

**Summary of the Task Force Report:  
Eastern Orthodox Teachings in Comparison with  
The Doctrinal Position of Biola University**

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**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

"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."

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

1. Justification is a forensic term which means "to declare righteous." It does not mean to "make someone righteous (inherently)," but rather it is the verdict of a judge "to pronounce righteous" as opposed "to condemn." The traditional Protestant teaching clearly distinguishes forensic justification from regeneration and subsequent growth in sanctification. Justification signifies a right status with God while regeneration and sanctification refer to the generation and growth of new life from which flow new effects of life (i.e., good works).
  2. Human beings are justified by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ which is reckoned to them. It is not based on any inherent righteousness or good works of the believer produced by the grace of God.
  3. 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.
- B. The Orthodox Teaching on Justification
    1. The Orthodox concept of justification

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.

- [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] "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. Orthodox teaching **explicitly** denies justification by faith alone and includes good works as necessary in justification

As noted above, 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" (being transformed into the likeness of God through union with Christ). Thus the place of works in relation to "salvation" or "deification" in the citations below 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 work 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." (Ware, 236).
3. Orthodox teaching **implicitly** denies 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. If the grace of justification and regeneration is actually given in the rite of baptism as in Orthodox teaching (see citations below), 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.

- [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 . . . . Through the action of the sacraments, the salvific power of God completes in us the process of sanctification” (Karmiris, 21-22).
- [2] “Each sacrament transmits its own particular grace. Baptism and chrismation transmit justifying and regenerating grace . . . .” (Karmiris, 22).
- [3] “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. . . . 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.” (Karmiris, 24).

## 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 Biola’s statement can be assumed to believe that no other instrumental means are necessary for the effecting of new birth.

### B. The Orthodox teaching that the new birth or regeneration occurs through the instrumentality of the sacrament of baptism denies that the new birth is effected solely by faith through the instrumentality of the Word of God.

- [1] “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 . . . . According to Chrysostom, ‘It is through baptism that we received remission of sins, sanctification, communion of the Spirit, adoption, and life eternal.’” (Karmiris, 24).
- [2] “‘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).
- [3] “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” (Karmiris, 25).
- [Comment: According to Orthodoxy, 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 effected by faith through 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.]

- C. 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 effecting 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.

[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).

[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." (Bulgakov, 45).

### 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."

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. (The "confession" of Christ is not viewed "as a qualifying condition for salvation," but rather as "tangible fruit of salvation" according to the explanation in the Biola teaching position.)

- 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 previous section). 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.

- [1] “This possibility of ‘being in Christ,’ of ‘participating’ in divine life . . . is, for the Byzantines, essentially manifested in the sacraments, or *mysteria*, of the Church” (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 191).
- [2] “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).
- [3] “The importance of this sacrament [Eucharist] for our salvation is so great as to make it equally important with the sacrament of baptism” (Karmiris, 28).

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

### I. General Summary of the Eastern Orthodox View of Tradition and Scripture

The Eastern Orthodox (EO) place significant weight on “tradition” – much more so than in Protestantism. Traditions include especially the Scriptures, the church councils (particularly the seven ecumenical councils), the teachings of the church fathers, the liturgy, and the veneration of icons. The problem from a Protestant perspective is not the existence of tradition per se, but 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. Another point of conflict is whether the church is the infallible interpreter of Scripture.

### II. Biola’s Position on Scripture

- A. The doctrinal statement does not affirm explicitly that the Bible alone is the sole rule of faith and practice (i.e., *sola Scriptura*), nor does the statement address the issues of Scripture’s *perspicuity* (i.e., clarity on essential points of the faith) and of Scripture’s *interpretation*.
- B. However, historically there can be no doubt that the writers of Biola’s doctrinal statement held to *sola Scriptura*.
- C. Note also that the doctrinal statement itself bases its conclusions on an appeal to Scripture alone.

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

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

- [1] “...[the Church] provides the norms of true belief, of the profession of the true faith” (Bulgakov, 10).
- [2] “...for them [the Orthodox] the Christian faith and experience can in no way be compatible with the notion of *Scriptura sola*” (Meyendorff, “Doing Theology,” 83).
- [3] “Anathema to those who [say]... 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).

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

While conservative Protestants do agree with the conclusions of at least certain of the ecumenical councils, they do not regard these as infallible or inspired, any more than they believe their own confessions of faith (e.g., Biola's doctrinal statement) to be inspired. Protestants accept these decisions only in so far as they reflect Scripture, which alone is infallible and inspired. Indeed, Protestants outright *reject* as erroneous much of the seventh ecumenical council (Nicea 787), which enjoined the veneration of icons.

- [1] "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).
- [2] "...the special divine inspiration which...is evident in the dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical councils" (Bulgakov, 32).
- [3] "The teaching authority of the ecumenical councils is grounded in the infallibility of the church" (Florovsky, *Authority*, 124).

- 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.

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. 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.

- [1] "...[The Bible] must not be regarded as something set up over the Church, but as something that lives and is understood within the Church....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....and individual readers, however sincere, are in danger of error if they trust their own personal interpretation" (Ware, 199).
- [2] "...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" (Bulgakov, 23-24).
- [3] "...to understand the inspired Scripture a special inspiration, inherent only in the Church, is necessary" (Bulgakov, 19).

- 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: Various Orthodox beliefs and practices which are in tension with the evangelical Protestant tradition of Biola although not directly related to the doctrinal statement.**

The doctrines below are generally taught and practiced by the Orthodox Church although not all are held as dogma. 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. (For documentation from Orthodox writers see the full Report.)

- I. The Church and its hierarchy. Orthodoxy teaches that the Church is the continuation of the incarnation of Christ 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.
- II. The exclusivity of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church is the true visible Church. Thus although most Orthodox believe in the possibility of salvation outside of the Orthodox Church, the full enjoyment of the grace of salvation is found only in the Orthodox Church.
- III. The canonization of saints. Like Protestants, Orthodoxy holds that all believers are "saints." In addition, however, some members of the Church are officially recognized through canonization as having attained a level of sanctification which is described as "glorification." Though dead, these recognized saints play a significant role in the faith and practice of the Orthodox believers. This includes praying to them and asking them to intercede for us as well as venerating them and their relics.
- IV. Prayers for the dead. Orthodoxy teaches that the ultimate fate of the individual is not determined until the last day of Judgment. The person still has opportunity prior to final judgement to turn more toward God or away from God. Thus there is the need to pray for the departed dead in their journey toward final judgment.
- V. Various beliefs about Mary. Orthodoxy teaches a number of doctrines concerning Mary that evangelical Protestantism holds as non-biblical. These included Mary's perpetual virginity (i.e., Mary remained a virgin after having Jesus); her freedom from actual sin (i.e., Mary did not commit any sins during her life); the Bodily Assumption of Mary (i.e., Mary's body was not

subject to corruption following death, but was instead immediately raised as a glorified body to heaven); Mary is to be venerated as the most holy saint; believers are to pray to Mary asking her to intercede for us in heaven.

- VI. The veneration of 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.
- VII. The denial of guilt in original sin. The evangelical Protestant heritage 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 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.