

Task Force Report:

**Eastern Orthodox Teachings in Comparison with
The Doctrinal Position of Biola University**

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Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This study examines the theological teachings and related practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church (often termed simply the Orthodox Church) in reference to the doctrinal statement of Biola University and to some other points of tension with Biola's evangelical Protestant tradition. Focusing as it does on the areas of difference, this report is not designed to present the full scope of either Orthodox or Protestant theology. (Throughout this report, the terms "Orthodox" and "Orthodoxy" have reference to Eastern Orthodoxy.) Furthermore, this report is not intended to provide a defense either of Biola's statement of faith or of Biola's Protestant heritage. The goal simply is to take Biola's statement of faith and heritage as they are and to examine those points at which the Eastern Orthodox teaching diverges.

The members of this task force recognize that Orthodoxy shares a great many of the historic doctrines of the Christian faith with evangelical Protestantism. These include

belief in the saving work of Christ, and especially the great Trinitarian and Christological teachings of the early creeds, particularly those of Nicea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451A.D.). There are, however, also differences between Orthodox teachings and those of evangelical Protestantism. These are the focus of this report.

Methodology of the Report

We have sought to present fairly and accurately both Orthodox and evangelical Protestant teaching, clarifying the differences between them. To this end, within the time constraints placed upon us, we read widely among recognized representative theologians of the Orthodox Church.

Each section sets forth the doctrine in question, stating the teaching of Biola's doctrinal statement or that of evangelical Protestantism generally (as appropriate) and then comparing the Orthodox teaching on that issue. With most of the Orthodox teachings, we included numerous citations from the primary sources of Orthodox writings, together with some of our own comments for clarification. Although this made the report rather lengthy, we felt that this was helpful both to support the discussion and to allow the reader to more fully understand the teaching under consideration.

Organization of the Report

We organized the report into two main parts. Part I examines teachings of Eastern Orthodox theology that are contrary to Biola's doctrinal statement. This part is subdivided into two sections. Section 1 addresses doctrines of Eastern Orthodoxy that contradict direct, explicit statements of Biola's statement of faith. Section 2 treats the question of *sola Scriptura*, which Eastern Orthodoxy denies but which is only implicitly affirmed in the Biola doctrinal statement. Part II evaluates some Eastern Orthodox teachings about which our doctrinal statement is silent (explicitly and implicitly), but which are, nevertheless, in tension with Biola's evangelical Protestant heritage. The report concludes with a list of works cited.

It is our sincere desire and prayer that this study will serve God's purposes and be useful to all those involved in this discussion.

Part I: Teachings of Eastern Orthodox Theology that are Contrary to Biola's Doctrinal Statement

Section 1: Doctrines Contrary to Explicit Statements in Biola's Doctrinal Statement

I. The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

A. Biola's Doctrinal Statement on Justification

1. The Statement

"Men are justified on the simple and single ground of the shed blood of Christ and upon the simple and single condition of faith in Him who shed the blood, and are born again by the quickening, renewing, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word of God."

2. A brief explanation of Biola's statement with special reference to the differences with Orthodox teaching

Biola's statement clearly teaches that justification (being right with God so that one is free from the judicial consequences of sin and the wrath of God against sin) is through faith alone (i.e., "...justified on...the simple and single condition of faith"). This understanding is further borne out by the explanatory note dealing with "confession before men" which reads, "Confession before men is viewed as tangible fruit of salvation and not as a qualifying condition for salvation."

Biola's statement of faith is based on the traditional Protestant understanding of the relationship between faith and good works which entails the following:

- a. Justification is a forensic term which means "to declare righteous." That is, the terminology "to justify" does not mean to "make someone righteous (inherently)," but rather it is the verdict of a judge "to pronounce righteous" as opposed "to condemn." In neither case do the terms "justify" or "condemn" actually change the person, they simply declare the status of the person. The traditional Protestant teaching clearly distinguishes forensic

justification from regeneration and subsequent growth in sanctification. Justification signifies a right status with God (i.e., being in right relationship with God because of the removal of the condemnation of sin and the gift of Christ's righteousness) while regeneration and sanctification refer to the generation and growth of new life from which flow new effects of life (i.e., good works).

- b. Human beings are justified by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ which is reckoned to them, i.e., justification is based on the believer's union with Christ and the imputation (reckoning) of Christ's righteousness to him. It is not based on any inherent righteousness or good works of the believer produced by the grace of God.
- c. The righteousness of Christ is reckoned to people on the sole ground of faith in Christ and his saving work, not on the ground of any inherent righteousness in them or good works of righteousness. The nature of the faith that brings justification is that of a living faith that does produce effects in life, i.e., good works, love, the fruit of the Spirit. But the effects of faith or good works are distinguished from the faith itself, as fruit is distinguished from the life of the tree. As the fruit of the tree is not the cause of the life of the tree, neither are good works the cause of the life of the believer or his status before God. This initial relationship with God which includes justification and regeneration (from which the effects of the fruit of good works flow) is realized through faith alone. Thus good works are evidential of justification, but not instrumental.

B. The Orthodox Teaching on Justification

1. The Orthodox concept of justification

- a. A general summary with special emphasis on the points of difference in relation to Biola's doctrinal statement above

The concept of justification in Orthodox theology differs from that of evangelical Protestantism. Instead of justification being simply a judicial declaration of the right status of the person on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness, Orthodox theology holds that justification includes also the actual making of the person righteous. It involves the partaking of a "real righteousness" whereby the individual is in fact being made righteous by being "in Christ," that is, by becoming a partaker of the Divine nature and, thus, entering the path of theosis or deification. Orthodox theology thus includes what evangelical Protestantism understands as

regeneration and sanctification in the meaning of justification. There is some element of the judicial idea in this view but it is purposefully minimized.

As a corollary to this understanding justification of the believer on the sole ground of Christ's righteousness appropriated through faith alone is denied. Instead, according to Orthodox teaching, justification requires as a necessary condition works done by the believer in cooperation with the grace of God. In other words, the righteous works which according to evangelical Protestantism belong to sanctification and are the fruit of a justification are according to Orthodoxy a necessary condition for justification.

b. Citations from Orthodox teaching on the meaning of justification

In general the concept of justification does not have a significant place in Orthodox teaching. This is due to the minimizing of the judicial element in salvation which will be noted below.

(The underlining in all of the sections of Orthodox teachings in this report has been added to highlight significant statements which indicate the points in tension with Biola's statement. In addition some comments have been added for further clarification.)

- [1] **“Justification** The act whereby God forgives the sins of a believer and begins to transform him or her into a righteous person” (*The Orthodox Study Bible* (hereafter *OSB*), 801).
- [2] “The Orthodox understanding of justification differs from the Protestant in several ways....Whereas some Christians focus on justification as a legal acquittal before God, Orthodox believers see justification by faith as a covenant relationship with Him, centered in union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-6)” (*OSB*, 348).
[Comment: Note that the reference to Romans 6 does not actually deal with “justification” but rather with sanctification. Justification has been dealt with in Romans 3-5.]
- [3] “...Justification by faith is not merely the equivalent of a one-time ‘not guilty’ verdict delivered by a court of law. Further, righteousness is not credited, as money to a bank account. Why? God’s righteousness is Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). To have His righteousness is to have Christ living within us, to be in union with Him, a relationship that is dynamic and substantial” (*OSB*, on Romans 3:26).
[Comment: The evangelical concept of salvation includes the concept of Christ living “within us” and our union with him, but sees these as

more related to regeneration and sanctification. The doctrine of justification is connected with the teaching of the believer's position of being "in Christ" through faith union and consequently "clothed in Christ's righteousness." The implications of this in relation to good works and justification will be seen below.]

- [4] "...**Imputed** (v. 11) means 'reckoned' or 'rendered.' This is not merely juridical or external, for true **righteousness** transcends the law, as shown with both Abraham and David. Rather, by **faith** we actively participate in God's grace given to us, His righteousness. By continuing in it we are gradually transformed internally and externally into His likeness. Those who relegate God's righteousness to something external and 'spiritual' by saying righteousness is not really ours, but only 'imputed' to us, miss the truth. They externalize God's righteousness as much as did many Jews" (*OSB* on Romans 4:11, 12).

[Comment: Note that Orthodoxy teaches that even though the righteousness is spoken of as "His righteousness," it is also "really ours" and not only "imputed" to us. Thus the righteousness involved in our justification, according to Orthodox teaching, is not the perfect righteousness of Christ, but the righteousness of Christ that we have worked into our own lives through the sanctifying grace of God.)

- [5] "...**Accounted** (v. 6) in our day suggests bookkeeping, debits and credits. To 'account' here (Gr. logizomai) refers rather to faithful participation. When God 'accounted' Abraham righteous, Abraham was participating with God in the fruit of the Holy Spirit and faith (v. 5)" (*OSB* on Gal. 3:6-9).
- [6] "To **justify** (v. 8) means to make righteous and so to be righteous. Therefore, to be **blessed** (v. 9) in Abraham is to participate with Him, body and soul, in communion with God and His goodness" (*OSB* on Gal. 3:8).
- [7] "For Luther 'to justify' meant to declare one righteous or just, not 'to make' righteous or just—it is an appeal to an extrinsic justice which in reality is a spiritual fiction" (Florovsky, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*, 30). Florovsky goes on to argue that justification must involve becoming righteous as well as being declared righteous (*ibid.*, 31-34). (Cited by Fairbairn, "Partakers of the Divine Nature," 44).

2. The Orthodox teaching **explicitly** denying justification by faith alone and the inclusion of good works as necessary in justification

It will be noted below that contrary to the significance of the concept of justification in the evangelical Protestant theology of salvation,

justification holds little place in Orthodox theology. Rather Orthodox theology refers more to “salvation” or “deification” (being transformed into the likeness of God through union with Christ) and “sanctification.” In general these terms, which overlap and are not clearly differentiated in Orthodox teaching, refer to a person’s relationship with God including being right with him and enjoying communion with him and his life as opposed to being alienated from him and without divine life. Since Orthodox teaching defines justification as including the concept of being transformed into the likeness of God, justification is included in the process of “salvation” or “deification.” Thus the place of works in relation to “salvation” or “deification” is also the place of works in relation to justification.

- [1] “Justification is not merely a once-for-all event, but a dynamic, ongoing process. Two conditions are given here: God accepts whoever (1) **fears Him** and (2) **works righteousness**. This in no way denies justification by faith; but it is not by faith *alone*. And God supplies the grace necessary for us to fear Him and work righteousness” (OSB, on Acts 10:35).
[Comment: Note that one of the conditions for justification is that a person must perform works righteousness.]
- [2] “...there is nothing esoteric or extraordinary about the methods which we must follow in order to be deified [the equivalent of being saved which includes justification]. If someone asks ‘How can I become god?’ the answer is very simple: go to church, receive the sacraments regularly, pray to God ‘in spirit and in truth’, read the Gospels, follow the commandments. The last three of these items—‘follow the commandments’—must never be forgotten. Orthodoxy, no less than western Christianity, firmly rejects the kind of mysticism that seeks to dispense with moral rules” (Ware, 236).
- [3] “Theosis. Union with God. Reception of the Holy Spirit. How is it possible for us to make this a reality? Which is the road that leads there? The answer remains one: the Christian life. The Christian life comes into being with the sacraments and with holy works, those virtuous works which are done with a pure and holy motive in the name of Christ” (Stavropoulos, “Partakers of Divine Nature,” 189).
[Comment: Note that there is no mention of faith in this explanation for the attainment of salvation.]
- [4] “...one must live within the body of Christ, be fed-by her sacraments, be instructed in her true faith, and worship at her altar to attain the godliness and righteousness that lead to the Kingdom’s open doors” (Gillquist, *Entering God’s Kingdom*, 7;

cited by Weber, "Looking for Home," 117).

- [5] "Fastings, vigils, prayers, alms, and other good works which are done in the name of Christ are means which help us reach that goal which always remains the same: the reception of the Holy Spirit and the making him our own, that is, theosis. Good works are able to grant us the fruits of the Holy Spirit only when they are done in the name of Jesus Christ" (Stavropoulos, "Partakers of the Divine Nature," 190).
[Comment: Note that good works are involved in receiving the Holy Spirit which is the way to theosis or salvation.]
- [6] "The road toward our theosis, our union with God, can be formulated in the following short statement: divine grace and human freedom; theory and action; enthusiastic zeal and decision; abandonment of the world and return to God; good works as means toward theosis; a warm heart and vigilant eye. Only then, the open road. We are able to walk that road. We will be accompanied and strengthened by divine grace" (Stavropoulos, "Partakers of the Divine Nature," 192).
[Comment: Good works strengthened by God's grace in Orthodox teaching are not the "working out" of our salvation (including justification) as in evangelical Protestantism, but rather the "means toward theosis" (see the same in the following statements). While evangelical Protestants include our good works in the process of sanctification, they clearly see justification and regeneration as received through faith alone. The good works in sanctification are the effects of an already received justification and regeneration.]
- [7] "Each of us receives, through the sacraments, a seed of sanctity, but it is up to us to make it bear fruit. The Church as an 'institution' is therefore not opposed to the Church as an 'event,' but the one presupposes the other, as grace presupposes our personal efforts to make it effective. Since the age of the Fathers the Orthodox Church has always upheld the doctrine of synergeia, that is, the collaboration between divine grace and the freewill of man on his way toward God. We are all saints by grace, but we must become saints by our acts and in our whole being" (Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, 193).
[Comment: Again, the difference with Orthodoxy is not that there is no place for cooperation between "divine grace and the freewill of man on his way toward God." The problem comes in when no distinction is made between the foundation of salvation in justification and regeneration, which are received by faith alone, and the consequent sanctification or transformation of the human person as a result of these prior works of God.]
- [8] "It is not through his own activity or 'energy' that man can be

deified—this would be Pelagianism—but by divine ‘energy,’ to which his human activity is ‘obedient’; between the two there is a ‘synergy,’ of which the relation of the two energies in Christ is the ontological basis....This is the theology of deification which we will also find in Gregory Palamas: ‘God in His completeness deifies those who are worthy of this, by uniting Himself with them...’ (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 164).

[Comment: This citation as with others reveals that for Orthodoxy salvation from beginning to end is a cooperation between divine grace and human “activity” in which faith is not distinguished from good works, but rather merged together so that good works are involved in justification.]

- [9] “In ‘deification,’ man achieves the supreme goal for which he was created. This goal, already realized in Christ by a unilateral action of God’s love, represents both the meaning of human history and a judgment over man. It is open to man’s response and free effort” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 165).

[Comment: Note that in Orthodox theology God’s love is responded to by man’s “effort,” with no mention of faith or a distinction between faith and good works.]

- [10] “This work is accomplished with the cooperation of human liberty and not without will....Our effort is joined mysteriously to the gift of God, by this capacity for deification. The whole person must be engaged in this effort. He must strive to become God-like through the action of faith, which testifies of his redemption by the blood of Christ and his reconciliation with God....Faith and its works: this is our share in our deification through the power of Christ...” (Bulgakov, 107).

- [11] “Good works do not constitute merit—no one merits or can merit salvation by human works. They represent man’s personal participation in achieving salvation, beyond any reckoning or compensation” (Bulgakov, 107).

[Comment: Since Orthodox theology merges justification and sanctification together, works become involved in justification in this theology. They are not works being done from justification as in the evangelical Protestant theology, but works as a means to attain justification.]

- [12] “...this idea [the Protestant idea of salvation by active faith] becomes one-sided when it denies our participation in our own salvation, thus denying to us all liberty, because of our fallen nature and original sin. This onesidedness produces the idea that [we] may be forgiven and justified by faith alone, since we are incapable of anything else. And faith is then only our act of beholding our own salvation. But we have preserved a residuum

of our primitive liberty [note this liberty does not seem to be not due to prevenient **soteriological** grace, but rather belongs to fallen man], and cannot lose it without losing the image of God and the spirituality of our being. Consequently, we are called upon to achieve in ourselves our own salvation. The individual forms, the ways and the different degrees of this salvation are capable of development, but in any case we must participate personally in our salvation. By so doing we do not become our own co-redeemer and co-savior with Christ, but we are active in the appropriation of our salvation, we seek it personally, we labor at it during all our life. In this sense, individual salvation, personal effort ('works') may be called merit, and the salvation attained, recompense. In the relative sense I have indicated, it may then be said that we deserve our portion in eternal beatitude. But this has nothing in common with the pharisaical and juridical idea that one can save oneself by good works.

But this salvation of human beings, effectuated by Christ, the new Adam, in a free act, for all humanity—this salvation must be freely accepted by each particular person. God realizes the objective aspect and lays the foundation for our salvation, but we must realize the subjective side and choose salvation. It is not enough, then, for us to believe passively that we are saved, for that faith leaves us conscious of our importance and gives us the certitude of being justified before the judgment of God only by a legal fiction, by the application of a sort of amnesty. And no more can we merit salvation by our own efforts (faith and works), salvation being conferred on us by the love of God. Nor can we multiply this gift, founding the claim on a right which belongs to us, but we can and we should appropriate for ourselves the immense gift of deification, according to the degree of our own, creating in ourselves resemblance to God of which the unique foundation is Christ" (Bulgakov, 107-109).

[Comment: This suggests that God in grace and love provides objective salvation, but we in our freedom must appropriate it by our effort, which according to Orthodox teaching includes some kind of human activity (works)—sacraments, prayer, acts of love, etc. Again, Protestant theology does not deny a place for "good works" in the sanctification process of salvation, but it does teach that "good works" are not part of the appropriation of salvation in the aspects of justification and regeneration.]

- [13] "If God has given us in the Church all the objective conditions, all the means that we need for attainment of this end [deification], we, on our side, must produce the necessary subjective conditions: for it is in this synergy, in this co-operation of man with God, that the union is fulfilled. This subjective aspect of our union with God constitutes the way of union which is the

Christian life” (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 196).

[Comment: Salvation is portrayed as an objective provision which the sinner must subjectively appropriate. This subjective appropriation is more than faith, as the word “synergy” (working together) indicates.

There is no indication of being joined to Christ and thus being in a saving [i.e., justified] relationship through faith without works.]

3. The Orthodox teaching **implicitly** denying justification by faith alone by asserting the necessity of the sacramental rites for justification, regeneration or salvation.

Evangelical Protestantism denies that baptism or any other sacramental rite is essential for justification or regeneration. Included in this denial is the belief that justification is by faith alone apart from works. Baptism, for example, according to the evangelical Protestant tradition of Biola University, is an outward sign of the grace of justification and regeneration which belongs to the believer by virtue of faith. Although evangelical Protestants may explain the full significance of baptism differently, they agree that the person who has genuine faith in Christ and his saving work is already justified before the actual rite of baptism.

If the grace of justification and regeneration is actually given in the rite of baptism as in Orthodox teaching, then something (a ritual work) has been added as necessary for the acquisition of these saving benefits and justification by faith alone apart from works is denied. In short, either one is justified by faith before actually experiencing the rite of baptism (i.e., justification by faith alone) or they are justified by faith plus the rite of baptism, which adds an action or “work” to faith as necessary for justification.]

- [1] “That justifying and sanctifying divine grace which abides in the church is administered by the church to the people by means of the holy mysteries, which are divinely instituted ceremonies that deliver, by visible means, mysteriously transmitted invisible grace. Thus it is that the sacraments, when they are worthily received, become instruments, means of transmission, of divine grace. They are ‘efficacious instruments of grace for those who participate in them,’ enabling faithful participants to become communicants in the redemptive work of the Savior; they are not fine means of the commandments of God. Through the action of the sacraments, the salvific power of God completes in us the process of sanctification. This is accomplished in all who are truly faithful by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the sacraments occupy such a prominent position in the Orthodox conscience. Indeed, ‘the whole meaning of the

church is realized in the sacraments, the church being, at the same time, the fullness of the body of Christ and members in particular” (Karmiris, 21-22).

[Comment: Sacraments are the efficacious means of justification and sanctification. Of course, they work in conjunction with the human will, cooperating with these graces. Nevertheless, justification of the believer understood in terms of theosis is clearly not accomplished by faith alone but by means of the grace offered in the sacraments.]

- [2] “Each sacrament transmits its own particular grace. Baptism and chrismation transmit justifying and regenerating grace; repentance and unction transmit grace which is for the healing of soul and body; ordination and marriage enable us to perform certain specific functions; and the Holy Eucharist feeds and satisfies us spiritually” (Karmiris, 22).

[Comment: Clearly for Orthodoxy, baptism transmits justification indicating that justification is not a declaration of God based upon the believer’s faith alone.]

- [3] “We receive the grace of God for salvation through participation in the sacramental life of the Church” (OSB, 807).

- [4] “...deification presupposes life in the Church, life in the sacraments. Theosis according to the likeness of the Trinity involves a common life, and it is only within the fellowship of the Church that this common life of coinherence can be properly realized. Church and sacraments are the means appointed by God whereby we may acquire the sanctifying Spirit and be transformed into the divine likeness [i.e., attain salvation]” (Ware, 237-38).

[Comment: It must be remembered that according to Orthodox teaching justification includes the “transformation of life into the divine likeness” which is also termed theosis or deification. Thus in the citation above, the sacraments are the “means” for acquiring justification.]

- [5] “Let me ask you a sincere question. Are you willing to flee to Jesus Christ for protection in His Holy Church, to learn to know Him, to be cleansed and changed? If so, a new life in Christ lies ahead for you. Your next step is to get to know an Orthodox priest in your area who can guide you through a time of preparation and instruction in the Christian faith, and then union with Christ in Holy Baptism” (Gillquist, Entering God’s Kingdom, 13-14; cited by Weber, “Looking for Home,” 117).

- [6] “The unity between Christ and His Church is effected above all through the sacraments. At baptism, the new Christian is buried and raised with Christ; at the Eucharist the members of Christ’s Body the Church receive His Body in the sacraments” (Ware, 241-2).

- [7] The life of the Church is “a new life according to the image of the Holy Trinity, a life in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, a life realized by participation in the sacraments” (Ware, 245).
- [8] “God has given us this good [the grace of theosis or salvation] in the church [especially through the sacraments]. In the church he has given us all of the objective presuppositions and all the necessary means to achieve our goal” (Stavropoulos, “Partakers of the Divine Nature,” 188).
- [9] “The holy mysteries (sacraments) are what transmit this grace of the All-Holy Spirit. His sanctifying and deifying energy is actualized in the holy services of the church, especially in holy baptism, repentance, and the divine Eucharist. It is fulfilled and completed with prayer and love” (Stavropoulos, “Partakers of the Divine Nature,” 192).
- [10] “According to Catholic [including Orthodoxy] tradition, in contrast with that which issued from the Reformation, the Church is an organic and sacramental reality which actualizes throughout history the work accomplished by Christ once and for all at a particular moment in time. Christ is really present in the Christian Community. His presence constitutes the Mystery of Christ and of the Church: it gives back to mankind its lost intimacy with the Father and it anticipates the second coming of the Son of Man” (Meyendorff, *Orthodoxy and Catholicity*, 3).
- [11] “The Redemption which God granted in Jesus Christ is available to us through the Church and by means of the Church [i.e., the sacraments]...” (Meyendorff, *Orthodox Church*, 200).
- [12] “These sacraments are...the aspects of a unique mystery of the Church, in which God shares divine life with humanity, redeeming man from sin and death and bestowing upon him the glory of immortality” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 191).
- [13] “...particular actions which bestow salvation” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 191).
[Comment: These “actions” are the sacramental actions of the Church.]
- [14] In “The Orthodox Faith,” a brief one and one half page summary of Orthodox beliefs from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, placed on the Internet by Orthodox Ministry ACCESS, there is no mention of faith for salvation. All that is said related to the application of salvation are the following statements:

“The Church is the holy institution founded by our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of men, bearing his holy sanction and

authority....”

“Baptism is the door through which one enters into the Church. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism. In the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist...we partake of the very Body and the very Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for remission of sins and eternal life.”

The remaining quotes deal with Baptism specifically:

- [15] **“To be baptized** is of monumental importance. Even after the household of Cornelius has received the Holy Spirit, baptism is essential. The Book of Acts amply demonstrates the crucial importance of the sacraments—baptism (2:41), chrismation through the laying on of hands (8:17), and the Eucharist (20:7)” (OSB, on Acts 10:48).
- [16] “There is, therefore, no practical difference between admitting a child or an adult to membership in the Church; in both cases, a human being who belonged to the ‘old Adam’ through his natural birth is introduced to ‘new life’ by partaking of baptism, chrismation, and holy communion. Christian initiation is one single and indivisible action: ‘If one does not receive the chrism one is not perfectly baptized,’ writes Symeon of Thessalonica” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 192).
[Comment: Note the clear teaching of baptismal regeneration.]
- [17] “At Baptism the Christian undergoes an outward washing in water and is at the same time cleansed inwardly from sin...” (Ware, 274).
- [18] “Though Baptism we receive a full forgiveness of all sin, whether original or actual; we ‘put on Christ’, becoming members of His Body the Church” (Ware, 278).
- [19] “By means of holy baptism, the ‘bath of regeneration’ and renewing of the Holy Spirit, believers shed the sinful garments of the old man and are clothed in Christ, entering through him as through a door, into the church, the kingdom of grace” (Karmiris, “Concerning the Sacraments,” 24).
- [20] “Indeed, through this sacrament [baptism] those who believe are cleansed of original sin and all actual sins (if they be adults). All of these sins are totally uprooted and obliterated, together with their guilt and their due punishment, the very body of sin (excepting only concupiscence) being reconciled to God, justified, made worthy by grace of the divine adoption. Those baptized thus become citizens and members incorporate in the body of the church, in the mystical body of Christ, which is actually

formed through baptism. We would emphasize again that it is through baptism that we receive explicit, complete, and utter remission of original sin, which is by this means uprooted, obliterated, together with any actual sins which the individual may have committed. Baptism brings about also the ontological destruction of the very body of sin, the source of death, since it was by sin that death passed to all (Rom. 5:12). According to the patriarch Dositheus, ‘There is no sin which cannot be absolved by baptism. The inclination to sin remains, but that is irrelevant...All those sins committed prior to baptism, or during baptism, disappear, are counted as not existing, as though they had never been committed’ (Karmiris, 24).

[Comment: Clearly justification is accomplished through baptism. Remission of sins is also accomplished through baptism, though it is not clear that this remission is understood in terms of Divine fiat. Rather, by means of one’s participation in the new life via baptism, one is “in Christ” and no longer a slave to sin. “Consequently, baptism ‘frees us from all spot (of sin), and thus we become the holy temple of God and partakers of his divine nature through our participation in his Holy Spirit’ (Karmiris, 24).]

- [21] “Considering baptism as ‘new birth’ implies also that it is a free gift from God, and is in no sense dependent upon human choice, consent, or even consciousness: ‘Just as in the case of physical birth we do not even contribute willingness to all the blessings derived from baptism.’ In the East, therefore, there was never any serious doubt or controversy about the legitimacy of infant baptism. This legitimacy was based, not on the idea of a ‘sin’ which would make even the infant guilty in the eyes of God and in need of baptism as justification, but on the fact that, at all stages of life, including infancy, man needs to be ‘born anew’—i.e., to begin a new and eternal life in Christ” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).

[Comment: Notice that the sacrament of baptism is the means of the new birth and is effectual apart from the condition of faith in the individual. Thus, remission of sins, regeneration and justification is accomplished in some sense apart from faith—as in the exemplar case of the infant.]

4. Other issues related to the doctrine of justification which bear on difference between evangelical Protestantism and Orthodox theology in the matter of faith and works in salvation

These include: (1) the minimizing of the judicial element in salvation, (2) the consequent minimization of the just wrath of God against sin, (3) the consequent minimization of the meaning of the death of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice (i.e., a sacrifice that satisfies God’s wrath against sin), and (4) the understanding of salvation as primarily the

renewal of the actual condition of the sinner rather than the forgiveness of the guilt of sin and forensic justification.

Evangelical Protestant theology has always emphasized sin as an affront to God's holiness and justice which incurs guilt and the just penalty of God's wrath and condemnation for breaking God's law. The doctrine of justification, being a forensic term, relates directly to these issues according to traditional Protestant theology.

Not only does justification deal directly with the problem of sin as incurring guilt and condemnation, but the belief that justification is through faith alone emphasizes the understanding that it is only through the work of Christ that the guilt of our sins is taken away and only through his righteousness and not any works of our own that we stand justified before God. Our good works as believers flow from our justification and regeneration as effects. They are not involved in the acquisition of these or in any way their cause.

In distinction to this Protestant theology, the Orthodox faith tends to minimize the specific issue of sin as involving guilt. Sin is viewed primarily as a corruption of the human being involving mortality and a propensity to do wrong. As a result the forensic concepts of judgment and the just wrath of God against sin are minimized. The concept of the death of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath against sin is correspondingly minimized.

The result in Orthodox theology is a concept of salvation that emphasizes the renewal of the sinner from a state of corruption to one of wholeness or final salvation, somewhat similar to the Protestant understanding of sanctification or Christian growth. By defining justification and the acquisition of salvation in terms of the actual transformation of the individual (as seen above), Orthodox theology involves works in justification and the acquisition of salvation. Protestant theology recognizes the place of human activity in salvation in terms of sanctification or "working out" the salvation that is given "in Christ." But this human activity is the result of what God has already done for us through the work of Christ in paying the guilt price for our sin thus satisfying his wrath and also giving us a righteous standing before him through the gift of Christ's righteousness and not our own.

The Orthodox teaching concerning, sin, guilt, and salvation

[1] "There is indeed a consensus in Greek patristic and Byzantine traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an

inheritance essentially of mortality rather than of sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 145).

[Comment: The evangelical Protestantism of Biola’s tradition believes that the “original sin” which all people inherited from Adam as a result of the fall, includes not only a sinful or corrupt nature and mortality, but also the guilt of sin. In fact, mortality or death is seen as the penalty of the guilt of sin.]

- [2] “The opposition between the two Adam’s is seen in terms not of guilt and forgiveness but of death and life....death and mortality are viewed, not so much as retribution for sin (although they are also a just retribution for personal sins), but means through which the fundamentally unjust ‘tyranny’ of the devil is exercised over mankind after Adam’s sin” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 146).
- [3] “Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its ‘natural’ state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt—these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 146).
- [4] “As we have seen, the patristic doctrine of salvation is based, not on the idea of guilt inherited from Adam and from which man is relieved in Christ, but on a more existential understanding of both ‘fallen’ and ‘redeemed’ humanity. From the ‘old Adam,’ through his natural birth, man inherits a defective form of life—bound by mortality, inevitably sinful, lacking fundamental freedom from the ‘prince of this world.’ The alternative to this ‘fallen’ state is ‘life in Christ,’ which is true and ‘natural’ human life, the gift of God bestowed in the mystery of the Church” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).
- [5] “This lack of clarity in both theology and practice [with regard to the status of penance] has a positive implication: confession and penance were interpreted primarily as a form of spiritual healing. For sin itself in Eastern Christian anthropology is primarily a disease, ‘passion.’...Byzantine theologians never succumbed to the temptation of reducing sin to the notion of a legal crime, which is to be sentenced, punished, or forgiven; yet they were aware that the sinner is primarily a prisoner of Satan and, as such, mortally sick. For this reason, confession and penance, at least ideally, preserved the character of liberation and healing rather than that of judgment; hence the great variety of forms and practices, and the impossibility of confining them within static theological categories” [Emphasis added] (Meyendorff,

Byzantine Theology, 196).

- [6] “Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians. The Greek patristic commentaries on such passages as Galatians 3:13 (‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us’) generally interpret the idea of redemption by substitution in the wider context of victory over death and of sanctification. They never develop the idea in the direction of an Anselmian theory of ‘satisfaction’” [Emphasis added] (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 160).
- [7] “Athanasius—‘He takes from us a nature similar to ours and, since we all are subject to corruption and death, He delivers His body to death for us’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 160). [Comment: Here Christ takes our role in death in order that he might defeat it, not to pay the consequences of the guilt of sin against the righteousness of God.]
- [8] “In the East, the cross is envisaged not so much as the punishment of the just one, which ‘satisfies’ a transcendent Justice requiring a retribution for man’s sins. As Georges Florovsky rightly puts it: ‘the death of the Cross was effective, not as a death of an Innocent One, but as the death of the Incarnate Lord.’ The point was not to satisfy a legal requirement, but to vanquish the frightful cosmic reality of death, which held humanity under its usurped control and pushed it into the vicious circle of sin and corruption....Just as original sin did not consist in an inherited guilt, so redemption was not primarily a justification, but a victory over death” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 161). [Comment: Clearly redemption in the east is less judicial in nature than in the west – including evangelical Protestantism – and more about Christ breaking the power of death and corruption. Moreover, redemption seems also to be less about Christ as the suffering substitute for humanity as in the west and more about Christ as the dying-rising Incarnated One – in which His work hypostatically understood opens the possibility for the church to participate in these with him (theosis).]
- [9] “As in the earlier Greek Fathers, the positive notion of ‘new birth,’ rather than the negative concept of ‘remission of sin,’ dominates Cabasilas’ theology of baptism” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 108).
- [10] “For God so loved the world that He spared not His Son to save and deify it. The Incarnation, first decreed to ransom fallen humanity and reconcile it with God, is understood by Orthodoxy, as, above all, the deification of man, as the communication of the divine life to him. To fallen man the Incarnation became the

supreme way for his reconciliation with God, the way of redemption. This produces the concept of salvation as deification. The redemption is the voluntary sacrifice of Christ, Who took upon Himself, together with our nature, our sin as well” (Bulgakov, 108).

[Comment: Notice that the emphasis is upon the Incarnated Christ on the cross and less upon the substitutionary role of Christ on the cross for our deification.]

II. The Doctrine of the New Birth Through the Instrumentality of the Word of God

A. Biola’s Doctrinal Statement Concerning the New Birth and the Word

“Men...are born again by the quickening, renewing, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word of God” (emphasis added).

In stating that the new birth is effected by the Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God with no reference to any other instruments, the writers of this statement can be assumed to believe that no other instrumental means are necessary for the effecting of new birth.

B. The Orthodox teaching on the instrumentality for being born again as involving the necessity of the sacraments and the hierarchy of the church denies that the new birth is effected solely by faith through the instrumentality of the Word of God.

1. The new birth is effected through the sacraments (especially baptism).

The following citations indicate that Orthodoxy does not affirm that regeneration by the Spirit is accomplished solely (or even primarily) through the response of faith to the Scriptures, that is, through the instrumentality of the Word. Orthodoxy clearly affirms that the Spirit’s work of regeneration occurs through the instrument of baptism.

[1] “Again according to Cabasilas all the scriptural and traditional designations of baptism point to the same *positive* meaning: ‘Birth’ and ‘new birth,’ ‘refashioning’ and ‘seal,’ as well as ‘baptism’ and ‘clothing’ and ‘anointing,’ ‘gift,’ ‘enlightening,’ and ‘washing’—all signify this one thing: that the rite is the beginning of existence for those who are and live in accordance with God” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).

[Comment: Baptism and its surrounding terms of washing, sealing, new birth have fundamentally to do with living in a new sphere of existence in union with God, theosis.]

- [2] “Consequently, baptism ‘frees us from all spot (of sin), and thus we become the holy temple of God and partakers of his divine nature through our participation in his Holy Spirit’” (Karmiris, 24).

[Comment: Again, baptism, as the means of regeneration, is associated with theosis, or union with God, terms used to describe Orthodoxy’s view of salvation. It is less clear that this beginning of union insures forgiveness by fiat but more that it provides a new possibility of living (freedom) in union with Christ without the corruption of death always weakening the human spirit to sin.]

- [3] “Each sacrament transmits its own particular grace. Baptism and chrismation transmit justifying and regenerating grace; repentance and unction transmit grace which is for the healing of soul and body; ordination and marriage enable us to perform certain specific functions; and the Holy Eucharist feeds and satisfies us spiritually” (Karmiris, 22).

[Comment: Clearly the sacrament of baptism (and not primarily the faith response to the Word) is the fundamental means in Orthodoxy by which the individual experiences justification and regeneration, that is, entrance into life in union with Christ.]

- [4] “Baptism is a spiritual birth. In putting on Christ the natural man dies, together with the original sin innate in him. A new person is engendered. It is the appropriation of the saving power of the redemptive work of Christ” (Bulgakov, 112).

[Comment: Again, baptism and not the faith response to the Scriptures is the instrument of regeneration.]

- [5] “Considering baptism as ‘new birth’ implies also that it is a free gift from God, and is in no sense dependent upon human choice, consent, or even consciousness: ‘Just as in the case of physical birth we do not even contribute willingness to all the blessings derived from baptism.’ In the East, therefore, there was never any serious doubt or controversy about the legitimacy of infant baptism. This legitimacy was based, not on the idea of a ‘sin’ which would make even the infant guilty in the eyes of God and in need of baptism as justification, but on the fact that, at all stages of life, including infancy, man needs to be ‘born anew’—i.e., to begin a new and eternal life in Christ” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).

[Comment: Clearly the new birth is accomplished by means of baptism and seemingly apart from the confession of faith as response to the instrumentality of the Word. Furthermore, for Orthodoxy, baptism of the infant is not a problem, because the issue at stake is not judicial dealing with sin (and the infant has none) but with placing the baptized in a new possible sphere of being in Christ (justification and regeneration as accomplished in baptism).]

- [6] “By means of holy baptism, the ‘bath of regeneration’ and renewing of the Holy Spirit, believers shed the sinful garments of the old man and are clothed in Christ, entering through him as through a door, into the church, the kingdom of grace. We are thus regenerated, renewed, and recreated, our nature being made over into the divine image, so that we become members of the mystical body of Christ, children of God by grace, and partakers of the divine nature through participation in the Holy Spirit. According to Chrysostom, ‘It is through baptism that we received remission of sins, sanctification, communion of the Spirit, adoption, and life eternal.’ And according to Basil the Great, baptism is ‘the ransoming of captives, the forgiving of their debts, the regeneration of the soul, the bright garment, the unassailable seal, chariot to heaven, the cause of the kingdom, the gift of adoption’” (Karmiris, 24).
[Comment: Baptism accomplishes new birth in Christ and is clearly the primary instrument in effecting regeneration, not faith’s response to the Word.]
- [7] “‘Baptism,’ writes Nicholas Cabasilas, ‘is nothing else but to be born according to Christ and to receive our very being and nature’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).
- [8] “Through chrismation baptized individuals receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, together with a power which enables them to develop their new spiritual state, which they entered at baptism. For ‘with the visible chrim the body is anointed, and the soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.’ Chrismation ‘is the Holy Spirit...Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit, the actualization of his divine presence.’ Thus, while baptism grants us a new, or spiritual, nature in Christ, chrim further expands it, shaping the newly baptized into the form, the mold, of Christ” (Karmiris, 25).
[Comment: Chrismation is the immediate outgrowth of baptism both chronologically and logically. As baptism places us in Christ, in the path of theosis and being a partaker of the divine nature, chrismation effects the imparting of the Holy Spirit and His gifts for the actualizing of theosis in conjunction with human freedom. Protestants typically see this imparting of the Spirit and His gifts as taking place in regeneration as response of faith to the instrumentality of the word implanted. For Orthodoxy, however, baptism and chrismation, not faith alone in response to the Word, are necessary means or instruments of regeneration.]
- [9] “Confirmation [Chrismation] is thus the personal Pentecost of man, his entrance into the new life in the Holy Spirit, which is the true life of the Church. It is his ordination as truly and fully man, for to be fully man is precisely to belong to the Kingdom of God....His whole body is anointed, sealed, sanctified, dedicated to

the new life: ‘The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit,’ says the Priest as he anoints the newly baptized,...The whole man is now made the temple of God, and his whole life is from now on a *liturgy*” (Schmemmann, 75-6).

[Comment: Again, baptism and chrismation, not faith in response to the Word implanted, is the primary means or instrument of regeneration.]

- [10] “It is only after Chrismation that they can partake of the other sacraments. Chrismation, during which the chrism is administered with the words, ‘The seal of gift of the Holy Spirit,’ corresponds to an individual Pentecost in the life of each Christian. Each Christian receives the gift of the Holy Spirit which is proper to him; he receives anew the glory inherent in the soul and body of the first Adam, lost after the fall (Rom. 3:23), the germ of the transfiguration and the resurrection” (Bulgakov, 113).

[Comment: The Biola doctrinal statement understands regeneration as the sending of the Spirit to make us alive to Christ as a result of a faith response to the Scriptures. According to Orthodoxy, the coming of the Spirit comes only fully upon the instrumentality of Chrismation.]

- [11] “The washing of regeneration, baptism, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, chrismation, form a unity in our salvation, which is clear throughout the NT. Jesus taught we are born from above through ‘water and the Spirit’ (John 3:5); Peter preached salvation in Christ through being ‘baptized’ and received ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38). Now Paul calls us to the *washing* of the water and the *renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (OSB, Titus 3:5).

- [12] “While the word was implanted in baptism, Christians continue to receive Him throughout their lives” (OSB, James 1:21).

[Comment: There is no mention of baptism in this text; rather it appears to have been read into the text in light of its association with salvation. The text seems to indicate that salvation is in fact the soul’s true faith response to the Scriptures being implanted by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit which results in being a doer of the Word. Baptism as an instrument of implanting the word is not in this text.]

- [13] “To be baptized is of monumental importance. Even after the household of Cornelius has received the Holy Spirit, baptism is essential. The Book of Acts amply demonstrates the crucial importance of the sacraments—baptism (2:41), chrismation through the laying on of hands (8:17), and the Eucharist (20:7)” (OSB, Acts 10:48).

[Comment: Clearly baptism is the instrument of regeneration in Orthodoxy.]

- [14] “(3) Sacramental theology. Paul writes not only of the Trinity (see Major Theme) but of the sacraments of the Church. He alludes to

baptism (1:5, 6; 2:1-6; 4:5, 22-24; 5:8-14, 26-32), chrismation (1:13, 14; 4:3, 4, 7; 5:18), and the Eucharist (1:7; 5:2, 19, 20)” (OSB, Ephesians).

[Comment: There is little or no justifiable association between the text and the listed sacrament by means of a simple reading of the text. The only way this is done is through a theological disposition for making such an association. For example, Eph. 1: 5 asserts that we are adopted as sons through Christ and the will of God; there is no reference to baptism. One can make this claim only if the text will allow for establishing a link between baptism and adoption. There is no evidence for this here. Or again, Eph. 1:13 refers to the sealing of the Holy Spirit which is supposed to be associated with the sacrament of chrismation. But again, the context indicates this is accomplished through “listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation” with no reference to the sacrament of Chrismation. The sacrament is merely read into the text due to a prior theological disposition.]

- [15] “We are begotten again to a living hope in baptism. As Jesus told Nicodemus, we enter the Kingdom of God by being ‘born of water and the Spirit’ (John 3:5). This new birth in baptism unites us with Christ and His resurrection (Rom. 6:3)” (OSB, 1 Peter 1:3).

[Comment: Being born again is not associated in this text with baptism but “through the resurrection of Jesus.” That is, the instrument seems to be the work of Christ and the Word’s interpretation of that event with no reference to baptism.]

- [16] “Ancient tradition applies these two parables in Matthew to the process of initiation into the Church, because the sacraments of baptism and chrismation bring us into marriage or union with Christ, a union fully realized in the age to come” (OSB, Matthew 22:1-14).

[Comment: The point of the text is that many are called for the Kingdom but few are chosen. It is difficult to find any implication for baptism except by a theological bias in which being a chosen for union in the kingdom must be associated with baptism. Clearly this is not derived from a simple reading of the text.]

- [17] “So to receive the Spirit we must be baptized in Christ and adopted as children of God (see Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:5). In adoption, Christians become anointed ones; it was of these God said, ‘Do not touch My anointed ones’ (Ps. 105:15)” (OSB, Mark 1:8).

- [18] “For Theodoret [contemp. of Augustine], in fact, the ‘remission of sins’ is only a side effect of baptism, fully real in cases of adult baptism, which was the norm, of course, in the early Church and which indeed ‘remits sins.’ But the principal meaning of baptism is wider and more positive: ‘If the only meaning of baptism were the remission of sins,’ writes Theodoret, ‘why would we baptize the newborn children who have not yet tasted of sin?In it

[baptism] are the promises of future delights; it is a type of the future communion with the master's passion Thus, the Church baptizes children, not to 'remit' their yet non-existent sins, but in order to give them a new and immortal life, which their mortal parents are unable to communicate to them. The opposition between the two Adams is seen in terms not of guilt and forgiveness but of death and life.... Baptism is the paschal mystery, the 'passage.' Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its 'natural state,' rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt—these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 145-6).
 [Comment: Baptism places individuals on a new path in Christ, from death into life, into the path of theosis, which the Holy Spirit and his gifts will make possible in chrismation. This is accomplished even on behalf of the infant. Thus, baptism and not faith's response to the Word becomes the primary instrument of regeneration.]

- [19] “In the Eastern Church, baptism and confirmation (the latter being effected through anointment with 'holy chrism' blessed by the bishop) are normally celebrated together. Immediately after receiving baptism and confirmation, the child is admitted to Eucharistic communion. There is, therefore, no practical difference between admitting a child or an adult to membership in the Church; in both cases, a human being who belonged to the 'old Adam' through his natural birth is introduced to 'new life' by partaking of baptism, chrismation, and holy communion” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 192).
2. The new birth is effected through the necessary instrumentality of the Orthodox hierarchical ministry.

Orthodoxy's strong position on Apostolic succession and the place of the Bishop as the “fountain of all the sacraments” entails that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is a necessary instrument in transmitting regeneration (as in baptism) and all the other sacramental means of grace for the participation in theosis and salvation. Thus, faith's response to the Scriptures is not a sufficient means of regeneration as indicated in Biola's doctrinal statement. The Spirit's regenerating work occurs primarily by means of baptism administered through the bishop or priest invoking the Word. One alarming entailment of this strong view of hierarchical and sacramental instrumentality is that Protestants, while being “in Christ” by means of an acceptable baptism, do not appear to have access to the fullness of the indwelling Spirit and His gifts (in Chrismation) and full participation in the life of union with Christ (in the Eucharist). Furthermore, this implies the

theologically awkward view that one may be regenerated and justified and yet not have the fullness of the Spirit and his gifts.

In Orthodoxy, baptism is typically done by a bishop or priest but may be done by any believer in emergency cases; Chrismation is typically done by a bishop in the west and by a priest in the east (in which case the Chrism is blessed by a bishop) (Ware, 278-79). The Eucharist can only be performed by a bishop or priest (Bulgakov, 113; Karmiris, 28).

- [1] “‘The dignity of the bishop is so necessary in the Church,’ wrote Dositheus, ‘that without him neither the Church nor the name Christian could exist or be spoken of at all...He is a living image of God upon earth...and a fountain of all the sacraments of the Catholic Church, through which we obtain salvation.’ ‘If any are not with the bishop,’ said Cyprian, ‘they are not in the Church’” (Ware, 248-9).

[Comment: The bishop and apostolic succession are the earthly instruments of the sacraments from which come salvation and regeneration (understood as participation in Christ). No doubt part of the Bishop’s ministry is the Word. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy does not believe that regeneration occurs primarily through a faith response to the Word implanted by the Spirit. Rather, salvation and regeneration is accomplished by means of the sacraments through the further instrument of the priest.]

- [2] “Above all, and this is the most essential thing, the hierarchy is the power for administering the sacraments; consequently the hierarchy carries in itself that mysterious power, superhuman and supernatural. According to the testimony of ancient writings (Apostolic Father such as St. Ignatius of Antioch) the bishop is he who celebrates the Eucharist, and only the Eucharist celebrated by a bishop is valid” (Bulgakov, 45).

The following citations are not explicitly related to the instrumentality of the Orthodox hierarchy in relation to the new birth. They nevertheless evidence this teaching in the understanding of the necessary place of the instrumentality of the hierarchy in other specific sacraments and in all of the sacraments related to salvation which would include baptism for regeneration.

- [3] “The Orthodox delegation to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Evanston, Ill.; 1954) maintained this position: ‘Only through Apostolic Succession is the mystery of Pentecost continued in the Church’” (Karmiris, 30).

[Comment: The transmission of the Spirit and his gifts – for Protestants a part of regeneration – is only through the instrument of the bishop in the baptism-chrismation event. This is to include a further instrument than

merely faith's response to the Scriptures.]

- [4] “Such is the effect of the abolition of the apostolic succession in Protestantism. It has deprived the Protestant world of the gifts of Pentecost, transmitted in the Sacraments and the cult of the Church by the hierarchy, which received its power from the Apostles and their successors. The Protestant world thus became like Christians who, although baptized ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus,’ have not received the Holy Spirit transmitted by the hands of the Apostles (Acts 19:5-6). Certainly God ‘gives not the spirit by measure,’ and those who are baptized with the baptism of Christ in the name of the Holy Trinity already have the assurance of the Holy Spirit, which ‘blows where it wills.’ The possibility of immediate and direct action of the holy Spirit on man by the power of a new Pentecost, or even of a prolonged Pentecost, cannot be completely excluded. But it can be stated that ‘no one knows whence the spirit comes and whither it goes,’ while Christ, by His will, has established in His Church definite and recognized modes for the reception of the Holy Spirit—as in the case cited above, when the Apostles, by the laying on of hands, transmitted it. These modes are the sacraments of the Church administered by a priest of the apostolic succession” (Bulgakov, 43-44).

[Comment: This is a most alarming text, for it shows a very strong hierarchical and sacramental instrumentality in transmitting the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this case, Protestants appear to be able to access the ministry of the Spirit but not through Christ's divinely instituted means in the sacraments via the hierarchy. It is one thing for an Orthodox to insist that they agree with Biola's doctrinal statement though differ on more minor points of theology. However, it is entirely another matter if that same Orthodox believer asserts that the non-Orthodox Biola community is limited to a secondary means by which to grow in the Spirit until they submit to the ecclesiastical and sacramental world of Orthodoxy.]

- [5] “The anointing of people who come to Orthodoxy out of the various heretical confessions is not a repetition of the sacrament of chrismation. It is granting the sacrament, for the first and only time, to one who in his heresy was deprived of a valid priesthood and valid chrism. Hence, in the ancient church ‘people who came out of any heresy were “chrismated,” for they did not already possess the holy chrismation” (Karmiris, 26).

[Comment: In light of Orthodoxy's belief that the Spirit and His gifts are imparted in Chrismation, and not solely through response to the Word, it follows that believers in non-Orthodox churches and institutions like Biola do not appear to possess the fullness of Pentecost (the Spirit or the gifts) until they enter the Orthodox tradition and receive Chrismation through the laying on of hands by the bishop/priest in order to participate fully in deification and growth in union with God. This is a

concern.]

- [6] “Furthermore, the Orthodox Catholic Church believes that divine grace is not dispensed outside of the true church, and thus the church does not recognize in their fullness sacramental acts which are performed outside of her, except in extraordinary circumstances (and then by ‘economy’ [a special exemption from the norm] and condescension she recognizes the sacraments of those heterodox who come to her)” (Karmiris, 23).
- [7] “The hierarchy of the Apostles did not receive the power to become vicars of Christ, but that of communicating the gifts necessary to the life of the Church...to the hierarchy belongs the authority to be mediators, servants of Christ, from whom they received full power for their ministry” (Bulgakov, 38).
- [8] “After the Apostles, the communication of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church became the prerogative of the hierarchy, that is of the episcopate, with its presbyters and deacons” (Bulgakov, 40).
- [9] “The assembly of the Apostles was the hierarchic receptacle and the tongues of fire, the method of transmission of the gifts of the grace of the Church. In view of this, the charismatic succession of the Apostles became necessary and inevitable. But this had to happen in a well-defined manner, valid for all, and not accidental, that is, by the regular succession of the hierarchy, which—to put it in terms of sacramental theology—must operate not ‘opere operantis’ but ‘opere operato’” (Bulgakov, 42).
[Comment: The justificative and regenerative grace available in the sacrament of baptism, for example, is through the instrumentality of the hierarchy. This is accomplished by virtue of their succession (“*opere operato*”) and not by virtue of the faith of the priest or bishop celebrant.]
- [10] “The priestly service, as a charismatic meditation, cannot be merely mechanical or magical; it presupposes the spiritual participation of the persons who serves as a living mediator. In acting as mediator between God and man in the sacrament, in causing the descent of the Holy Spirit, the priest makes himself the instrument of that descent; he renounces his own individuality, he dies with the victim, he is at the same time sacrificed and sacrificer. ‘he who offers and that which is offered’ in the image of Christ, the High Priest” (Bulgakov, 50).
[Comment: Again, the priest is clearly a necessary instrument in the believer’s reception of the Holy Spirit in chrismation. Here is the odd view that a Protestant could be regenerated and in Christ due to baptism and yet not have the fullness of the Spirit and His gifts on account of not having access to chrismation as mediated by the Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy. The believer’s faith response to the Word is insufficient.]

[11] “We see then, first of all, that the priest, as performer of the sacrament, is simply the instrument of the invisible and actual celebrant, the Lord himself. Hence, it is that, in the Holy Eucharist, the priest prays that God will ‘make this bread the precious body of thy Christ...’” (Karmiris, 23).

[Comment: Orthodoxy does not believe that the priest has any sacramental power per se, that is, in himself, but only as the instrument of invisible Lord as true celebrant (e.g., in the Eucharist). Nevertheless, the priest is still a necessary instrument for regeneration and the other sacramental graces. The believer’s faith response to the Word is not sufficient for these graces.]

III. The Teaching That the Reception of Christ as Saviour and Lord is Sufficient for Eternal Life.

A. Biola’s Doctrinal Statement Concerning Eternal Life Through the Reception of Christ as Savior and Lord

“All those who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord, and who confess him as such before their fellowmen, become children of God and receive eternal life....At death their spirits depart to be with Christ in conscious blessedness.”

It is recognized that this statement does not explicitly state that becoming a Christian (which includes justification and regeneration) is through faith alone. But the obvious implication is that the reception of Christ (i.e., through genuine faith) is the sufficient condition to become a child of God and receive eternal life. (“Confession” of Christ is viewed as “tangible fruit of salvation and not as a qualifying condition for salvation” according to the explanation in the Biola teaching position.)

In harmony with the statements above which explicitly declare that justification is by faith alone, this statement therefore excludes any additional conditions which are necessary for obtaining final salvation or eternal life. Evangelical Protestantism believes that if the faith is genuine, it will inevitably produce good works (cf. James 2), but these works are not necessary conditions in addition to genuine faith.

B. The Orthodox teaching on the participation in the various sacramental means of grace as a necessary instrumental condition for obtaining final salvation thus denies that to “become children of God and receive eternal life” is simply through “receiving Jesus Christ as Savior” without additional necessary instrumental conditions.

The Orthodox teaching on the necessary instrumentality of the sacrament of baptism for justification and the new birth and chrismation for the

reception of the Holy Spirit has already been documented (see pp. 11, 19). Here it will be useful to add the teaching concerning the necessity of the Eucharist and repentance as a condition for the continuance of salvation and of finally obtaining eternal life. Clearly, if anything is added to faith as a necessity for obtaining final salvation, then justification is not by faith alone.

- [1] “This possibility of ‘being in Christ,’ of ‘participating’ in divine life—the ‘natural’ state of humanity—is, for the Byzantines, essentially manifested in the sacraments, or *mysteria*, of the Church” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 191).
[Comment: Clearly, faith is not the sufficient condition for entrance into eternal life; rather, according to Orthodoxy, the sacraments are necessary conditions as well.]
- [2] “The sacrament of new humanity *par excellence*, the Eucharist, for Cabasilas ‘alone of the mysteries perfects the other sacraments...since they cannot fulfill the initiation without it’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 205).
[Comment: The Eucharist is necessary to realize what was made potential in baptismal regeneration and justification. That is, the Eucharistic life is the process by which we are made righteous and follow through on our salvation. Faith is not the sufficient condition for completing our salvation.]
- [3] “The flesh of the Lord, received by the believers, through hypostatic union animates and deifies those who partake; without losing its own natural properties, it transmits to them and transplants into them the divine life. This union of Christ with his faithful results in the remission of the sins of the latter. This remission of sins results in immortality and eternal life” (Karmiris, 26).
[Comment: Even the remission of sins associated with Eucharist has to do with immortality and eternal life understood in the Orthodox sense of theosis and participation. This eucharistic participation is the primary means of grace for participation in our eternal life of being made righteous in deification. Thus, faith is not the sufficient condition for salvation. One must also engage in the works which come out of the eucharistic life.]
- [4] “According to John of Damascus, ‘men become partakers of and communicants in the divine nature; as many, that is, as receive the holy body of Christ, and drink his blood.’ In the Holy Eucharist men are united with and incorporated into the God-man, receiving that divine quality necessary for their deification” (Karmiris, 27).
[Comment: The Eucharist is a necessary condition for realizing salvation via theosis. Again, faith is not the sufficient condition for salvation. One

must also engage in the works which come out of the eucharistic life.]

- [5] “According to the divine Liturgy of Chrysostom, the faithful communicate in the Holy Eucharist of the body and blood of Christ ‘for the purification of the soul, for the remission of sins, for the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, for the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven (an inheritance).’ In the first place, the soul of the participant is purified and sanctified, spiritually nourished and mystically rendered incorruptible. Secondly, the communicant receives the seed of incorruption, resurrection, immortality, and eternal life; taking in ‘the very body and blood of Christ,’ the participants progress further into sanctification as members of Christ’s mystical body (the church), being linked with him and with each other through the Holy Communion through which they receive the divine life and deification” (Karmiris, 27).

[Comment: Again, the remission of sins associated with the Eucharist has to do with immortality and eternal life understood in the Orthodox sense of theosis and participation. This eucharistic participation is the primary means of grace for participation in our eternal life of being made righteous in deification]

- [6] “In the Holy Eucharist the faithful truly participate in the real body and blood of Christ. They are mystically united with and incorporated into him, becoming, according to the historically well-known descriptions of Ignatius of Antioch, ‘one body, one blood, Christ-bearers and temple-bearers.’ According to Cyril of Jerusalem, ‘by partaking of the body and blood of Christ, thou mayest be made of the same body and of the same blood with him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because his body and blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that, according to the blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature” (Karmiris, 26).

- [7] “The importance of this sacrament [Eucharist] for our salvation is so great as to make it equally important with the sacrament of baptism. For this reason the Orthodox people, clergy and laity alike, all receive the Holy Communion in both species, following the required preparation. The communion in both species is based on Matthew 26:26-27, and even infants, according to John 6:53-54, participate immediately following their baptism, which practice (infant baptism) is based upon John 3:5” (Karmiris, 28).

- [8] “The great Nicholas Cabasilas, though still bound to the old Dionysian symbolism, overcomes the dangers of Nominalism; clearly, for him as also for Gregory Palamas, the Eucharist is the mystery which not only ‘represents’ the life of Christ and offers it to our ‘contemplation’; it is the moment and the place, in which

Christ's deified humanity becomes ours. 'He not merely clothed Himself in a body. He also took a soul and mind and will and everything human, so that He might be able to be united to the whole of us, penetrate through the whole of us, and resolve us into Himself, having in every respect joined His own to that which is ours... For since it was not possible for us to ascend and participate in that which is His, He comes down to us and participates in that which is ours. And so precisely does He conform to the things which He assumed that, in giving those thing to use which He has received from us, He gives Himself to us. Partaking of the body and blood of His humanity, we receive God Himself in our souls—the Body and Blood of God, and the soul, mind, and will of God—no less than His humanity'" (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 205).

- [9] “‘Holy Communion’ ‘The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving’” (*The Divine Liturgy of St. Tikhon*, 75).
- [10] “In the Holy Eucharist the faithful truly participate in the real body and blood of Christ. They are mystically united with and incorporated into him, becoming, according to the historically well-known descriptions of Ignatius of Antioch, ‘one body, one blood, Christ-bearers and temple-bearers.’ According to Cyril of Jerusalem, ‘by partaking of the body and blood of Christ, thou mayest be made of the same body and of the same blood with him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because his body and blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that, according to the blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature’” (Karmiris, 26).
- [11] “Naturally, it is understood that, in all of these things, nothing is added to the sacrifice of the cross, the saving fruit of which is communicated to participants in the Eucharist. Neither is repeated the Redeemer’s death on the cross. His presence in the Eucharist is a mystical one, as ‘the Offerer and the Offered, the Acceptor and the Distributed,’ as sacrifice and victim, delivering to those who partake of the Holy Eucharist the saving fruits of his sacrifice on the cross” (Karmiris, 29).
- [12] “And thus in the Eucharist it is He who seals and confirms our ascension into heaven, who transforms the Church into the body of Christ and—therefore—*manifests* the elements of our offering as *communion in the Holy Spirit*. This is the consecration” (Schmemmann, 43-44).

Section 2: Scripture and Tradition: A Doctrine Contrary to the *Implicit* Meaning of Biola's Doctrinal Statement

I. Biola's Position on Scripture

A. Relevant Portions of Biola's Doctrinal Statement

1. "The Bible, consisting of all the books of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, a supernaturally given revelation from God Himself, concerning Himself, His being, nature, character, will and purposes; and concerning man, his nature, need and duty and destiny. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are without error or misstatement in their moral and spiritual teaching and record of historical facts. They are without error or defect of any kind."
2. "All the words that He [Jesus] spoke during His earthly life were the words of God. There is absolutely no error of any kind in them, and by the words of Jesus Christ the words of all other teachers must be tested."

B. General Observations on Biola's Doctrinal Statement Concerning Scripture

1. From the above quotations, it is clear that the framers placed strong emphasis on the Bible's *inerrancy* as well as its *authority*. This is understandably the case, due to the controversies with modernism, higher criticism, and theological liberalism – views which denied both of these truths. That they affirmed the Bible's reliability both in moral/spiritual and in historical facts further shows how the statement was tailored to address the controversies of the day.
2. The doctrinal statement does not address directly certain issues relevant to the present study. For example:
 - a. The statement does not specifically present the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. That is, it is not affirmed explicitly that the Bible alone is the sole rule of faith and practice. While the Scriptures are declared authoritative, it is not stated whether there might be other authoritative sources of faith and practice – church tradition (e.g., church councils, liturgy, the writings of eminent theologians such as the church fathers) being one such possible source.
 - b. The statement does not identify the limits of the canon. While it speaks generally of the "Old and New Testaments" it does not mention whether there are only sixty-six books, which would be the case if the apocrypha is rejected.

- c. The statement does not address the issues of Scripture's *perspicuity* (i.e., clarity on essential points of the faith) nor of Scripture's *interpretation*. Of present interest is the question of whether one needs to submit certain of one's interpretations to an infallible teaching magisterium, such as a Pope (as in Roman Catholicism) or the mind of a Spirit-led church (as in Eastern Orthodoxy).

C. Biola's Position on Scripture Historically

1. Even granting the lack of precise statement on the abovementioned points, there can be no doubt about the position taken by the writers of Biola's doctrinal statement. As conservative Protestants, the founders held to *sola Scriptura*, to the Protestant canon, and to the Scripture's perspicuity, without the church as intermediary. These were issues about which there was no internal dispute among conservative Protestants, and thus the framers of the statement took their truth for granted. This can be shown readily by consulting, e.g., *The Fundamentals*, which sets forth the conservative Protestant fundamentalistic teaching in detail. The close connection between Biola and the production and publication of *The Fundamentals* is well known.
2. It is noteworthy that the doctrinal statement bases its conclusions on an appeal to Scripture alone. No other sources of authority (e.g., church fathers or other eminent theologians) are cited. Thus, the school's doctrinal statement models the principle of *sola Scriptura* even though it does not affirm it specifically.
3. Moving beyond the specific wording of the school's doctrinal statement, there can be no doubt that as a school, Biola has always held to *sola Scriptura* (Scripture being defined as the sixty-six book canon), and has not regarded the church as Scripture's infallible interpreter. Again, the *Fundamentals* presents a fair introduction to the thoughts of Biola's founders. In this text the conservative Protestant position is clearly enunciated.

II. General Summary of the Eastern Orthodox View of Tradition

The Eastern Orthodox (EO) place significant weight on "tradition" – much more so than in Protestantism. EO discussions of tradition include in their inventory especially (though not exclusively) the Scriptures, the church councils (particularly the seven ecumenical councils), the teachings of the church fathers, the liturgy, and the veneration of icons.

The development of tradition must be understood in light of the Holy Spirit's activity in the corporate life of the church. The Holy Spirit's living presence has

guided and continues to guide the church; the results of this guidance form the body of the church's living tradition. At the same time, the EO have what might reasonably be called "degrees" of tradition. The EO consider some traditions to be more authoritative than others, and certain traditions are absolutely authoritative and binding on all. For example, while local church councils might possess a historically or geographically conditioned – and therefore only limited – authority, the doctrinal decisions of the seven ecumenical church councils possess absolute, infallible, timeless, and unchanging authority, to which all the faithful must submit. (Besides dealing with doctrinal issues, the ecumenical councils sometimes dealt with matters of practice and discipline. As with a local council, these aspects of the ecumenical councils may or may not remain binding on the faithful today.) Likewise for the church fathers: not every teaching uttered by a church father is considered binding or even true, while certain other teachings – which are regarded as expressing the universal mind of the church as led by the Holy Spirit – would carry the greatest weight. Some (though apparently not all) EO writers would distinguish the former by the word "tradition" (with a lowercase "t"), in distinction from the latter, which would be "Tradition" (with an uppercase "T"). Indeed, the number of absolutely binding "traditions" – perhaps more properly called "Tradition" – is relatively small when compared to the total body of EO traditions.

Concerning the Scriptures, the EO deny that they set Tradition in opposition to them, nor do they regard Tradition to be a second source of revelation separate from Scripture. Rather, they believe that the same Holy Spirit inspired both; Tradition and Scripture cohere and do not contradict. From this it follows that the Scriptures must be interpreted in harmony with the accepted body of Tradition and not in contradiction to it. As the Tradition is given to the church by the Holy Spirit and arises only within it, the church alone has the right to define the correct understanding of that Tradition. The Scriptures, as part of that Tradition, can therefore only be interpreted in the context of the church. Authoritative church interpretation takes precedence and any individual interpretation that does not square with the church's teaching is to be rejected.

It is important to note that the problem from a Protestant perspective is not the existence of tradition per se. Every branch of Christendom, Biola included, can point to a heritage of beliefs and practices which may reasonably be described as "tradition" – in the lowercase usage of the word. The issue is whether any tradition, however widely or anciently held, is to be regarded as on a par with Scripture in terms of inspiration, infallibility, and authority. Certain traditions within EO, such as the teachings of the seven ecumenical councils (including the seventh council, which affirms the veneration of icons), are regarded as equal to Scripture in inspiration, infallibility, and authority. This is clearly incompatible with Biola's position as a Protestant institution, committed to the

sole authority of the Bible (*sola Scriptura*).

The following sections explore those aspects of EO tradition at variance with Biola's position. The analysis that follows will provide primary source quotations for each significant point made in the above summary. A brief discussion of the points at variance with Biola's position will be included.

III. The EO deny the principle of *sola Scriptura*.

Contrary to the classic Protestant position, the EO expressly deny the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Protestants consider the word of God to be the unique source of Christian doctrine. Likewise, Protestants affirm the Bible to be the sole external criterion in matters of faith, which stands above the church and judges any and all practices of it. All doctrines – no matter how anciently or widely held, no matter how reflective of the “mind of the church” in any particular age or in every age – must be tested by Scripture alone and rejected if they do not conform to the same.

For the EO it is the Spirit-led church that provides the norms for true belief; in Protestantism, Spirit-inspired Scripture is the sole norm. Naturally, Protestants regard the issue of the canon as important: since the word of God is the sole authority and Protestants depend on it alone, it is critical to identify properly what is and is not God's word. Protestants accept only a sixty-six book canon and reject the apocrypha or so-called “deuterocanonical” writings.

[1] “It is highly important to establish a right relationship between the Word of God and tradition in the life of the Church. The Word of God may be considered as the unique and primary source of Christian doctrine, and ‘Biblicalism’ as the truest manifestation of the ecclesiastical spirit (this is the case in Protestantism). In this case Christianity becomes the religion of a book instead of being that of spirit and of life—the religion of the New Testament scribes....Biblical orthodoxy, which is developed in certain branches of Protestantism and in certain sects, dries up Christianity, making of it a legalistic religion” (Bulgakov, 21).

[Comment: The second sentence is not using the word “may” in the sense of permission – as though it would be acceptable to consider the Word of God as the unique and primary source of Christian doctrine. Rather, Bulgakov is saying that one way of looking at the matter is to regard the Word as the unique and primary source, but to do so results in a lifeless, legalistic, “book religion.” While he does not identify specifically the “certain branches” of Protestantism that he has in mind, it certainly would not be the liberal branch, since such a position hardly characterizes it. It is highly likely that that he has “fundamentalist” Protestants in view – as characterizes Biola's heritage.]

[2] “The freedom the Orthodox enjoys in his relations with God

makes it possible for him to carry on a dialogue with all Christians, Protestants or Catholics, and to appeal to his separated brethren to accept, not some external ‘criterion’—Rome or *sola scriptura*—but the living Truth as experienced in a liturgical communion and in the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit” (Meyendorff, *Orthodox Church*, 226).

[Comment: In this quote the teaching of sola Scriptura is explicitly denied. Those who accept sola Scriptura are contrasted with those who would accept the “living Truth” – as if those who submit themselves to Scripture alone are following a dead letter. Protestants are here compared to Roman Catholics, whose “external criterion” is the Pope.]

- [3] “In this history the Church takes dogmatic forms; it [the Church] provides the norms of true belief, of the profession of the true faith” (Bulgakov, 10).

[Comment: For Protestants, Scripture is the sole norm, not the Church.]

- [4] “Even today, Orthodox theologians refer to them [i.e., the apocrypha] as deuterocanonical books. They are considered part of Scripture and are read in church liturgically, but occupy something of a marginal place in the canon. This rather detached Orthodox attitude toward the problem of the scriptural canon shows clearly that for them the Christian faith and experience can in no way be compatible with the notion of *Scriptura sola*....[Meyendorff cites a text from Basil the Great, which, among other things means that] the essence of this *kerygma* is indeed contained in the books of the New Testament, but that this *kerygma* would be mere human words if it were not delivered in the full context of the living tradition, particularly the sacraments and the liturgy of the church” (Meyendorff, “Doing Theology,” 83).

- [5] “Anathema to those who spurn the teachings of the holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church, taking as a pretext and making their own the arguments of Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Dioscorus, that unless we were evidently taught by the Old and New Testaments, we should not follow the teachings of the holy Fathers and of the holy Ecumenical Synods, and the tradition of the Catholic Church” (The Council of Nicea 787, Acts of Session I).

[Comment: As will be noted in the next point, the EO regard this council (Nicea 787) as infallible and inspired. Written over 700 years before the Reformation, this anathema could not have Protestantism in view. Yet, the Protestant position of *sola Scriptura* is roundly condemned and associated with some of the most notorious heretics in church history. The council correctly notes that Arius did appeal to Scripture in his denial of Christ’s deity, just as the Jehovah’s Witnesses do today. However, from our perspective, the problem with Arius was not that he held to *sola*

Scriptura and thereby failed to give enough place to tradition, but that he twisted Scripture's true meaning.]

- IV. The EO regard the seven ecumenical councils as inspired, inerrant, infallible, and absolutely authoritative. They are therefore on a par with Scripture.

As noted in the previous point, Protestants regard the Bible and the Bible alone as the inspired, inerrant, infallible, and absolutely authoritative rule of faith and practice. The EO, on the other hand, place certain of its traditions on a par with Scripture in these respects. This is so because, like the Scriptures, the church is seen as a divinely-inspired, infallible institution.

The dogmatic decisions of the seven ecumenical councils are an important case in point. Unlike the doctrinal decisions of a local or individual bishop, which are always liable to error, EO regards the dogmatic definitions of an ecumenical council as infallible. These possess the same abiding and irrevocable authority as Scripture. The doctrinal conclusions of the seven ecumenical councils are obligatory for all and must be accepted in their entirety. Indeed, to reject the decisions of these councils is to separate oneself from the church. The ecumenical definitions are essential to Christianity, not peripheral. This is true for all seven of the councils, including the seventh (Nicea 787), which concerns the veneration of icons.

As noted earlier, some of the issues discussed at the ecumenical councils were of a non-doctrinal character (e.g., practical, organizational, or disciplinary matters; see p. 34). EO writers indicate that such matters might not be applicable to all or even to any of the EO today, even though they were defined at an ecumenical council. On the other hand, when EO writers speak of the binding character of the ecumenical councils, they generally speak of the "doctrinal" or "dogmatic" decisions of these councils. Historically, the ecumenical councils provided a concise summary or epitome of the doctrine under consideration (e.g., the relatively short Nicene creed), together with "acts" of the council, which detail the doctrinal reasoning behind the decisions reached. While EO writers simply affirm the councils' "dogmatic decisions," they do not specify whether they have merely the epitome in view or *anything* in the council of a specifically doctrinal character. Seeing no expressed limitation to the contrary, it seems most reasonable to conclude that for the EO any doctrinal pronouncement of the council would be binding, even beyond the short creedal summary. Historically, it is worth noting that the later ecumenical councils themselves consulted the acts of prior councils to determine the proper doctrinal conclusions they ought to reach. Thus, the fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople 553) searched diligently the acts of the fourth ecumenical council (Chalcedon 451) to decide whether certain writings produced by some eminent theologians of the Antiochene school ought to be condemned.

It seems best, then, to conclude that everything of a doctrinal nature connected with an ecumenical council is of binding authority for the EO. For that reason, a few of the citations given below are to the acts of certain ecumenical councils. However, even if the scope of authority is narrower than understood here, the outcome is not affected in the case of the issue before us, since it is clear that the EO hold at least *some* parts of the councils to be inspired and infallible and therefore equal in authority to Scripture.

While conservative Protestants do respect and even endorse the conclusions of at least certain of the ecumenical councils (particularly Nicea 325 and Chalcedon 451), they do not regard these as infallible or inspired. Protestants accept conciliar decisions only in so far as they reflect Scripture, which alone is infallible and inspired. Therefore, even where Protestants agree with a conciliar decision, they still do not regard such decisions as inspired, infallible, or inerrant – any more than they would attribute such properties to their own confessions of faith. In our own case, while we believe Biola’s own doctrinal statement to be true (else we would not affirm it ourselves nor require others to subscribe to it) we do not impute inspiration to it.

Indeed, Protestants outright *reject* as erroneous much of the seventh ecumenical council (Nicea 787). That is, the decisions of this council are not even regarded as true, much less inspired. Nicea 787 enjoined the veneration of icons, which conservative Protestants repudiate as unbiblical. This is enjoined both in the council’s shorter summary statement as well as in the larger acts of the council. (Thus, even if one were to take the more limited view of which parts of the ecumenical council are authoritative, this would have no bearing on the question under consideration.) Even if one could find a conservative Protestant who might allow for the veneration of images as *adiaphora* (i.e., an indifferent matter in which there is individual liberty), certainly no conservative Protestant would *enjoin* their veneration, as Nicea 787 does. Nicea 787 went so far as to anathematize those who do not venerate images, saying that they should be driven far away from the church. Furthermore, the Acts (Session I) of this “inspired” council contain the following anathema: “Anathema to those who spurn the teachings of the holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church, taking as a pretext and making their own the arguments of Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Dioscorus, that unless we were evidently taught by the Old and New Testaments, we should not follow the teachings of the holy Fathers and of the holy Ecumenical Synods, and the tradition of the Catholic Church.” The view condemned is the Protestant position of *sola Scriptura*, over 700 years before the Reformation. The names of Luther and Calvin could with equal propriety be placed alongside the notorious heresiarchs listed. (Indeed, there were seventeenth-century EO confessions that did condemn the teachings of the Reformers by name.

However, these are not mentioned here because these were local and not ecumenical councils.) Finally, Nicea 787 also sports incidental theological and factual errors unbecoming of an inspired, infallible work, such as the reference to Mary as “ever-virgin,” in spite of Scripture’s explicit teaching to the contrary (e.g., Matt. 12:46; Lk. 8:19; Jn. 2:12). In short, the claims of Protestantism and the seventh ecumenical council are irreconcilable.

- [1] “For instance, Greek philosophy was accepted as the most satisfactory form for the expression of Christology. This pragmatism of form is nevertheless no hindrance to the special divine inspiration which, so the Church holds, is evident in the dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical councils” (Bulgakov, 32).
[Comment: Divine inspiration is imputed to the decisions of the ecumenical councils. For Protestants, inspiration is a property of the Scriptures alone.]
- [2] “The teaching authority of the ecumenical councils is grounded in the infallibility of the church. The ultimate authority is vested in the church, which is forever the pillar and the foundation of truth....It is a *charismatic* authority, grounded in the assistance of the Spirit (‘for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’)” (Florovsky, *Authority*, 124).
[Comment: In affirming the church’s infallibility, the EO do not mean that anything and everything uttered by a church leader or even a church father is infallible; see the earlier discussion of this (p. 34). The EO are referring to those determinations which historically have reflected the mind of the church in toto; they are speaking of the Spirit-led “mind of the church” – such as one has in the case of an ecumenical council – not a particular member’s idiosyncratic opinion on a peripheral issue. Even given this qualifier, such a position is at odds with historic Protestantism.]
- [3] “The doctrinal definitions of an Ecumenical Council are infallible. Thus in the eyes of the Orthodox Church, the statement of faith put out by the seven councils possess, along with the Bible, an abiding and irrevocable authority” (Ware, 202).
[Comment: A more direct statement imputing infallibility to the ecumenical councils and putting Scripture on a par with tradition would be hard to find.]
- [4] “While the doctrinal decisions of general councils are infallible, those of a local council or an individual bishop are always liable to error; but if such decisions are accepted by the rest of the Church, then they come to acquire Ecumenical authority...The doctrinal decisions of an Ecumenical Council cannot be revised or corrected, but must be accepted in their entirety; but the Church has often been selective in its treatment of the acts of local councils” (Ware, 202).

- [5] “Such a profession of faith, obligatory for all, is the Nicene Creed recited during the liturgy (to which may be added the Apostles’ Creed, which has less value and is not of liturgical use, and especially the Athanasian Creed). Then come the dogmatic definitions of the seven ecumenical councils. Anyone who does not accept this minimum of Church tradition by that fact separates himself from the society of the Church. The canons of the ecumenical and local councils, concerning various sides of the life of the church, are also obligatory. But the value and importance of these practical rules cannot be compared with the dogmatic definitions mentioned above, many among them being the outcome of historic circumstances. Thus certain canons have been simply abrogated by others more recent (something which cannot happen to dogmatic definitions)...” (Bulgakov, 27).
[Comment: Acceptance of the seven ecumenical councils is not optional. This is important, especially in reference to the seventh council. The Acts of this council anathematized *sola Scriptura*, and, additionally, sentenced to excommunication (in the creedal epitome) and anathema (in the section immediately following the epitome) those who refused to venerate icons. As noted earlier (p. 37) and as Bulgakov here states, it is the dogmatic or doctrinal definitions of the councils that are binding, not canons having to do with matters of practical church life and discipline, which were also on the council’s agenda. Thus, in so far as a doctrinal decision is in view (e.g., the veneration of icons) it is obligatory on the faithful. Logically, then, it would seem that an EO believer must endorse these conclusions.]
- [6] “I think I would be faithful to the Orthodox general feeling on the matter if I said that in the Orthodox church formal doctrinal definitions are concerned only with essentials, without which the whole New Testament vision of salvation would not stand. This was certainly the case for the dogmas of the seven ecumenical councils, including the decree of Nicea II (787) on the veneration of icons, which in fact was not so much a decree on religious art as an affirmation of the reality of the incarnation; that is to say, it was a statement that Christ was a historical person—visible, depictable, and representable” (Meyendorff, “Doing Theology,” 90).
[Comment: It is clear that the veneration of icons is, together with the dogmatic pronouncements on the Trinity and two natures in Christ, an “essential” matter of Christian faith. To the EO it is not an indifferent matter, about which Christians may agree to disagree.]
- [7] “The point in question here concerns the definitions of the seven ecumenical councils; their denial would be truly in contradiction—direct or indirect—with the profession of faith which is the foundation stone of the Church: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matt. 16:17)” (Bulgakov, 29).

[Comment: It is not entirely clear what connection Bulgakov is making between the ecumenical councils and the confession of Jesus as the Christ. Yet, he certainly does seem to be saying that one cannot truly confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and deny the absolute authority of the seven ecumenical councils.]

[8] “Just as much as dogmatic definitions, it has been possible for the icons of Christ to be compared to Holy Scriptures, to receive the same veneration, since iconography sets forth in colors what the Word announces in written letters” (Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” 145).

- V. EO affirms that the Spirit-led church is the infallible interpreter of Scripture. Individuals must therefore conform their interpretations to the infallible teachings of the church.

One of the main issues in the Protestant Reformation was whether one’s understanding of the Bible had necessarily to be in accord with the traditional interpretation of the church, as handed down by the church’s “divinely-inspired” Fathers. The Roman Catholic and EO churches both agree that one’s interpretation of Scripture must be subordinated to and controlled by the Tradition. The church alone can declare authoritatively the infallible sense of Scripture, since she is the only authentic depository of the apostolic kerygma. In other words, the ultimate authority for determining the truth in faith resides in the church as a divine institution. Indeed, even the Bible’s inspired character is established and guaranteed only by the church, not by individual opinion. The EO believe that no reader of Scripture can comprehend for himself or herself the Scripture’s inspired character apart from an organic union with the church.

Here again it is worth noting that the EO do not wish to be understood as affirming every interpretation of Scripture offered by any particular church father. Also, there is some flexibility of interpretation allowed on certain doctrines – though even here the interpreter should seek to align him or herself with the general “mind of the church,” as best as can be determined. However, the church is Scripture’s infallible interpreter when it comes to defined matters of the faith, as the quotes given below indicate.

Protestants, on the other hand, do not regard the church as beyond the possibility of error in interpreting the Scriptures. Just as an individual member is both “justified and a sinner,” even so, the church as a whole is sinful and liable to errors of various kinds – even on important issues, such as justification by faith alone, the sole authority of Scripture, icons, etc. Protestants believe that the EO (and, for that matter, Roman Catholic) position effectively (and wrongly) places the church over the Bible rather than the other way around. The Scriptures must always be over the church as a judge. No matter how

sincerely, universally, or anciently held an opinion, all opinions must be subjected to Scripture and rejected if they do not conform to the same.

To consider but one concrete example, the teaching of baptismal regeneration occurs early in church tradition and was and is widely held. Yet, this teaching contradicts the Bible, which affirms that a person is regenerated through faith alone and not through a sacrament such as baptism. (See the discussion beginning on pp. 11ff.) In this case, the “mind of the church” traditionally has been wrong because it has failed to follow the teaching of Scripture on this point.

In the Protestant view, there is no need for an infallible church to interpret the Bible. Protestants believe in Scripture’s *clarity* (also called *perspicuity*). This means that “all things necessary for our salvation and for our Christian life and growth are very clearly set forth in Scripture” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108). “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings [i.e., on essentials] are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it” (ibid.). If and when the institutional church fails to affirm the clear teaching of Scripture, the teachings of the church are to be rejected.

- [1] “It is true, however, that in comparison with the Roman confession Orthodoxy leaves more liberty to personal theological thought, to individual judgment in the domain of ‘theological opinions’ (‘theologoumena’). This is a consequence of the fact that Orthodoxy, while safeguarding essential dogmas, necessary to the faith, knows no theological doctrine obligatory for all. It applies the principle: ‘in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas’” (Bulgakov, 83).

[Comment: Of course, our present concern is not so much where there is individual freedom of interpretation but where there is not. The point here is that there are certain teachings at variance with the Protestant position that are not optional in Eastern Orthodoxy (e.g., some teachings of the seven ecumenical councils and other teachings that are accepted as part of the Church’s infallible Tradition).]

- [2] “...when one undertakes to understand the Word of God from the point of view of faith and dogma, one must necessarily be in accord with the interpretation of the Church handed down by the divinely-inspired Fathers and teachers of the Church and from the apostolic times. After His resurrection Our Lord opened to His disciples the understanding of the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). This understanding continues to be opened to us by the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church....This principle curbs the individual will by placing man face to face with the Church, subordinating him interiorly to the control of tradition, making him responsible, not only as an isolated individual, but also as a member of the

Church. In practice, it amounts to this: in obvious cases his conception of certain events or doctrines must not be in disagreement with the fundamental conceptions of the Church. In less obvious cases he is obliged to collate his opinions with what predominates in Church tradition; he must himself seek such verification and agreement” (Bulgakov, 23-24).

[Comment: Note that the interpreter is to submit his opinion to church tradition, both in “obvious cases” as well as in “less obvious cases.”]

- [3] “The church had the authority to interpret the Scripture, since she was the only authentic depository of apostolic kerygma....Indeed, Scripture itself was the major part of this apostolic deposit. So was also the church. Scripture and church could not be separated or opposed to each other. Scripture, that is, its true understanding, was only in the church, as she was guided by the Spirit” (Florovsky, “Function of Tradition,” 112-13).

- [4] “In other words, the ultimate authority—and the ability to discern the truth in faith—is vested in the church, which is indeed a ‘divine institution’ in the proper and strict sense of the word, whereas no council, and no conciliar institution, is *de jure divino*, except insofar as it happens to be a true image or manifestation of the church herself” (Florovsky, “Authority of the Ancient Councils,” 118).

[Comment: From a Protestant perspective, the ultimate authority is vested in Scripture, not in the church. The church is indeed a “divine institution” in the sense that it is Christ’s body. But the ultimate authority resides not in the body but in the head, and he has expressed himself clearly and infallibly in Scripture (Heb. 1:1-2).]

- [5] “Holy Scripture is thus a part of the tradition of the Church. It is that tradition which affirms the value of the holy books in the Church. The canon of holy books which affirms their inspired character is established by tradition; the inspired nature of the scripture can be guaranteed only by the church, that is to say, by tradition.... no one can of himself decide questions relative to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. That is given only by the Spirit of God which lives in the Church...This cannot then be a question of personal choice but depends only on the judgment of the Church” (Bulgakov, 12).

[Comment: The books of the canon are inspired and bear the marks (“*indicia*”) of that inspiration. Christians recognize these marks through the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. The living quality of Scripture is recognized directly by all true Christians. The church merely recognizes these marks but in no way “guarantees” Scripture’s inspired nature, as if Christians could not recognize it apart from an infallible church.]

- [6] “Orthodox, when they read the Scripture, accept the guidance of the Church. When received into the Orthodox Church, a convert promises, ‘I will accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretation which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother’” (Ware, 200).

[Comment: A Protestant could never agree to the promise an Orthodox convert must make. That is, a Protestant could not agree ahead of time to interpret the text in accordance with tradition. Rather, he would commit himself to go wherever Scripture leads, even if it means repudiating doctrines however authoritative from an ecclesial perspective.]

- [7] “There cannot be, there should not be, any break between Scripture and tradition. No reader of the Word of God can comprehend for himself the inspired character of that which he reads, for to the individual there is not given an organ of such comprehension. Such an organ is available to the reader only when he finds himself in union with all in the Church” (Bulgakov, 13).

[Comment: Bulgakov’s view is at odds with a Protestant perspective. The individual reader does indeed comprehend Scripture’s inspired character. The church is not such an organ but rather the Scripture’s inspired character is known through the working of the Holy Spirit directly in the believer’s heart.]

- [8] “But although dependent upon historical circumstance, Scripture always preserves its divine power, since the Word of the God-Man, the Word of God addressed to man, could be spoken only in human language. But that human historical form becomes an obstacle to the understanding of the Word of God; it becomes transparent only under the guidance of the Spirit of God, Who lives in the Church, so that to understand the inspired Scripture a special inspiration, inherent only in the Church, is necessary” (Bulgakov, 19).

- [9] “It is obvious that a theology of this kind which regards the Church as both ‘justified and sinner’ cannot be acceptable to the Orthodox Church: for the mystery of the Church consists precisely in the fact that sinners, coming together, form the infallible Church....No analogy can possibly be drawn between the individual member, who is a sinner, and the Church, the Body of Christ. This Protestant thesis appears to the Orthodox to amount to a negation of the full and real presence of Christ in his Church, as a repudiation of the promises which he made to his disciples: ‘When he will come, the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you into all truth’ (John XVI.13)” (Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, 221).

[Comment: Meyendorff clearly contrasts the EO view of the church’s infallibility with the Protestant conception of the church as fallible.]

Individual Christians are indeed “justified sinners” (as Luther well put it), as is the body of Christians taken *in toto*, i.e., the church.]

- [10] “But if Christians are People of the Book, the Bible is the Book of the People; it must not be regarded as something set up over the Church, but as something that lives and is understood within the Church (that is why one should not separate Scripture and Tradition). It is from the Church that the Bible ultimately derives its authority, for it was the Church which originally decided which books form a part of Holy Scripture; and it is the Church alone which can interpret Holy Scripture with authority. There are many sayings in the Bible which by themselves are far from clear, and individual readers, however sincere, are in danger of error if they trust their own personal interpretation” (Ware, 199).

[Comment: While it is true that the Bible is a living book that is understood within the church, it is also true, from a Protestant perspective, that the Bible is over the church. Although the Bible exhorts people to submit to their leaders, we are to submit ourselves *unreservedly* to Scripture alone, for all human teachers are liable to err.]

- VI. EO allows for a certain degree of theological freedom insofar as its concept of tradition distinguishes between “dogma,” which requires universal assent, and “theological speculation” (theologoumena), which does not.

Although Orthodox theologians appear to agree on these issues of conflict discussed in this report, they do not always specify which are binding. Thus, it is unclear whether the Orthodox doctrines in conflict with Biola’s doctrinal statement are dogmas requiring universal assent or theological speculation with which one can differ. Each relevant doctrine needs to be carefully examined in this way in order to determine whether one can without contradiction assent both to Biola’s doctrinal statement and to Orthodoxy with conscious integrity and conviction. On the other hand, if indeed any of the doctrines treated in this report were said to be optional “theologoumena,” the problem that would still need to be addressed is that doctrines in conflict with Biola’s doctrinal position are taught universally throughout the Orthodox tradition.

- [1] “It is true, however, that in comparison with the Roman confession Orthodoxy leaves more liberty to personal theological thought, to individual judgment in the domain of ‘theological opinions’ (‘theologoumena’). This is a consequence of the fact that Orthodoxy, while safeguarding essential dogmas, necessary to the faith, knows no theological doctrine obligatory for all. It applies the principle: ‘in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas’.” (Bulgakov, 83).

- [2] “Thus, in doing theology today, an Orthodox theologian is

answerable to Scripture and to tradition, as expressed in the reality of communion, which I tried to describe above. But his responsibility is that of a fully free person, entrusted by God to learn the truth and to communicate it to others. This freedom could be restricted only by the truth itself, but divine truth does not restrict human freedom but makes us free (John 8:32). The early church did not know—and the Orthodox does not know today—any automatic, formal, or authoritarian way of discerning truth from falsehood” (Meyendorff, “Doing Theology,” 86).

- [3] “...an Orthodox theologian, although he necessarily defines himself as a consistent follower of the patristic and conciliar tradition of the early church, and although he is inevitably respectful of the present positions of his church as they are expressed in the consensus of the episcopate, is fundamentally free in his expressing the faith. Of course, he is also responsible, since freedom entails the risks of error” (Meyendorff, “Doing Theology,” 92).

Part II: Some Teachings Not Mentioned in the Doctrinal Statement That Are in Tension With Biola’s Evangelical Protestant Heritage

The Orthodox tradition holds various beliefs and practices (which are, of course, based on beliefs) that are in tension with the evangelical tradition of Biola’s heritage. Not all of the items discussed are held as dogma; nevertheless they are generally taught and practiced with the Orthodox Church. Evangelical Protestantism rejects these traditions not only on the ground that they are not taught in the Scriptures, but also because many of them are either directly contrary to Scripture (e.g., the perpetual virginity of Mary) or they lead to practices that are contrary to Scripture (e. g., the sinlessness of Mary, which contributes to an exaggerated veneration of her and the practice of praying to her). In short, Evangelical Protestantism sees these beliefs and practices as either directly unbiblical or as additions that may lead to the adulteration of the truths of Scriptures.

I. The Church and the Hierarchy

A. The Nature of the Church

The Church according to Orthodox teaching is sacramental in the sense that it is the continuation of the incarnation of Christ in the world. Christ is present in the Church so that the Church is understood to be both divine and human. The Church therefore continues Christ’s own prophetic,

priestly, and kingly ministry in the world. This leads among other things to the conclusion that the Church, through the hierarchy, conveys the saving grace of God through the sacraments. The evangelical Protestant tradition recognizes that the church as the Body of Christ is in union with Christ as its Head and also that the members of the church are indwelt by the Spirit. But it believes that Christ as Head of the Church is nevertheless to be distinguished from the church. According to evangelical Protestantism the church points people to Christ for salvation through faith in him and does not believe that Christ is so united to the Church that the church through its sacraments is now the conveyor of the divine grace of salvation.

- [1] “The Church is the extension of the Incarnation, the place where the Incarnation perpetuates itself. The Church...is ‘the centre and organ of Christ’s redeeming work...it is nothing else than the continuation and extension of His prophetic, priestly, and kingly power...The Church is Christ with us’ (Ware, 241).
- [2] “The Incarnation is not only an idea or a doctrine; it is above all an event which happened once in time but which possesses all the power of eternity, and this perpetual incarnation, a perfect, indissoluble union, yet with confusion, of the two natures—divine and human—makes the Church” (Bulgakov, 1).
- [3] “The Church, in its essence as a divine-human unity, belongs to the realm of the divine” (Bulgakov, 3).
- [4] “According to Catholic tradition, in contrast with that which issued from the Reformation, the Church is an organic and sacramental reality which actualizes throughout history the work accomplished by Christ once and for all at a particular moment in time. Christ is really present in the Christian Community. His presence constitutes the Mystery of Christ and of the Church: it gives back to mankind its lost intimacy with the Father and it anticipates the second coming of the Son of Man” (Meyendorff, *Orthodoxy and Catholicity*, 3).
- [5] “The hierarchy, in direct succession from the Apostles, and the One Who appointed them, is Christ Himself, acting in the Church. There can be no greater misfortune in the Church than that great movement beginning in the sixteenth century, by which whole congregations, whole nations, deprived themselves of the hierarchy” (Bulgakov, 49).
- [6] “The bishop was, first of all, the image of Christ in the Eucharistic mystery. ‘O Lord our God,’ says the prayer of episcopal ordination, ‘who in Thy providence hast instituted for us teachers of like nature with ourselves, to maintain Thine Altar, that they

may offer unto Thee sacrifice and oblation for all Thy people; do Thou, the same Lord, make this man has been proclaimed a steward of the episcopal grace, to be an imitator of Thee, the true Shepherd....” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 209-10).

- [7] “The sanctity of the Church is that of Christ Himself. The word of the Old Testament: ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’ (Lev. xi.44-5) is realized in the New by means of the Incarnation, which is the sanctification of the human race by the Church....Life in the church is a supreme reality in which we participate and by means of which we become sanctified” (Bulgakov, 95).
- [8] “When we speak of the sanctity of the Church, it is first of all the sanctity conferred by the Church; the sanctity attained or realized by its members comes only after that” (Bulgakov, 98).
- [9] “Above all, and this is the most essential thing, the hierarchy is the power for administering the sacraments; consequently the hierarchy carries in itself that mysterious power, superhuman and supernatural. According to the testimony of ancient writings...the bishop is he who celebrates the Eucharist, and only the Eucharist celebrated by a bishop is valid” (Bulgakov, 45).
- [10] “The hierarchy of the Apostles did not receive the power to become vicars of Christ, but that of communicating the gifts necessary to the life of the Church...to the hierarchy belongs the authority to be mediators, servants of Christ, from whom they received full power for their ministry” (Bulgakov, 38).
- [11] “Christ commissions the disciples to continue His mission on earth, granting them **the Holy Spirit** (v. 22) and the power to **forgive...sins** (v. 23). These words of Christ are among the scriptural foundations of the sacraments of holy orders (see article, “Ordination,” at Acts 14) and repentance (see article, ‘Confession,’ at 1 John 1). Through the consecration and empowerment of the Apostles by the Lord, and through their ordination of others to continue their apostolic mission, Christ’s own Holy Priesthood is communicated to the bishops and priests of the Church” (*OSB*, John 20:21-23).

B. The Absolute Necessity of the Hierarchy for the Existence of the Church and Its Ministry of Conveying the Grace of Salvation

(Many of the following citations were used also in the section dealing with justification by faith alone).

- [1] “...the sacramental understanding of the church implied the hierarchical structure, a continuity in the teaching office, and,

- finally conciliar authority” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 225).
- [2] “...the sacramental understanding of ecclesiology served as a guarantee against individualism and arbitrariness: responsibility could only be understood in this ecclesial framework, which, in turn, was impossible without an identifiable ministry of bishops and priests” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 226).
- [3] “The Orthodox delegation to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Evanston, Ill.; 1954) maintained this position: ‘Only through Apostolic Succession is the mystery of Pentecost continued in the Church’” (Karmiris, 30).
- [4] “Such is the effect of the abolition of the apostolic succession in Protestantism. It has deprived the Protestant world of the gifts of Pentecost, transmitted in the Sacraments and the cult of the Church by the hierarchy, which received its power from the Apostles and their successors. The Protestant world thus became like Christians who, although baptized ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus,’ have not received the Holy Spirit transmitted by the hands of the Apostles (Acts 19:5-6)” (Bulgakov 43).
- [5] “Furthermore, the Orthodox Catholic Church believes that divine grace is not dispensed outside of the true church, and thus the church does not recognize in their fullness sacramental acts which are performed outside of her, except in extraordinary circumstances (and then by ‘economy’ [a special exemption from the norm] and condescension she recognizes the sacraments of those heterodox who come to her)” (Karmiris, 23).
- [6] “After the Apostles, the communication of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church became the prerogative of the hierarchy, that is of the episcopate, with its presbyters and deacons” (Bulgakov, 40).
- [7] “‘The dignity of the bishop is so necessary in the Church,’ wrote Dositheus, ‘that without him neither the Church nor the name Christian could exist or be spoken of at all...He is a living image of God upon earth...and a fountain of all the sacraments of the Catholic Church, through which we obtain salvation.’ ‘If any are not with the bishop,’ said Cyprian, ‘they are not in the Church.’” (Ware, 248-49).
- [8] “Symeon of Thessalonica defines the episcopal dignity in terms of its sacraments functions; the bishop for him is the one who performs all sacraments—baptism, chrismation, Eucharist, ordination; he is the one ‘through whom all ecclesiastical acts are perfected’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 210).

- [9] “Some who are opposed to the established Church have used this verse to claim that all you need is Jesus—not the church, her clergy, or her sacraments. But the Son became the **one Mediator** by becoming **Man** through the Holy Spirit and a virgin—that is, through **God and men**. He ‘built’ His humanity not from Himself alone but from another, the Virgin Mary. Likewise, as the *Mediator* He says, ‘I will build My church’ (Matt. 16:18); He establishes her leaders and her worship. As Mary gives us Christ in His humanity, the Church introduces us to Him, who alone is our *Mediator*” (OSB, 1 Tim. 2:5).
- [10] “The assembly of the Apostles was the hierarchic receptacle and the tongues of fire, the method of transmission of the gifts of the grace of the Church. In view of this, the charismatic succession of the Apostles became necessary and inevitable. But this had to happen in a well-defined manner, valid for all, and not accidental, that is, by the regular succession of the hierarchy, which—to put it in terms of sacramental theology—must operate not ‘opere operantis’ but ‘opere operato’ (Bulgakov, 42).
- [11] “This sacramental nature of the true life in the Spirit presupposes the existence of a visible Church with a hierarchy possessing special functions and a charisma to teach...” (Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, 192; cf. also 212ff.).
- [12] “The Redemption which God granted in Jesus Christ is available to us through the Church and by means of the Church...” (Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, 200).

II. The Exclusivity of the Orthodox Church

A. Summary of Orthodoxy’s View of the Exclusivity of the Orthodox Church

The Orthodox church believes in both an invisible church insofar as it is born of grace and a visible Church which is the community of the redeemed on earth. However, Orthodoxy refuses to separate the two and, by so doing, believes itself to be that one Church. She claims this not by merit but by election. In general, she teaches that outside of the Orthodox church there is no salvation. However, there is controversy within her as to how to understand this.

Generally, Orthodox believe that individuals outside the visible Orthodox Church can be saved—she recognizes the heterodox, non-Orthodox or schismatic baptism of even Protestantism. The more moderate wing sees those outside her visible communion as members of the Orthodox but not visibly so. Believers are more or less Orthodox depending upon the degree to which their communions possess a genuine measure of Orthodox

practices and beliefs. The more strict group may allow non-Orthodox to be saved if they genuinely love God but insist they are not members of the Church. They are separate from the benefits of the Church. Consequently, the Orthodox desire reconciliation of all Christians to the Orthodox Church.

Orthodoxy allows for a good deal of diversity, for, indeed, the Orthodox church does not contain a single ecclesiastical organization per se as in the case of Rome. Nevertheless, diversity cannot be permitted in matters of faith. Orthodox are not typically interested in a “minimal reunion scheme” but insist reunion can only be based upon accepting the fullness of the faith. Of course, this faith consists in the essentials or dogma and not in theological speculations or customs. The precise nature of these essentials is unclear from their writings. A corollary to this is that until unity is achieved, there is not real communion in the sacraments, which is the fountain of our unity. Thus, Orthodox will not use the Eucharist to bring union but believe this will occur when there is true doctrinal unity.

This view, course, is in tension with the Evangelical Protestant tradition which, while believing in one Church universal, insists there are many churches visible wherever the gospel is proclaimed. Thus, Protestants oppose the view that salvation and the means of grace are contained in the one, visible Orthodox church (though even Orthodox may interpret this in different ways).

B. The Orthodox Teaching on the Exclusivity of the Orthodox Church.

1. The Orthodox believe that the Orthodox Church is the true visible Church so that a goal is to reconcile all other Christian communions to the Orthodox church. Thus, typical Protestant churches need to find their full actualization in Christ within the confines of the Orthodox church.

[1] “Note at once that the Orthodox Church is aware that she is the true Church, possessing the plenitude and purity of the truth in the Holy Spirit. Hence proceeds the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward other confessions, separated, immediately or not, from the unity of the Church; it can desire but one thing, that is to make Orthodox the entire Christian world, so that all confessions, may be grounded in universal Orthodoxy” (Bulgakov, 187).

[2] “And not all Christians belong in the fullest sense, to the Church—only Orthodox. Both these facts give rise to problems for the searching reason and for religious faith..... And how is it that of that section of humanity called to the love of Christ by

baptism, only a portion live the true life of the Church, elect from among the elect? Orthodox theology refuses to separate the 'invisible' and the visible Church, and therefore it refuses to say that the Church is invisibly one but visibly divided. No: the Church is one in the sense that here on earth there is a single, visible community which alone can claim to be the one true Church" (Ware, 245).

- [3] "Orthodoxy, believing that the Church on earth has remained and must remain visibly one, naturally also believes itself to be that one visible Church" (Ware, 246)
- [4] "Claiming as it does to be the one true Church, the Orthodox Church also believes that, if it so desired, it could by itself convene and hold another Ecumenical Council, equal in authority to the first seven" (Ware, 247).
- [5] "Because they believe their Church to be the true Church, Orthodox can have but one ultimate desire: reconciliation of all Christians to Orthodoxy" (Ware, 309).
- [6] "Yet there is one field in which diversity cannot be permitted. Orthodoxy insists upon unity in matters of faith. Before there can be reunion among Christians, there must first be full agreement in faith: this is the basic principle for orthodox in all their ecumenical relations" (Ware, 310)

2. In general, Orthodox do allow for non-Orthodox to be saved.

- [1] "This Orthodox spirit, which lives in the universal Church is more apparent to the eye of God than to that of man. In the first place all baptized persons are Christians, hence, in a certain sense, Orthodox" (Bulgakov, 188).
- [2] "Such, then, is the Orthodox idea of the unity of the Church. Orthodoxy also teaches that outside the Church there is no salvation.....Does it therefore follow that anyone who is not visibly within the Church is necessarily damned? Of course not; still less does it follow that everyone who is visibly within the Church is necessarily saved" (Ware, 247).
- [3] "By God's grace the Orthodox Church possesses the fullness of truth (so its members are bound to believe), but there are other Christian communions which possess to a greater or lesser degree a genuine measure of Orthodoxy. All these facts must be taken into account: one cannot simply say that all non-Orthodox are outside the Church, and leave it at that; one cannot treat other Christians as if they stood on the same level as unbelievers" (Ware, 308-9)

[4] “But there also exists in the Orthodox Church a more rigorous group who hold that since Orthodoxy is the Church, anyone who is not Orthodox cannot be a member....Of course (so the stricter group add) divine grace may well be active among many non-Orthodox, and if they are sincere in their love of God, then we may be sure that God will have mercy upon them; but they cannot, in their present state, be termed members of the Church” (Ware, 309).

3. There is controversy in the Orthodox church whether non-Orthodox are members in the Church or not. Thus, this issue seems to be a matter of theological speculation and not dogma.

[1] “...for all ecclesiastical communities, even those whose road is farthest from that of the orthodox church, preserve a considerable part of the universal tradition, and, as a result of this, share in Orthodoxy. They all have ‘a grain’ of Orthodoxy” (Bulgakov, 188).

[2] “For Orthodoxy is composed, so to speak, of two circles: a large circle, the court of the temple, and a narrow circle, the temple itself and the holy of holies. Orthodoxy does not desire the submission of any person or group; it wishes to make each one understand....Note here their sharp distinction between the attitude of Orthodoxy and that of Roman Catholicism. For the latter, reunion means, first of all, submission” (Bulgakov, 188).

[3] “If Orthodox claim to constitute the one true Church, what then do they consider the status of those Christians who do not belong to their communion?...There is the more moderate group which includes most of those Orthodox who have had close personal contact with other Christians. This group holds, that while it is true to say that Orthodoxy is the Church, it is false to conclude from this that those who are non Orthodox cannot possibly belong to the Church. Many people may be members of the Church who are not visibly so; invisible bonds may exist despite an outward separation. The Spirit blows where it chooses and, as Irenaeus said, where the Spirit is, there is the Church....By God’s grace the Orthodox Church possesses the fullness of truth (so its members are bound to believe), but there are other Christian communions which possess to a greater or lesser degree a genuine measure of Orthodoxy. All these facts must be taken into account: one cannot simply say that all non-Orthodox are outside the Church, and leave it at that; one cannot treat other Christians as if they stood on the same level as unbelievers” (Ware, 308-9).

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- [5] “There can thus be no satisfactory and complete definition of the Church. ‘Come and see’—one recognizes the Church only by experience, by grace, by participation in its life. This is why before making any formal definition, the Church must be conceived in its mystical being, underlying all definitions, but larger than them all. The Church, in its essence as a divine-human unity, belongs to the realm of the divine” (Bulgakov, 3). [Comment: Orthodoxy gives some evidence that one cannot define the Church solely by external criteria or by necessary and sufficient conditions. The Church is also something which only can be experienced. Perhaps this is what makes most Orthodox open to the possibility of non-Orthodox being Christians.]
4. According to Orthodoxy, non-Orthodox believers cannot enjoy the full benefits of the means of grace made available through the Church.

Orthodox may differ on the degree to which non-Orthodox do not benefit. Specifically, non-Orthodox are unable to receive the benefits from Chrismation and the Eucharist, both of which require the Orthodox hierarchy.

- [1] “Such is the effect of the abolition of the apostolic succession in Protestantism. It has deprived the Protestant world of the gifts of Pentecost, transmitted in the Sacraments and the cult of the Church by the hierarchy, which received its power from the Apostles and their successors. The Protestant world thus became like Christians who, although baptized ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus,’ have not received the Holy Spirit transmitted by the hands of the Apostles (Acts 19:5-6). Certainly God ‘gives not the spirit by measure,’ and those who are baptized with the baptism of Christ in the name of the Holy Trinity already have the assurance of the Holy Spirit, which ‘blows where it wills.’ The possibility of immediate and direct action of the Holy Spirit on man by the power of a new Pentecost, or even of a prolonged Pentecost, cannot be completely excluded. But it can be stated that ‘no one knows whence the spirit comes and whither it goes,’ while Christ, by His will, has established in His Church definite and recognized modes for the reception of the Holy Spirit—as in the case cited above, when the Apostles, by the laying on of hands, transmitted it. These modes are the sacraments of the Church administered by a priest of the apostolic succession” (Bulgakov, 43-44).

[Comment: This is a most alarming text, for it shows a very strong hierarchical and sacramental instrumentality in transmitting the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this case, Protestants may experience the ministry of the Spirit by means of His kind intentions but not through Christ's divinely instituted means in the sacraments via the hierarchy.]

- [2] "There can be no greater misfortune in the Church than that great movement beginning in the sixteenth century, by which whole congregations, whole nations, deprived themselves of the hierarchy. Of course, 'the Spirit goes where it wills,' and it is impossible to say that these churches are altogether deprived of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, this is one of the deepest sorrows of the Christian Church today, and we must all pray for a time when our Protestant brothers should again seek and regain a hierarchy" (Bulgakov, 49).
- [3] "But the decisive act [for reunion of the Christian communions], perhaps still far distant, would consist in the re-establishment of the hierarchy of the Apostolic Succession in those bodies where it was abolished" (Bulgakov, 190).
[Comment: Notice that for Bulgakov, the hierarchy is central for the establishing of unity.]
- [4] "'The dignity of the bishop is so necessary in the Church,' wrote Dositheus, 'that without him neither the Church nor the name Christian could exist or be spoken of at all...He is a living image of God upon earth...and a fountain of all the sacraments of the Catholic Church, through which we obtain salvation.' 'If any are not with the bishop,' said Cyprian, 'they are not in the Church'" (Ware, 248-9)
- [5] "Above all, and this is the most essential thing, the hierarchy is the power for administering the sacraments; consequently the hierarchy carries in itself that mysterious power, superhuman and supernatural. According to the testimony of ancient writings (Apostolic Fathers such as St. Ignatius of Antioch) the bishop is he who celebrates the Eucharist, and only the Eucharist celebrated by a bishop is valid" (Bulgakov, 45).
- [6] "The anointing of people who come to Orthodoxy out of the various heretical confessions is not a repetition of the sacrament of chrismation. It is granting the sacrament, for the first and only time, to one who in his heresy was deprived of a valid priesthood and valid chrism. Hence, in the ancient church people who came out of any heresy were 'chrismated,' for they did not already possess the holy chrismation" (Karmiris, 26).
[Comment: Though Bulgakov and Ware are open to the possibility that Protestants have the Spirit, nevertheless, Protestants do not have the Spirit and his gifts available in Chrismation in the full sacramental sense.]

- [7] “Furthermore, the Orthodox Catholic Church believes that divine grace is not dispensed outside of the true church, and thus the church does not recognize in their fullness sacramental acts which are performed outside of her, except in extraordinary circumstances (and then by ‘economy’ [a special exemption from the norm] and condescension she recognizes the sacraments of those heterodox who come to her)” (Karmiris, 23).
- [8] “...until unity in the faith has been achieved, there can be no communion in the sacraments. Communion at the Lord’s Table (most Orthodox believe) cannot be used as a means to secure unity in the faith, but must come as the consequence and crown of a unity already attained” (Ware, 310).

III. The Saints

Orthodoxy like evangelical Protestantism holds that all members of the church are “saints,” i.e., they are participating in the holiness of God through union with Christ. However, in EO there are also some members of the Church that are officially recognized and honored as saints. Although some are so recognized while still living, only those who have died can be definitely canonized by the Church as saints. Such canonization is the recognition by the Church that these people have attained a level of sanctification which is described as “glorification.”

These officially recognized saints who are now in glory play a significant role in the faith and practice of the Orthodox believers. This is based on the doctrine of the “communion of the saints,” which teaches that there is no division between the living and those that have died. The “relations of love are not interrupted by death” and members of the church, both on earth or departed, are bound together and have the duty to bear each others burdens in mutual love and prayer.

A. The Canonization of Saints

- [1] “From the holiness of the Church it follows that there are instances where certain of its members are glorified for their sanctity. A vivid example of this occurs when the Church canonizes a saint. There comes a time when the Church changes the character of the prayer which relates to a certain person. Instead of praying for the repose of his soul and for the pardon of his sins, instead of praying for him, the Church begins to address itself to him, asking his intercession for us before God by his prayers. He has no further need of our prayers. At the moment of the glorification of the saints, during the solemnity of their canonization, there is a decisive and solemn time when instead of the prayer for the glorified saint: ‘Give rest, O Lord, to the soul of

thy servant,' there is heard, for the first time, a prayer address to the new saint: 'Holy Father [i.e., the saint], pray to God for us'" (Bulgakov, 98-99).

B. The Veneration of Saints and Their Relics.

- [1] "Reverence for the saints is closely bound up with the veneration of icons. These are placed by the Orthodox not only in their churches, but in each room of their homes, and even in cars and buses. These ever-present icons act as a point of meeting between the living members of the Church and those who have gone before...At Baptism an Orthodox is given the name of a saint, as a symbol of her or his entry into the unity of the church which is not only the earthly Church, but also the Church in heaven. Orthodox have a special devotion to the saint whose name they bear; usually they keep an icon of their patron saint in their room and daily ask for his or her intercessions" (Ware, 256-57).
- [2] "One consequence of the cult of the Saints is the veneration of their relics....The relics of the Saints, when they are preserved (which does not always happen) are very specially venerated...From the dogmatic point of view, the veneration of relics (as well as that of the icons of Saints) is founded on faith in a special connection between the spirit of the Saint and his human remains, a connection which death does not destroy. In the case of the Saints the power of death is limited; their souls do not altogether leave their bodies, but remain present in spirit and in grace in their relics, even in the smallest portion" (Bulgakov, 123-24).
- [3] "Because Orthodox are convinced that the body is sanctified and transfigured together with the soul, they have an immense reverence for the relics of the saints. Like Roman Catholics, they believe that the grace of God present in the saint's bodies during life remains active in their relics when they have died, and that God uses these relics as a channel of divine power and an instrument of healing....This reverence for relics is not the fruit of ignorance and superstition, but springs from a highly developed theology of the body" (Ware, 234).

C. The Intercession of the Saints in Heaven (Prayers to the Dead)

Orthodoxy believes strongly in the "golden chain" of the "communion of the saints," a strong continuity between our growing in union with God on earth and continuing this in the after life. Our participation together in Christ makes possible the request for intercession. As we respect saints and covet their prayers while on earth, Orthodoxy believes that the same can

and should go on while these saints are in heaven carrying on the life of union with Christ.

- [1] “Obviously he [Mark of Ephesus] understood the state of the blessed, not as a legal and static justification, but as a never-ending ascent, into which the entire communion of saints—the Church in heaven and the Church on earth—has been initiated in Christ. In the communion of the Body of Christ, all members of the Church, living or dead, are interdependent and united by ties of love and mutual concern; thus, the prayers of the Church on earth and the intercession of the saints in heaven can effectively help all sinners, i.e., all men, to get closer to God. This communion of saints, however, is still in expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of the *parousia* and of the general resurrection, when a decisive, though mysterious, landmark will be reached for each individual destiny” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 221).
- [2] “For indeed, death, through the Resurrection, has lost its power over those who are ‘in Him.’ It cannot separate them either from God or from each other. This communion in Christ, indestructible by death, makes possible and necessary the continuous intercession of all the members of the Body for each other. Prayer *for* the departed, as well as intercession by the departed saints for the living, express a single and indivisible ‘communion of saints.’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 222).
- [3] “The cult of the Saints occupies a considerable place in Orthodox piety. The Saints are our intercessors and our protectors in the heavens and, in consequence, living and active members of the Church militant. Their blessed presence in the Church manifests itself in their pictures and their relics” (Bulgakov, 119).
- [4] “According to the belief of the Church, the relations of love with the saints already glorified by God are not interrupted by death. On the contrary the saints, in constant relation with us, pray for us and aid us in all of our life” (Bulgakov, 99).
- [5] “An Orthodox invokes in prayer not only the saints but the angels, and in particular her or his guardian angel” (Ware, 257).
[Comment: Note that the Orthodox prays not only to saints, but also to angels.]
- [6] “From the holiness of the Church it follows that there are instances where certain of its members are glorified for their sanctity. A vivid example of this occurs when the Church canonizes a saint. There comes a time when the Church changes the character of the prayer which relates to a certain person.

Instead of praying for the repose of his soul and for the pardon of his sins, instead of praying for him, the Church begins to address itself to him, asking his intercession for us before God by his prayers. He has no further need of our prayers. At the moment of the glorification of the saints, during the solemnity of their canonization, there is a decisive and solemn time when instead of the prayer for the glorified saint: ‘Give rest, O Lord, to the soul of thy servant,’ there is heard, for the first time, a prayer address to the new saint: ‘Holy Father [i.e., the saint], pray to God for us’” (Bulgakov, 98-99).

[Comment: Bulgakov notes that once the person is canonized or officially declared a “saint” prayers are no longer made for that person, but rather prayers are now addressed to that person. The person is now addressed as “Holy Father.”]

- [7] “The Saints are not mediators between God and man—this would set aside the Unique Mediator, which is Christ—but they are our friends, who pray with us, and aid us in our Christian ministry and in our communion with Christ” (Bulgakov, 119).
- [8] “Each soul must have its own direct contact with Christ, its own conversation with Him, its own life in the Savior. And in this there cannot be any mediator....We are conscious, at one time, both of the immediate nearness and dearness of Christ and of the presence of our Lord and Judge. It is naturally necessary to hide ourselves in awe before the Judge of all, and here we take refuge beneath the protection of the Virgin and the Saints. For they belong to our race and kind. With them we may speak in our language of human frailty, and thus, in mutual comprehension, stand shoulder to shoulder with them before the terrible judgment seat of God” (Bulgakov, 122).
- [Comment: The Orthodox teaching desires not to deny the biblical teaching that Christ is the only mediator between God and humans (cf. previous citation). However, as this citation indicates, it would appear that the Orthodox believer does at times seek to avoid directly going to Christ by using the saints and Mary to go to Christ for them, thus in practice having functional mediators between themselves and Christ. This statement also suggests that Mary and the saints understand our frailty better than Christ (contrary to Heb. 4:15).]
- [9] “In private an Orthodox Christian is free to ask for the prayers of any member of the Church, whether canonized or not. It would be perfectly normal for an Orthodox child, if orphaned, to end his evening prayers by asking for the intercessions not only of the Mother of God and the saints, but of his own mother and father. In its public worship, however, the Church usually asks the prayers only of those whom it has officially proclaimed as saints” (Ware, 256)

[10] “Saints can help us, not by force of their deserts but by force of the spiritual freedom in love that they have acquired through their spiritual efforts. This freedom gives them the power to represent us before God in prayer, and also in effective love for human beings. God accords to the Saints, as to the angels, the power to accomplish His will by active though invisible aid accorded to men. They are the Church ‘invisible’ which lives with the same life as the Church visible. They are the hands of God by which God performs his works. This is why it is given to the Saints to do deeds of love even after their death, not as works necessary to their salvation—for their salvation is already attained—but to aid their brothers in the way of salvation” (Bulgakov, 121).

[11] “An Orthodox Christian invokes in prayer not only the saints but the angels, and in particular her or his guardian angel. The angels ‘fence us around with their intercessions and shelter us under their protecting wings of immaterial glory.’” (Ware, 257)

IV. Prayers for the Dead

A. Summary of Orthodoxy on Prayers for the Dead

Orthodoxy universally upholds some notion of prayers for the dead. This belief is logically connected with their view that the ultimate fate of the individual is not determined until the last day of Judgment. Thus, Orthodoxy often emphasizes the individual’s ongoing journey of freedom toward or away from the love of God after death. That is, the person still has opportunity prior to final judgement to turn from his or her wickedness and toward God *or* from justification and away from God. This possibility for spiritual movement in the after life explains the need for intercession for the departed dead. Prayers for the dead are a continuation of the “Communion of the saints,” which is particularly emphasized in the Eucharist which the liturgy states is given for the living and the dead. In general, prayers are given for the departed members of the Church; some would also pray for the unjust departed while others leave them to the just mercy of God.

In general, prayers for the dead are in tension with historical Protestant beliefs on the grounds that (1) this practice is not taught in Scripture and that (2) (according to most Protestants) the ultimate fate of the believer is sealed at death so that there is no further probation period between death and Judgment. The Biola doctrinal statement even seems to imply (2) [“At death their Spirits {those who believe on Christ as Lord} depart to be with Christ in conscious blessedness All those who persistently reject Jesus Christ in the present life shall be raised from the dead and throughout

eternity exist in the state of conscious, unutterable, endless torment and anguish.”]

- B. The Orthodox practice of praying for the dead is related to their belief in the “communion of the Saints.”

[1] “For indeed, death, through the Resurrection, has lost its power over those who are ‘in Him.’ It cannot separate them either from God or from each other. This communion in Christ, indestructible by death, makes possible and necessary the continuous intercession of all the members of the Body for each other. Prayer for the departed, as well as intercession by the departed saints for the living, express a single and indivisible ‘communion of saints.’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 222).

[Comment: Though Protestants would certainly hold to the notion of the “mystical union of the saints,” this typically does not include any concept of communion with the saints (prayers for, to, or by the saints departed.)]

- C. The Orthodox believe that the saints may continue to exercise freedom after death away from or toward God.

[1] “Man’s freedom is not destroyed even by physical death; thus, there is the possibility of continuous change and mutual intercession. But it is precisely this freedom which implies responsibility and, therefore, the ultimate test of the last judgment, when—alone in the entire cosmic system, which will then experience its final transfiguration—man will still have the privilege of facing the eternal consequence of either his ‘yes’ or his ‘no’ to God” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 222).

- D. The Orthodox belief that one can exercise freedom in moving closer toward or away from God after death in turn raises the need for prayers for the dead.

[1] “Although the Byzantine tradition had always acknowledged that prayers for the dead were both licit and necessary, that the solidarity of all the members of the Body of Christ was not broken by death, and that, through the intercession of the Church, the departed could get closer to God, it ignored the notion of redemption through ‘satisfaction,’ of which the legalistic concept of ‘purgatory pains’ was an expression” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 96).

[2] “Both sides agreed that prayers for the departed are necessary and helpful, but Mark of Ephesus insisted that even the just need them; he referred, in particular, to the Eucharistic canon of Chrysostom’s liturgy, which offers the ‘blood-less sacrifice’ for ‘patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and every righteous spirit made

perfect in faith,' and even for the Virgin Mary herself. Obviously he understood the state of the blessed, not as a legal and static justification, but as a never-ending ascent, into which the entire communion of saints—the Church in heaven and the Church on earth—has been initiated in Christ. In the communion of the Body of Christ, all members of the Church, living or dead, are interdependent and united by ties of love and mutual concern; thus, the prayers of the Church on earth and the intercession of the saints in heaven can effectively help all sinners, i.e., all men, to get closer to God. This communion of saints, however, is still in expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of the *parousia* and of the general resurrection, when a decisive, though mysterious, landmark will be reached for each individual destiny” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 221).

[3] “The Church at least knows no bounds to the efficacy of prayers for those who have quitted this world union with the Church, and it believes in the effective action of these prayers” (Bulgakov, 183).

[4] “Legalism, which applied to individual human destiny the Anselmian doctrine of ‘satisfaction,’ is the *ratio theologica* of the Latin doctrine on purgatory. For Mark of Ephesus, however, salvation is communion and ‘deification.’ On his way to God, the Christian does not stand alone; he is a member of Christ’s Body. He can achieve this communion even now, before his death as well as afterward, and, in any case, he needs the prayer of the whole Body, at least until the end of time when Christ will be ‘all in all.’ Of course, such an understanding of salvation through communion excludes any legalistic view of the Church’s pastoral and sacramental powers over either the living or the dead (the East will never have a doctrine of ‘indulgences’), or any precise description of the state of the departed souls before the general resurrection. Except for the negative act of rejecting the Latin doctrine of purgatory implied in the canonization of Mark of Ephesus and in later doctrinal statements of Orthodox theologians, the Orthodox Church never entered the road of seeking exact doctrinal statements on the ‘beyond’” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 221).

E. According to Orthodoxy, there is even the possibility for the unjust after death by freedom to move into justification and love of God.

[1] “This offers, consequently, the possibility of liberation from the pains of hell and of passing from an estate of reprobation to that of justification. In this sense it may be asked not if a purgatory exists, but even more if a ‘definite hell’ exists. In other words, is not hell a sort of purgatory? The Church at least knows no bounds

to the efficacy of prayers for those who have quitted this world union with the Church, and it believes in the effective action of these prayers” (Bulgakov, 183).

[Comment: Bulgakov seems to believe that the baptized who were once part of the church can be impacted by the prayers of the living and pass from hell into heaven. However, those who never were part of the Church, “the church passes no judgment but leaves them to the mercy of God” (Bulgakov, 183).]

- F. Orthodoxy advocates prayers for the dead but do not universally agree on or do not claim to know the exact nature of the benefit or efficacy of those prayers (or have differed on this).

[1] “So the Orthodox Church prays for the faithful departed; and again: ‘O God of spirits and of all flesh, You have trampled down death and overthrown the devil, and given life unto Your world. Give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Your departed servants, in a place of light, refreshment, and repose, whence all pain, sorrow, and sighing have fled away. Pardon every transgression which they have committed, whether by word or deed or thought.’ Orthodox are convinced that Christians here on earth have a duty to pray for the departed, and they are confident that the dead are helped by such prayers. But precisely in what way do our prayers help the dead? What exactly is the condition of souls in the period between death and the Resurrection of the Body at the Last Day? Here Orthodox teaching is not entirely clear, and has varied somewhat at different times” (Ware, 255).

V. The Virgin Mary

A. Various Orthodox Beliefs Related to Mary

1. Mary’s perpetual virginity

[1] “In the Greek patristic tradition; these **brothers** are identified as stepbrothers of Jesus, sons of Joseph by a previous wife. In the Latin tradition, they are seen as relatives, such as cousins” (OSB, Mark 3:31).

[2] “This forgetfulness of the Virgin Mary is often found in Protestantism even in such extreme beliefs as that the Virgin might have other children by Joseph...” (Bulgakov, 116).

2. Mary was free from actual sin.

[1] “The Orthodox Church calls Mary ‘All-Holy’; it calls her ‘immaculate’ or ‘spotless’...; and all Orthodox are agreed in believing that Our Lady was free from actual sin” (Ware, 259).

[Comment: While the Orthodox generally do not agree with the Roman Catholic dogma of the “Immaculate Conception,” i.e., that Mary was conceived in her mother’s womb without the stain of original sin, they do believe that Mary did not ever commit any actual sin]

- [2] “But Orthodoxy does not admit in the All-pure Virgin any individual sin, for that would be unworthy the dignity of the Mother of God” (Bulgakov ,117).

3. The Bodily Assumption of Mary.

- [1] “...Orthodoxy...firmly believes in her [Mary’s] Bodily Assumption. Like the rest of mankind, Our Lady underwent physical death, but in her case the Resurrection of the Body has been anticipated: after death her body was taken up or ‘assumed’ into heaven and her tomb was found to be empty. She has passed beyond death and judgment, and lives already in the Age to Come. Yet she is not thereby separated from the rest of humanity, for that same bodily glory which Mary enjoys now, all of us hope one day to share” (Ware, 260).
- [2] “The Church believes that, dying a natural death, she [Mary] was not subject to corruption, but, raised up by her Son, she lives in her glorified body at the right hand of Christ in the heavens” (Bulgakov, 118).

B. Mary is the Mother of the whole church.

- [1] “In saying to the **disciple whom** Jesus **loved** (v. 26), that is, to John, **Behold your mother** (v. 27), Jesus symbolically establishes Mary’s role as mother of all faithful disciples—of the entire Church [emphasis in the original]” (OSB, John 19:25-27).

C. Mary is the supreme example of holiness and obedience.

Her cooperation with God in being willing to bear Jesus is the supreme example of the cooperation of the synergy of human free will and divine grace in salvation. In fact her cooperation was essential for God’s plan of salvation.

- [1] “The Virgin Mary is viewed as the goal of Old Testament history, which began with the children of Eve” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 147).
- [2] “The election of the Virgin Mary is, therefore, the culminating point of Israel’s progress toward reconciliation with God, but God’s final response to this progress and the beginning of new life comes with the Incarnation of the Word. Salvation needed ‘a

new root,' writers Palamas in the same homily, 'for no one, except God, is without sin; no one can give life; no one can remit sins.' This 'new root' is God the Word made flesh; the Virgin Mary is His 'temple'" (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 147).

- [3] "Byzantine homiletic and hymnographical texts often praise the Virgin as 'fully prepared,' 'cleansed,' and 'sanctified'" (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 147).
- [4] "This election was announced to Mary by the angel Gabriel. But Mary remained free to accept or to refuse. The whole history of the world, every fulfillment of the divine plan, was dependent on this free human response. The humble consent of the Virgin allowed the Word to become flesh" (Lossky, *Orthodoxy Theology*, 89).
- [5] "Everything God had waited for from fallen humanity was realized in Mary: a personal liberty finally opened her flesh, her human nature, to the necessary work of salvation" (Lossky, *Orthodoxy Theology*, 89).
[Comment: This statement about Mary, and those above, not only indicate why the Orthodox honour Mary so highly, but also portray the Orthodox understanding of the synergy of human will with the divine. Eve is the model of the human part in salvation in her preparedness for receiving the Savior.]
- [6] "But Orthodox honour Mary, not only because she is Theotokos, but because she is Panagia, All-Holy. Among all God's creatures, she is the supreme example of synergy or cooperation between the purpose of the deity and human freedom. God, who always respects our liberty of choice, did not wish to become incarnate without the willing consent of His Mother. He waited for her voluntary response....Mary could have refused; she was not merely passive, but an active participant in the mystery. As Nicolas Cabasilas said:

'The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father, of His power and His Spirit...but it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin...Just as God became incarnate voluntarily, so He wished that His Mother should bear Him freely and with her full consent.'

If Christ is the New Adam, Mary is the New Eve, whose obedient submission to the will of God counterbalanced Eve's disobedience in Paradise. 'So the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by her unbelief, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by her faith.' 'Death by Eve, life by Mary'" (Ware, 258-59).

[Comment: Scripture says death came by one man, Adam, not Eve. The praise of Mary for her faith is not analogous to anything in Scripture, e.g.,

there is no veneration or praise for Abraham among God's people even though he is the model of faith for all believers.]

- [7] “The Byzantine liturgy is certainly far from sparing in its praise of the ‘Mother of God’: it recognizes here her exception role in salvation—by her Fiat to the Archangel, Mary, the New Eve, is the origin of the new human race which shares in the life of God...its sees in her the goal and perfection of all creation, ready at last to receive the Savior—but it is Jesus Christ, and not Mary, whom the Church adores as the Prince of Life, Savior, and Redeemer...” (Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, 200 [emphasis added]).

D. The Veneration of Mary

Mary is venerated because she is the most holy of all saints and because of her cooperation with God in being willing to bear Jesus, which is the supreme example of the cooperation of the human free will and divine grace in salvation. In fact, her cooperation was essential for God's plan of salvation.

- [1] “**Highly favored** (Gr. *charitoo*) can also be translated ‘full of grace.’ Mary is greeted with an exalted salutation because, in her destiny to be the mother of Christ, she is the most **blessed** woman of all time. In accord with Luke's picture of her, Mary is praised in the Orthodox Church as being surrounded with divine grace and shining with holiness” (OSB, Luke 1:28).
- [2] “Mary's faithful response makes her the highest model of obedience to God. The Incarnation of the Son of God is not only the work of the Trinity, but also the work of the will and the faith of the Virgin. Therefore, the Virgin Mary is honored not only because God chose her, or because she bore the Son of God in the flesh, but also because she herself chose to believe and obey God firmly” (OSB, Luke 1:38).
- [3] The Orthodox “reverence [Mary] as the most exalted among God's creatures, ‘more honoured than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim’....Orthodox, like Roman Catholics, venerate or Honour the Mother of God, but in no sense do the members of either Church regard her as a fourth person of the Trinity, nor do they assign to her the worship due to God alone. In Greek theology the distinction is very clearly marked: there is a special word, latreia, reserved for the worship of God, while for the veneration of the Virgin entirely different terms are employed (duleia, hyperduleia, proskynesis)” (Ware, 257).
[Comment: Orthodox theologians clearly make the above distinction between the veneration of Mary and the worship of God by the use of

these different Greek words (as is done also by Roman Catholics). However, the strong exaltation and veneration of Mary in words and practices raises the question of whether this clear distinction is always made in the minds of the lay worshipers.]

- [4] “The Orthodox Church venerates the Virgin Mary as ‘more honourable than the cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim,’ as superior to all created beings. The Church sees in her the Mother of God, who, without being a substitute for the One Mediator, intercedes before her Son for all humanity. We ceaselessly pray her to intercede for us. Love and veneration for the Virgin is the soul of Orthodox piety, its heart, that which warms and animates its entire body. A faith in Christ which does not include His virgin birth and the veneration of His Mother is another faith, another Christianity from that of the Orthodox Church. Protestantism is this other sort of Christianity, with its strange and deeply-rooted lack of feeling for the Mother of God, a condition which dates from the Reformation. In this lack of veneration for the Virgin, Protestantism differs in almost equal measure from both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Hence even the Protestant comprehension of the Incarnation loses some of its fullness and power” (Bulgakov, 116).
- [5] “This forgetfulness of the Virgin Mary is often found in Protestantism even in such extreme beliefs as that the Virgin might have other children by Joseph, or even a denial of the virgin birth itself. The Church never separates Mother and Son, she who was incarnated by Him who was incarnate. In adoring the humanity of Christ, we venerate His Mother, from whom He received that humanity and who, in her person, represents the whole of humanity. Through the grace of God, in her all the sanctity accessible to humanity is attained, even after the fall, in the Church of the Old Testament” (Bulgakov, 116-17).
- [6] “The Virgin Mary is the center, invisible but real, of the Apostolic Church, it is in her that the secret of primitive Christianity is hidden, as well as that of the Evangel of the Spirit, written by St. John, whom Christ gave her for a son, as He hung upon the Cross. The Church believes that, dying a natural death, she was not subject to corruption, but, raised up by her Son, she lives in her glorified body at the right hand of Christ in the heavens” (Bulgakov, 117).

E. Prayer to Mary Sometimes Bordering on Her as a Mediator

(It should be noted that the Orthodox teaching previously cited [in II above] regarding praying to the saints would also apply to praying to Mary as the supreme saint.)

- [1] “We are conscious, at one time, both of the immediate nearness and dearness of Christ and of the presence of our Lord and Judge. It is naturally necessary to hide ourselves in awe before the Judge of all, and here we take our refuge beneath the protection of the Virgin and the Saints” (Bulgakov, 122).
- [2] “Prayers addressed to the Virgin occupy a large place in the Orthodox service. Besides the feasts and the days specially consecrated to her, every office contains innumerable prayers addressed to her and her name is constantly spoken in the temple together with the name of Our Lord Jesus” (Bulgakov, 118).
- [3] “The Church sees in her the Mother of God, who, without being a substitute for the One Mediator, intercedes before her Son for all humanity. We ceaselessly pray her to intercede for us” (Bulgakov, 116).
- [4] “Living in heaven in a state of glory the Virgin remains the mother of the human race for which she prays and intercedes. This is why the Church addresses to her its supplication, invoking her aid. She covers the world with her veil, praying, weeping for the sins of the world; at the Last Judgment she will intercede before her Son and ask pardon from Him. She sanctifies the whole world; in her and by her the world attains transfiguration. In a word, the veneration of the Virgin marks with its imprint all Christian anthropology and cosmology, and all the life of prayer and piety” (Bulgakov, 118).

VI. Icons

The Tradition of the Orthodox church is not only expressed through words and worship but also through its art, that is, its icons. The practice of venerating icons was mandated by the seventh ecumenical council (787) and, thus, has become very important to the life of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox are to honor, worship God, and pray before icons which are pictures or representations of Jesus Christ, Mary, and the Saints, typically painted on wooden panels or other plain surfaces.

However, Orthodoxy makes an ontological distinction between the image (including the materials of the icon) and the prototype (the object pictured), which is venerated in the icon. Orthodox insist they do not venerate the essence of the image but rather the form of the prototype which is imprinted upon the icon and, hence, its corresponding prototype (the person). This act of veneration ultimately is to lead to adoration of God who makes Himself present through the intermediary of the icon. According to Orthodoxy, as the glory of Christ was shown through the person of Christ and made visible to

the disciples on Mount Tabor, so too the Spirit can make use of matter today (the icon) to reveal the glory of Christ or the deification of the saint (who is even now in the presence of God) to those who by grace are able to perceive this. Thus, the genre unique to the icon does not present a realism of “the corruptible flesh destined for decomposition, but transfigured flesh illuminated by grace, the flesh of the world to come” (Ouspensky). The icon differs from a portrait: the latter represents an ordinary human being, the former a person united to God (or, as in the case of Christ, the Person of the God-Man).

Orthodoxy flatly denies the charge that veneration of icons is idolatry. First, Orthodox insist that icons are not attempts to represent the invisible God who by definition is incomprehensible. Any attempt to do so is both impossible and blasphemous. Second, the fact of the incarnation makes it possible to make a likeness of Him (“When the invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw his likeness” [John of Damascus].) The icon is not an attempt to portray the Divine or the human nature of Christ in isolation but to represent the unity and totality of these two natures in one person. To deny icons is to deny the incarnation, that the Word became flesh. Third, not every prohibition contained in the Old Testament applies in the New Testament. Thus, the prohibition against graven images was temporary and is now superseded by the incarnation of God Himself. Fourth, Orthodoxy distinguishes between absolute worship or adoration (*latreia*), which is unique and due to God alone, from relative reverence, veneration or respect (*proskynesis, douleia*) which can and should be given to any number of objects or people (a son to a father, servants to master, citizens to king, people to the cross and the Book of the Gospels etc.).

The veneration of icons is clearly in tension with the Protestant tradition. The objection is not so much against religious art in general, which may be an appropriate instrument of religious education and, by God’s grace, an aid to faith. Rather, the problem is with Orthodoxy’s view of the nature of the icon and its being a very special means of grace in contrast to religious art in general. Protestant evangelicals deny that such a view is derived from the Scriptures. Moreover, Protestants would object to Orthodoxy’s mandating belief in and veneration of icons insofar as (1) these are not mandated by the Scriptures and, thus, (2) this mandate violates *sola Scriptura*, for in this case, Tradition and the ecumenical councils are capable of establishing norms for faith and practice.

- A. The Council of Nicea (787) mandated the belief in and veneration of icons, the refusal of which would bring excommunication and anathema. Orthodoxy’s insistence that the council’s pronouncements are a rule for faith and practice is in conflict with *sola Scriptura*.

[1] “Thus, we decide that those who dare to think or teach differently, following the example of the evil heretics; those who dare to scorn the ecclesiastical traditions to make innovations or to repudiate something...or the painting of icons...if they are monks or laymen, they be excommunicated” (Ecumenical Council of 787).

[2] “In general, the icon is an aspect of ecclesiastical tradition in colors and images, parallel to oral, written and monumental tradition” (Bulgakov, p.142).

[Comment: Icons are typically seen as part of the tradition in the Church, though not propositional in nature.]

B. Orthodoxy attempts to distinguish between worship, which is for God alone, and veneration, which demonstrates the respect and esteem for the object or person being represented. Orthodox insist they do not venerate the essence of the image but rather the form of the prototype which is imprinted upon the icon and, hence, its corresponding prototype (the Saint or Christ). Nevertheless, the act of veneration for the person represented in the image finds its goal in adoration of God, who makes Himself present *through the intermediary of the icon*.

[1] “Their most concrete result was a precise orthodox definition of the cult of images at the Second Council of Nicea, in the writings of John of Damascus and, especially, in the writings of Theodore the Studite. The image, essentially distinct from the original, is an object of *relative veneration or honor* while worship is reserved for God alone and can in no way be addressed to images. The Theotokos and the saints themselves cannot be ‘worshipped, but only venerated.’ Nevertheless, the actual veneration given to images does not have them for its ultimate object, since the image is only a relative connection with the represented object. The religious action is addressed to the prototype, and then becomes adoration. Thus the same action is veneration insofar as it concerns the image of the saints and adoration insofar as it is addressed to God” (Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 184).

[2] “Theodore the Studite...he specifies several times that it is not ‘the essence of the image which is venerated, but the form of the prototype represented by the image,...for it is not matter which is the object of veneration.’ ...The encounter with the Word’s hypostasis is the real aim of icon-veneration, and this encounter can and must happen through the intermediary of a material image, a witness to the historical reality of the incarnation and of the deification with which *our* human nature has been glorified in Christ” (Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 191).

- [3] “Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council (692): ‘We represent on icons the *holy flesh* of the Lord.’ The fathers of the seventh ecumenical council explain this in the following words: ‘Although the catholic church represents Christ in his human form (*morphe*) through painting, it does not separate his flesh from the divinity which is joined to it ... When we make the icon of the Lord, we confess his deified flesh, and we recognize in the icon nothing except an image representing a resemblance to the prototype. It is for this reason that it receives its name; it participates only in this, and is therefore venerable and holy” (Ouspensky, 42).
- [4] “The Orthodox prays before the icon of Christ as before Christ Himself; but the icon, the abiding place of that presence, remains only a thing and never becomes an idol or a fetish’ (Bulgakov, 140).

C. The strong emphasis upon venerating icons may (1) dilute the centrality of the Scriptures and other biblically endorsed means of grace in the process of sanctification, or (2) lead to gross practices of idolatry in those who misunderstand the intent of Orthodox theology.

- [1] “The Orthodox prays before the icon of Christ as before Christ Himself; but the icon, the abiding place of that presence, remains only a thing and never becomes an idol or a fetish. The need to have before one an icon is evidence of the concrete character of a religious sentiment which often cannot be satisfied by contemplation alone, and which seeks an immediate approach to the divine. This is natural, for man consists of both a spirit and a body” (Bulgakov, 140).
[Comment: The icon is not to be an idol, though the fact that praying to it is like praying to Christ Himself may diminish the biblical centrality of our direct access to the priestly ministry of Christ in prayer.]
- [2] “Orthodoxy regards the Bible as a verbal icon of Christ, the seventh Ecumenical Council laying down that the Holy Icons and the Book of the Gospels should be venerated in the same way. In every church the Gospel Book has a place of honor on the altar; it is carried in procession at the Liturgy and at matins...; the faithful kiss it and prostrate themselves before it. Such is the respect shown in the Orthodox Church for the Word of God” (Ware, 201).
[Comment: When Orthodoxy states that the Bible is considered a “verbal icon” and is to be venerated in the same manner as other holy icons, they seem to refer to the tradition of kissing the Book of the Gospels in the liturgical service. This does not necessarily mean that Orthodoxy believes icons provide propositional revelation but only that the icon and the Book of the Gospels as objects of veneration in some way present to the believer what is precious for faith. Nevertheless, this borders on placing

the icon and Scriptures on the same plane as to their respective value in sanctification.]

- [3] “The grace of the Holy Spirit lives in the image, which ‘sanctifies the eyes of the faithful,’ according to the Synodicon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy (paragraph 4), and which heals both spiritual and corporal illnesses: ‘We venerate thy most pure image, by which thou hast saved us from the servitude of the enemy’” (Ouspensky, 51).

[Comment: Certainly it is possible for a Protestant to believe that religious art may be an aid to faith. However, the above citation links veneration of the icon to spiritual and physical healings, deliverance from spiritual slavery to the devil, and a grace which “lives in the image.” Protestant Evangelicalism would take issue with such a strong view of icon veneration and its effects, (1) as not being derived from the Scriptures, and (2) as potentially, in practice, supplanting or diluting the place of the Scriptures as the central instrument in our sanctification.]

- [4] “The content of the icon forms a true spiritual guide for the Christian life and, in particular, for prayer. Prayer is a conversation with God; this is why it requires the absence of passions, deafness to and the non acceptance of external, worldly excitement” (Ouspensky, 56).

- [5] “Nevertheless, the results and the revelations of icon painting surpass, in power, both speculative theology and profane art. Icon painting testifies to the beyond and its aspects; it does not attempt to prove, it simply presents. It does not constrain by the power of proofs; it convinces and conquers by its very evidence” (Bulgakov, 143).

[Comment: The sanctifying results of experiencing the icons is given a place above “theologoumena,” or the speculative musings of the theologians. Thus, Orthodoxy’s elevating the veneration of icons over its own speculative theology in the believer’s life of piety may result in the unlearned placing this practice above the importance of knowing propositional revelation (the Scriptures) in general.]

- [6] “By the power of this gracious presence, aid may be given the worshipper, in a sense as though it came from the person represented in the icon, and in this sense every icon which has received its full power, by the fact of having been blessed, is in principle a wonder-working icon. As a matter of fact, only those icons are considered wonder-working which have revealed themselves as possessing miraculous power, expressing this power in some specially evident way” (Bulgakov, 141).

D. Orthodox insist that the making of an icon is not idolatry insofar as icons are not attempts to represent the invisible God who by definition is

incomprehensible. Any attempt is considered both impossible and blasphemous.

[1] “The icon does not represent the divinity. Rather, it indicates the human’s participation in the divine life” (Ouspensky, 46).

[2] “...there should be no image of God the Father, for he is not incarnate and is consequently invisible and nonrepresentable. The council thus emphasizes the difference between the representability of the Son, because he is incarnate, and the absolute impossibility of representing the Father” (Ouspensky, 37).

E. Orthodoxy insists that the fact of the incarnation is the rationale for icons.

[1] “Consequently, we represent only what has been revealed to us: the incarnate person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is represented as it manifested itself: in the shape of a dove at the baptism of Christ, in the form of tongues of fire at Pentecost, and so on” (Ouspensky, 37).

[2] “It is obvious that when you contemplate God becoming man, then you may depict Him clothed in human form. When the invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw His likeness....In former times, God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now, when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation” (John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, 1.8, 16).

F. Orthodoxy believes that the icon is not a heretical attempt to separate Christ’s humanity from his divinity or to merge the two. Rather it is an attempt to put on canvas what can be in the imagination as a result of thinking on the incarnation, that is, a likeness of the *person* of Christ who in fact is the unity and totality of his two natures.

[1] “The image of the God-man was precisely what the iconoclasts could not understand. They asked how the two natures of Christ could be represented. But the Orthodox did not even think of representing either the divine nature or the human nature of Christ. They represented his person, the person of the God-man who unites in himself the two natures without confusion or division” (Ouspensky, 35-36).

[2] “For Theodore the Studite, ‘every portrait is, in any case, the

portrait of an hypostasis, and not of a nature': for the hypostasis is the only concrete form of existence of the human nature and, therefore, the only reality that can be represented; and the human nature of Christ is precisely hypostatized in the Logos' hypostasis, and it is the latter that is represented in the image, for 'the image and the similitude with the prototype can only refer to one hypostasis and not to two.' ...Thus it is only the personalism of patristic theology that makes it possible to overcome the essential dilemma of the iconoclastic controversy and provides a solid basis for the veneration of images" (Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 188-9).

G. Some Protestants may agree with Orthodoxy that there is value in attempting to express through art the internal sanctifying processes of the believer. As such it can be an aid to faith by God's grace. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy clearly wants to distinguish this mere religious art which has an educational intent from the icon which reveals by the Spirit a certain glory ("deified flesh" analogous to the transfiguration) or a Divine Presence to those who have the eyes of faith. Evangelical Protestants would deny that such a view is derived from the Scriptures.

- [1] "We can therefore also create an external icon, making use of matter which surrounds us and which has been sanctified by the coming of God on earth. Certainly, we can express the inner spiritual state by words alone, but such a state is made apparent, visibly confirmed, shown by representation" (Ouspensky, 45).
- [2] "If the word and the song of the church sanctify our soul by means of hearing, the image sanctifies by means of sight" (Ouspensky, 62).
- [3] "By word and by image, the liturgy sanctifies our senses. Being an expression of the image and likeness of God restored in man, the icon is a dynamic and constructive element of worship. This is why the church, by the decision of the seventh ecumenical council, orders that icons be placed 'on the same level as the images of the life-giving cross, in all of the churches of God, on vases and sacred vestments, on the walls, on wooden boards, in homes and in the streets'" (Ouspensky, 63).
- [4] "The icon is not only a holy picture, it is something greater than a mere picture. According to Orthodox belief, an icon is a place of the Gracious Presence. It is the place of an appearance of Christ, of the Virgin, of the Saints, of all those represented by the icon, and hence it serves as a place for prayer to them. This semblance of Christ before which the prayers of the faithful are said, His image, made only of wood and color, materials necessary for that representation, does not belong to the Body of Christ. In this

sense the icon is the opposite of the Eucharist, where there is no image of Christ, but where He is mysteriously present in matter in His Body and Blood, offered to the communicant” (Bulgakov, 140).

- [5] “The icon of the Lord shows us that which was revealed to the apostles on Mount Tabor. We contemplate not only the face of Jesus Christ, but also his glory, the light of divine truth made visible to our eyes by the symbolic language of the icon” (Ouspensky, 44)
- [6] “The unusual details of appearance which we see in the icon—in particular in the sense organs (the eyes without brilliance, the ears which are sometimes strangely shaped)—are represented in a nonnaturalistic manner, not because the iconographer is unable to do otherwise, but because their natural state is not what he wants to represent. The icon’s role is not to bring us closer to what we see in nature, but to show us a body which perceives what usually escapes human perception, that is, the spiritual world” (Ouspensky, 55).
- [7] “As we can see, therefore, the icon is an image not only of a living but also of a deified prototype. It does not represent the corruptible flesh destined for decomposition, but transfigured flesh illuminated by grace, the flesh of the world to come (see I Cor. 15: 35-46). It portrays the divine beauty and glory in material ways which are visible to physical eyes. The icon is venerable and holy precisely because it portrays this deified state of its prototype and bears his name. This is why grace, characteristic of the prototype, is present in the icon. In other words, the grace of the Holy Spirit sustains the holiness both of the represented person and of his icon, and this grace brings about the relationship between the faithful and the saint through the intermediary of the icon of the saint. The icon participates in the holiness of its prototype and, through the icon, we in turn participate in this holiness in our prayers. The fathers of the seventh ecumenical council distinguished carefully between an icon and a portrait. The latter represents an ordinary human being, the former a man united to God. The icon is distinguishable from the portrait by its very content. This content calls for specific forms of expression which are characteristic of the icon alone, and which distinguish it from all other images. The icon indicates holiness in such a way that it need not be inferred by our thought but is visible to our physical eyes. As the image of the sanctification of man, the icon represents the reality which was revealed in the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, to the extent that the disciples were able to understand it” (Ouspensky, 43-44).

- [8] “The icon’s nonnaturalistic manner of representing the organs of sense conveys the deafness, the absence of reaction to the business of the world, the detachment from all excitement, and the impassiveness that characterize those who have reached holiness. And, conversely, it conveys their acceptance of the spiritual world. The Orthodox icon expresses in an image the theme of a hymn for Holy Saturday: ‘Let all mortal flesh keep silent...pondering nothing earthly-minded.’ Everything here is subordinate to that general harmony which expresses peace, order, and inner harmony. For there is no disorder in the kingdom of the Holy Spirit” (Ouspensky, 55).
- [9] “Thus the aim of the icon is not to provoke or glorify in us a natural human feeling. It is not emotive, not sentimental. Its intention is to attune us to the transfiguration of all our feelings, our intelligence, and all the other aspects of our nature. It does so by stripping them of all exaltation which could be harmful or unhealthy. Like the deification which it conveys, the icon suppresses nothing that is human: neither the psychological element nor a person’s various characteristics in the world. Thus the icon does not fail to indicate the occupation which the saint was able to turn into a spiritual activity, whether an ecclesiastic occupation such as that of a bishop or a monk, or a worldly occupation, such as that of a prince, a soldier, or a physician. As in the Gospel, every aspect of the saint’s life—thought, learning, and human feelings—is represented in its contact with the divine world; ...Just as we represent the God-man as being similar to us in all things *except sin*, so do we represent the saint as a person freed from sin” (Ouspensky, 57).
- [10] “The icons shows us precisely the body of a holy person ‘in the mold of his glorious body’ (Phil. 3:21), a body which is freed from the corruption of sin, and which ‘in a certain manner partakes of the properties of the spiritual body it will receive at the resurrection of the just.’ Orthodox sacred art is a visible expression of the dogma of the transfiguration” (Ouspensky, 58).
- [11] “In its own language, the icon conveys the work of grace which, according to Gregory Palamas, ‘paints in us, so to speak, on what is the image of God that which is in the divine likeness, in such a way that ... we are transformed into his likeness.’ The justification and the value of the icon do not, therefore, lie in its beauty as an object, but in that which it represents—an image of beauty in the divine likeness” (Ouspensky, 58).
- [12] “This is why, in the icon, we find that everything which surrounds a saint changes its mien. The world that surrounds man—the bearer and announcer of the divine revelation—here becomes

transformed and renewed, an image of the world to come. Everything loses its usual disorderly aspect, everything becomes a harmonious structure: the landscape, the animals, architecture. Everything that surrounds the saint bows with him to a rhythmic order. Everything reflects the divine presence and is drawn—and also draws us—towards God. The representations of the earth, the world of vegetation, and the animal world in the icon are not intended to bring us close to what we always see around us—a fallen world in its corruptible state—but to show that this world participates in the deification of man. The effect of holiness on the entire created world, especially on the wild animals, is often seen in the saints' lives" (Ouspensky, 60).

- [13] "It can be said that the icon is painted according to nature, but with the help of symbols, because the nature which it represents is not directly representable, namely, the world which will be fully revealed only at the second coming of the Lord" (Ouspensky, 63).

VII. The Denial of Guilt in Original Sin.

The evangelical Protestant heritage to which Biola belongs has historically held that all people have inherited from Adam not only the corruption and mortality of sin, but also the guilt of sin. Orthodox theology holds only to the inheritance of corruption and mortality. One of the effects of this, as has been noted in the discussion of justification by faith alone, is the minimizing of guilt in the problem of sin in general, and the consequent minimizing of the death of Christ as a sacrifice to satisfy God's just condemnation of the sinner as one guilty of breaking His law.

- [1] "Most Orthodox theologians reject the idea of 'original guilt'...Humans (Orthodox usually teach) automatically inherit Adam's corruption and mortality, but not his guilt: they are only guilty in so far as by their own free choice they imitate Adam...The Orthodox picture of fall humanity is far less sombre than the Augustinian or Calvinist view" (Ware 224).
- [2] "From these basic ideas about the personal character of sin, it is evident that the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God would be conceived only as their personal sin; there would be no place, then, in such an anthropology for the concept of inherited guilt, or for a 'sin of nature,' although it admits that human nature incurs the consequences of Adam's sin" (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 143).
- [3] "There is indeed a consensus in Greek patristic and Byzantine traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an inheritance essentially of mortality rather than of sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality" (Meyendorff,

Byzantine Theology, 145).

- [4] “Thus, the Church baptizes children, not to ‘remit’ their yet non-existent sins, but in order to give them a new and immortal life, which their mortal parents are unable to communicate to them. The opposition between the two Adam’s is seen in terms not of guilt and forgiveness but of death and life” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 146).
- [5] “Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its ‘natural’ state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt—these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 146).
- [6] “As we have seen, the patristic doctrine of salvation is based, not on the idea of guilt inherited from Adam and from which man is relieved in Christ, but on a more existential understanding of both ‘fallen’ and ‘redeemed’ humanity. From the ‘old Adam,’ through his natural birth, man inherits a defective form of life—bound by mortality, inevitably sinful, lacking fundamental freedom from the ‘prince of this world.’ The alternative to this ‘fallen’ state is ‘life in Christ,’ which is true and ‘natural’ human life, the gift of God bestowed in the mystery of the Church” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 193).
- [7] “This lack of clarity in both theology and practice [with regard to the status of penance] has a positive implication: confession and penance were interpreted primarily as a form of spiritual healing. For sin itself in Eastern Christian anthropology is primarily a disease, ‘passion.’...Byzantine theologians never succumbed to the temptation of reducing sin to the notion of a legal crime, which is to be sentenced, punished, or forgiven; yet they were aware that the sinner is primarily a prisoner of Satan and, as such, mortally sick. For this reason, confession and penance, at least ideally, preserved the character of liberation and healing rather than that of judgment; hence the great variety of forms and practices, and the impossibility of confining them within static theological categories” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 196).
- [8] “Original sin means general corruption of human nature which has been diverted from its proper norm. Its first consequence was the loss of the state of Grace. Then came the general corruption of human nature, which, after it turned itself from life in God, became mortal” (Sergius Bulgakov, 106).

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Task Force Report:

Eastern Orthodox Teachings in Comparison with
The Doctrinal Position of Biola University

A Report

Presented to Dr. Sherwood Lingenfelter, Provost

Biola University

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April 13, 1998

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