

BECOMING ORTHODOX

A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith

Peter Gillquist

Dedicated to His Eminence Metropolitan Philip Saliba.

In 1987 in Detroit you said that if you had to receive the Evangelical Orthodox Church into the Archdiocese again, you would do so a thousand times.

From our side, we would all say Yes a thousand times as well! Many years!

After a long and painful journey, two thousand exhausted evangelical Protestants finally find their way home. This is the story of a handful of brave men and their congregations who risk their lucrative jobs, their security, and the approval of their closest friends to obey God's call.

This is also the story of every believer who seeks the Church. Where the Lord is Christ. Where holiness, accountability, and the sovereignty of God are preached. Where fellowship is something more than gathering for a potluck dinner in the church basement. And where fashionable impulses give way to apostolic ministry and teaching.

This is a book for Christians who are looking for ways to breathe life into their own churches. It is also a book for the thoroughly disillusioned — for those who have set out on their own journey of exploration. Finally, it is a book for Orthodox Christians who are in need of renewal.

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NOTES

FOREWORD

This book is most welcome!

This is the story of a group of evangelicals, mostly North American Protestants, who undertake the search for the New Testament Church and discover it in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.

Obviously, the book is intended for both Protestants and Roman Catholics, who might also take the risk of such a search. The paradox, however, is that the impression it makes touches in a unique way even those of us who were born and raised in the Orthodox faith.

I am a witness to this myself. The book appealed to me greatly. The action unfolds like a novel. It is like a slice of life, presenting the humor and disappointment, irony and failure that are always woven into the fabric of life itself.

I believe this book should be read not only by those in the process of searching, but also by those who are already in the Orthodox Church. Peter Gillquist has done a great work!

Professor Joseph Allen, Doctor of Theology, St. Vladimir's Seminary, Crestwood, New York.

INTRODUCTION

What could possibly motivate a group of two thousand North American Christians to move from their rather progressive form of evangelical Protestantism to what is decidedly the most ancient form of the apostolic faith — and in little more than a decade?

How is it possible that people with experience in organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth for Christ, and New Life could be led astray and join the Orthodox Church? Why would Christians with degrees from Wheaton College, Lincoln Christian College, Dallas Seminary, Fuller Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Seattle Pacific University, Oral Roberts University, and Biola University even gather together, let alone then embrace the historic teaching on the Church, liturgical worship, and the sacraments?

From February through April 1987, the entire membership of the Evangelical Orthodox Church — laity and clergy alike — were received parish by parish into full communion with the Orthodox Church by Metropolitan Philip Saliba, Archbishop of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. (The term *metropolitan* refers to a bishop who governs a church in a given area or nation, but not a diocese. An *archbishop* is a bishop who is usually the chairman of a council of bishops. The terms are often used interchangeably.)

This book traces step-by-step the story of that journey, addressing one by one the difficult and sometimes distorted biblical and theological issues encountered along the way.

In addition to our own history, we will take a look at the origins of the Christian Church in the New Testament and make a journey through the centuries to the Church in our own time. This is my personal story, yet a testimony that attempts in the best way possible to describe the journey of all the participants.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Fr. John Brown in chapter four, "The Discovery of the New Testament Church"; Fr. Richard Ballew in chapter seven, "Call No Man Father"; and Fr. Weldon Hardenbrook in chapter nine, "A Sign for All Christians." (These works are published by Conciliar Press, P.O. Box 106, Mount Hermon, California, 95041, which also publishes the award-winning magazine *Again*.)

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Joseph Allen, Fr. Gordon Walker, Fr. Jack Sparks, Fr. Gregory Rogers, Deacon Michael Hyatt, as well as to Tom and JoAnn Webster, who reviewed the final manuscript. Finally, I express gratitude to Mrs. Shirley Dillon for the repeated typing of the text in its various revisions.

Peter Gillquist, Santa Barbara, California

PART ONE: FROM ARROWHEAD SPRINGS TO ANTIOCH

CHAPTER ONE: NEVER SAY NEVER

"Neither in your lifetime nor in mine have we witnessed such a mass conversion to Holy Orthodoxy," proclaimed Metropolitan Philip Saliba at the beginning of his homily at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles on that February morning in 1987.

Actually, it was afternoon. Because of the ordinations of sixty of us as deacons and priests, plus the reception into the Church of more than two hundred laypersons, the service had stretched over four hours!

Priests and Christian leaders from across North America had come to witness the event. Friends and relatives had also participated. Bishop Maximos of the Pittsburgh Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church was present and gave a speech at the reception that followed.

But the celebration had been going on all week. The reception of new members and the ordinations had begun the previous week on February eighth, at Saint Michael's Church in the Los Angeles suburb of Van Nuys. Those who today, on February fifteenth, were to be ordained as priests had received their diaconal ordination at that time. In the Orthodox Church you cannot go from layman to priest in one step.

"Last week I was saying to evangelicals, 'Welcome home!'" continued the Archbishop. "Today I say, 'Come home, America. Come home to the faith of Peter and Paul!'"

I looked across the vast altar area into the interior of the church, and then into the eyes of the sixty others who had just received the grace of ordination in holy orders together with me. The fragrance of incense still lingered from the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, and the candles on the magnificent marble altar had not yet burned down.

Many of the Orthodox priests who had traveled great distances to participate had tears in their eyes, as did many of us — the newly received into the Church.

"Our fathers brought Orthodoxy to America," whispered veteran priest James Meena, referring to his Arab Christian ancestors. Then he smiled and added, "Now it is your turn to bring America to Orthodoxy."

But why does America need Orthodox Christianity? Why should it even be interested? It is so ancient, so foreign, so "Catholic," and so complex on top of everything else. Could it, as we say, even flourish in Peoria?

But secondly, and of much more immediate importance: what could so captivate two thousand Bible-believing, blood-bought, Gospel-preaching, Christ-centered, lifelong evangelical Protestants that they would embrace the Orthodox faith with such enthusiasm? Could this be a new form of religious rebellion? Could vibrant, Spirit-filled Christians have somehow gone off the rails and become bogged down in the stagnant and lifeless rigidity of the sacraments? Or worse still, could this be one of the cunning deceptions of the evil one?

Those of us who became the leaders of this journey had met in Campus Crusade for Christ. Although we were products of the Fifties, we became something of a wave toward the turmoil of the Sixties — disillusioned, or rather discontent, with the status quo of what we perceived as bland denominational American Christianity.

Bold, open, radical, and maximalist — we did not like the established church, we did not like the world order, and we had taken it upon ourselves to change both of them.

What great days those were! We would not exchange them for anything in the world. We would not exchange our present place for anything in the world either. Clearly, one led to the other.

"There is a university in America where you boys will never break through," a friend of mine, a businessman and evangelical, told me over lunch in Chicago in late 1965.

"Which one?" I fired back, having already decided that this would be the next place I would go.

"Notre Dame," he sniffed.

"Let's make a bet," I told him. We finished lunch with small talk and parted.

I hurried home and called the chaplain's office in South Bend.

"I would like to meet with him as soon as possible," I insisted to his secretary after introducing myself.

"I'll make you an appointment with Father for tomorrow at nine in the morning," she replied after consulting his schedule.

"Fine. I'll be there."

That was the way we worked. The greater the challenge, the higher the bar was set, the more we liked it. And the better we performed. I threw some clothes in a suitcase, said goodbye to my wife and children, pulled out of the snow-jammed boulevard in Evanston, and headed south down the highway to South Bend. I settled into a motel near the university, praying somehow the doors to the Irish would open for me.

A few months later we had gathered nearly two thousand five hundred students from Notre Dame and the neighboring Saint Mary's University in the brand new conference center on campus grounds to listen for two consecutive evenings to John Brown and New Man — our vocal-and-preaching team. Before that, I had promised the chaplain:

"We haven't come to make them Protestant, but to call them to a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ."

And I was completely convinced of every word I said.

The response was incredible. In those days we distributed index cards, asking students to check their name if they had prayed with us to open their lives to Christ. Over two hundred of them had checked.

We had broken through at Notre Dame.

Then came Berkeley, California. "Berkeley Blitz," as we called it. This happened in the winter of the 1966-67 school year. We had decided that we were tired of the free speech movement and Bettina Aptheker. "Let's hit the university and shake it to its foundations," we told each other. Hundreds of students — and Berkeley students at that! — skipped their lunch to hear Billy Graham's message in the university amphitheater following his morning meeting with dozens of faculty members. The next morning John Brown spoke from the steps in front of the main auditorium and literally silenced one who was heckling him from the crowd. No one else dared challenge him, and we won.

Although we didn't achieve the same optimistic result we had hoped for at Berkeley, at least we had fought the radicals on their own ground and succeeded in doing what we had come to do.

At the same time, we loved and hated all of this. The paratrooper mentality is a thrilling pleasure, but can bring bitter disappointments. Although we showed something of the same courage we saw in the early Christians in the book of Acts, the long-term prognosis for the permanence of those we were influencing was grim. Most decisions for Christ, honestly speaking, did not hold up.

Our motto was: "Win the university for Christ today, win the world for Him tomorrow." But as much as we didn't want to admit it while we were busy winning universities, the world was going from bad to worse. During the decade of the sixties we had succeeded in establishing branches of Campus Crusade for Christ in many of the more important American universities, but it was during that same decade that the universities of our nation deteriorated. They became corrupt – morally, politically, and culturally. We had done our work, and things had gotten worse instead of better. The university world in 1970 was far less Christian than it had been in 1960.

"What we are doing isn't working," we admitted to one another. "We're getting decisions, we're getting commitments to Christ, we're building the organization and recruiting staff, but we can't bring about change. We are failing in the midst of our own successes."

Dr. Jack Sparks couldn't get Berkeley out of his head. Before joining Campus Crusade for Christ to direct a systematic program for reaching people through computerized distribution of literature, he had taught statistics and research project development at Penn State and Colorado State universities. Now, after the Blitz, he filed a request and received several seasoned Campus Crusade staff members to join him, then headed for Berkeley.

There he outdid all of us. He traded his business suits for jeans and work shirts, grew a beard, and hit the university with a greater commitment to Christ than the radicals ever had to their causes. He even baptized several of his converts in the well-known fountain in the Berkeley market center!

The style he used, the literature he devised, and the life he and his wife Esther led cut across the new anti-cultural barriers and began producing something that gave hope of permanence. It resembled something you might see in the book of Acts. It looked less and less like Campus Crusade for Christ and more and more like the beginnings of a Christian community or, if I dare say it, a church.

CHAPTER TWO: HUNTING TO MADNESS FOR THE PERFECT CHURCH

I was raised and grew up in a church of one of the traditional denominations in Minneapolis. Among my earliest childhood desires was the desire to follow God. On Sunday morning, Sunday school and church were mandatory. Even the less serious children rarely missed them. As far as I can remember, there was never a time when I did not believe in God. Somewhere along the way I simply grew bored.

In junior high school we sat in church with our parents. By tenth grade all the "precious young people," as the adults often called us, sat together. And the older we got, the farther back we moved.

In high school I was elected leader of the youth group. That meant I had to lead the praise on Sunday evenings, and I felt empty.

"I'm not even sure I'm still a Christian," I confided to my friend who had been the leader the previous year.

"Oh, you're miles ahead of me," he replied. "I no longer believe there is a God."

And he had been one of the most vibrant and active boys in the entire congregation!

After high school, in 1956, I enrolled in the University of Minnesota in the neighboring town. The next year I joined a fraternity and moved to the university dormitory. The dormitory was in close proximity to the student center of our denomination and I remember vowing never to set foot inside. I kept my word. Not that I hated God or even the Church. The church simply no longer meant anything to me. It scratched where I didn't itch. And no one came looking for me.

Except Campus Crusade for Christ.

The local representative of the "Crusade" was giving talks systematically at all the student fraternities in the university, and ours, of course, was on the list. It was already 1959, and the president of our governing body, who was a Roman Catholic, was inviting every Monday evening during Lent a speaker from a different denomination to help stabilize the quality of life in the fraternity. The Campus Crusade group was part of that program.

When I saw these people stand up and tell, without embarrassment, what Jesus Christ meant to them, the message struck a resonant chord somewhere deep in me. My girlfriend, Marilyn, about a month earlier had already made a firm decision to commit her life to Christ, and I knew I would have to do the same. I helped the Campus Crusade leader organize weekly Bible study hours at our fraternity. And after about three or four weeks, I also committed myself to Christ in prayer one evening after the Bible study, when everyone else had already gone to bed. I knew my decision to follow Him was serious, regardless of what it might cost me.

Shortly after that, though I don't remember which happened first, I took the Campus Crusade leader to a Lutheran church, and he took me to his independent Baptist church. There he had me tell about my recent conversion to the large Sunday school group. But much more memorable to me was the morning when I convinced him to come with me. We went to the Lutheran church in downtown Minneapolis and heard what I considered to be a wonderful sermon on the theme of living for Christ.

As we were leaving, he turned to me and said:

"Well, now I'll have to go home and eat."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The Bible is the true milk of the Word, and I'm starving to death," he said.

"You mean you didn't like the sermon?" I asked again.

"There was no solid content in it, no verse-by-verse biblical teaching," he replied with a frown.

"But you heard what he said about Christ," I began to protest. "I think he did quite well."

"Well, your understanding will grow as you begin to know the Lord more closely," he said. "We need in-depth biblical teaching to grow in our faith."

How could I argue with that? I began to devour the New Testament.

In the months that followed I began to love Christ more and more, and the organized church less and less. Although not everyone in Campus Crusade believed the way our leader believed, through his influence I began to reject communion and baptism as sacraments through which we receive God's grace and embraced a much more personal faith in God. In fact, a year later I was baptized again, at my own personal insistence, by a Baptist pastor in Dallas. At the time I was convinced that my baptism as a child had "not taken."

And since I preferred the warmth, intimacy, and enthusiasm of Campus Crusade meetings over the invariability of Sunday worship, I found myself moving from my previous experience of church without Christ toward the exact opposite: Christ without church. It took quite some time before I realized that neither one could carry you long enough.

That summer I attended a Campus Crusade conference in the suburbs of the Twin Cities. There I met several men with whom I would serve the Lord for the rest of my days. Dick Ballew and his wife Sylvia arrived a day late because their car had broken down somewhere on the road between Texas and Minneapolis. He stood before us and told how he had managed to introduce the auto mechanic to Christ, right there on the spot. "Well, that's it!" I thought to myself. "That's exactly what I want to be able to do."

By my final year at university I had already set as my goal to devote my life to pastoral ministry, even in the established church. One morning I crossed the river to Saint Paul and visited the nearby seminary of one of the denominations. Among the faculty was an elderly professor known as an exceptionally devout man. I met with him and told my story – how I had grown up in the church, drifted away, and in college had returned to faith in Christ.

"I feel God is calling me to pastoral ministry and I'm wondering if I could study at your seminary," I asked when I finished my account.

Tears welled up in his eyes.

"I pray that young men like you would enroll in the seminary," he said. "But don't come. Go somewhere else. Here they will talk you out of everything you've already come to believe."

At the time I had no idea that what would later become known as "Protestant liberalism" was already in full swing in many of the major denominational seminaries. I enrolled at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, and, I assure you, things were not at all liberal there!

My time in Dallas definitively settled for me the issue of the inspiration of the Bible. Although I had not been through any personal crisis regarding this, at Dallas we learned why the Bible is truly inspired, what Scripture says about itself, and the importance of reading and believing Scripture. During that first year in seminary, Marilyn, my new bride, and I lived across the street from Southern Methodist University, where she was finishing her penultimate year. At Southern Methodist University I laid the groundwork for Campus Crusade for Christ.

The following year I was offered the opportunity to move to Chicago, to start Campus Crusade for Christ at Northwestern University in Evanston, to form a board of directors for the Chicago area, and to begin recruiting associates from Wheaton College. I asked the archivist, now president, of Dallas University, Donald Campbell, for his support in leaving the seminary the following year and transferring to Wheaton College. He gave me his blessing, and in the summer of 1961 we moved to the Windy City [Chicago] to begin our work.

At Wheaton I continued the process of disillusionment with the church. Up to that point I had been educated against anything with even a hint of liturgical worship or sacraments, thanks to both Campus Crusade for Christ and Dallas Seminary. At Wheaton there were some "odd birds" or "rebels" who wore wire-rimmed glasses and wool jackets and who had joined the Episcopal Church. Most of us, however, were drawn toward a new American phenomenon: the Bible Church. I was attracted to the preaching and biblical exposition. And the singing, although sometimes overly showy, was at least energetic and lively. There were moments when both Marilyn and I needed something a bit more solemn or grand in the Sunday service, but for the sake of biblical preaching one had to give up serious worship.

Before finishing university, a fraternity brother had accused me of practicing the "Christianity of the bottom deal." I cringed when he said it, because I suspected he might be right. But what was the alternative? The more I learned about liberalism rampant in the traditional churches, the more I feared ever trading biblical preaching for beauty in worship.

From time to time Marilyn and I would visit one of the traditional churches, like the Evangelical Lutheran or Presbyterian Church, and engage in more serious worship. But we refrained from joining them, because ten blocks away was a church of the same denomination where the pastor questioned Christ's resurrection, His virgin birth, or other cornerstones of the Christian faith. We had already experienced enough of the reality of personal life with Christ, the joy of faith, and the love of Scripture that we never wanted to be part of something unbelieving, dead, or dull. It was so exciting to be a committed Christian, and I was firmly determined that nothing would be able to prevent that.

After about a year spent in Wheaton, we moved to Evanston to devote our full time over the next six years to work with students at Northwestern University. We encountered fierce resistance from religious organizations in the university, which viewed us as a threat to the established denominational student groups. Neither our evangelical convictions nor our parachurch identity were welcome. And yet, by the mid-sixties we had finally succeeded in establishing Campus Crusade for Christ as a recognized organization at Northwestern University.

Our staff and student teams spent their time giving talks to the various groups housed on university grounds and speaking individually with students about Jesus Christ, usually over a Coke or coffee. We became the fastest-growing Christian group at the university. Some tolerance of us was developing, since we played strictly by the rules, but the heated theological disagreements still remained. We were looked upon as sheep-stealers and fundamentalists. But evangelism was already running in my veins – bringing new people to Christ gave me incredible satisfaction and inner reward.

Every summer, all available Campus Crusade for Christ staff in the United States gathered together for staff training at Arrowhead Springs – our headquarters near San Bernardino, California. Gradually those of us who were regional and area directors had become inseparable. After fighting alone on university territory throughout the year, we literally counted the days until our joint retreat at Arrowhead Springs for the summer program. We ate together, played handball together, preached together, swam and used the sauna together, and studied Scripture together.

We began calling this "the funnel." It seemed that when we got together and opened the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit spoke to us as one man, constantly drawing our attention to the mercy of God and to the Church. "Why aren't we a church?" we asked one another. "Here in the New Testament, the only thing Jesus established was the Church!" We loved what we were doing, but in the book of Acts, things revolved around the Church, not a parachurch organization.

The turning point came in the summer of 1966. Our new National Coordinator was John Brown; Dick Ballew was Eastern Regional Director; Jim Craddock ran the South; Rob Andrews – the West; and I was Regional Director of the North – the Big Ten area. Because of our zeal to discover New Testament Christianity, that summer we had decided to meet for breakfast at six every morning at Sages Restaurant in downtown San Bernardino. Gordon Walker, the Africa Director, and Ken Berven, the Canadian Director, often joined us. We expected "the funnel" to open, expected God to speak to us through the Scriptures, most often through the New Testament Epistles.

We were devouring the New Testament, watching for passages on God's grace and on the Church. That summer we became convinced that whatever form our efforts might take, it had to be ecclesial. We looked at the Church as the place where God's grace and mercy are manifested. We saw that every believer possesses a gift which must be employed in order for the entire Body of Christ to function, not just one or two paid professionals. The Church had to be a community.

We were struck by the fact that in New Testament times the Church had begun its development in people's homes, and that church buildings do not begin to appear until the third century. And although none of us had ever been fixated on miracles, each of us longed for a place where genuine healing might occur or truly prophetic words might be spoken, where every member could use his gift. We dreamed of a home where the wounded could receive care and where the "riffraff" of society would be just as important as the decorated ones, as returning royalty or student body presidents. And the more we immersed ourselves in the New Testament, the more concerned we became about the incompleteness of our condition as a severed member of the Church.

At first we saw an immediate and simple solution to our dilemma. We could try to turn Campus Crusade for Christ into a church. Even before we began, we knew it wouldn't work, but we steeled ourselves and tried anyway. It didn't work.

In the fall of 1966 we began forming student mobilization groups at the universities, groups formed as closely as possible to our conception of the New Testament Church. We began preaching fellowship, commitment, and group work, but stopped short of practicing baptisms and communion. These groups became the object of every kind of treatment – from fierce criticism from some established churches, to unceasing praise from the more radical and the dreamers. Without wanting to, we were in conflict with the philosophy of Campus Crusade for Christ. We could not continue indefinitely in this way.

In the end, certain things happened that forced dozens of us to leave Campus Crusade for Christ in 1968. As for me personally, I felt I had already accomplished everything possible there. The parachurch wind had gone out of my sails. I longed for something more. But let me at least state that to this day, I would still prefer presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a student fraternity or dormitory to anywhere else.

We all felt the lack of sufficient freedom. We wanted to remove all obstacles and do "everything they did in the first century" – baptize the newly converted, administer

communion, make more vocal statements against evil. In short, above all else we wanted to be the New Testament Church.

Precisely — the New Testament Church! Over the years and primarily through reading Scripture and church history, the longing for the New Testament Church had taken complete hold of us. I am a bit embarrassed to tell of one incident, because it sounds rather messianic and arrogant, and perhaps it was somewhat that way. But at least we were sincere.

Once, in 1967, John Brown and I were traveling by train from Evanston to Chicago, and I said to him:

"You know what we are? We're reformers. Like Luther and Calvin we want to make the Church again what it ought to be."

He nodded.

"I'm not saying we're in their league," I added as a safeguard. "Nor do I want to sound absurd. But what we really want to do is reform the Church."

"You're right," he agreed, and it seemed we had now definitively admitted it to each other.

Another reason for leaving was simply that we believed it was God's will. And that is precisely what sustained us in the most difficult moments of our exodus. We were faced with the challenge of leaving something that was economically stable, and at the time even respectable, simply to step out in faith and start over from scratch.

It was February 1968 and I was speaking at one of the satellite dormitories of the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse. On the way back from the student union to the dormitory where I was staying for the night, I felt a specific tugging and a still, small voice saying, "I want you to leave." When I reached the dormitory, I called John at his home in California.

"I'm done," I announced into the receiver, not knowing what else to say.

There was a long silence on the other end. Finally he said:

"So am I."

Later that week I submitted my resignation. The exodus had begun.

That summer we gathered as many as possible of the growing number of former staff members and began teaching and preaching the New Testament Church — or at least our views of it. A Lutheran church in La Jolla, California had permitted us to use its facility. We had no idea how we would bring to a successful conclusion what we had undertaken, but nothing in the world could dampen our enthusiasm. "The answer is in the Church!" we declared. "This is precisely why contemporary evangelism doesn't change the world. Because it is self-referential, not Church-directed. People are not converted within the Body of Christ — they are like newborn infants left on the doorstep to feed and care for themselves."

One morning during the same conference I walked out of the hall and noticed a young man with a badge on his shirt. It read: "God isn't dead, the Church is." Amen, I thought to myself — not only are newly converted going straight into the ditch, but the churches are so pitiful they can't hold those who come to them. The Church is held captive in an invisible, contemporary Babylon!

And so the Church was the answer, but not any of the churches we knew. We were in search of the New Testament Church precisely, and we would soon discover that many others had taken the same path. We were beginning something that we soon started calling "Hunting to madness for the perfect Church!"

The first and easiest thing we could do was to create a competing organization and this time do everything "right." We had even thought up a name for it. We would out-witness, out-preach, and certainly out-program the best achievements of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Fortunately, "the funnel" was still working. None of us had peace about that plan. But one thing at least was certain: we had families to feed, and the previous legitimate means of raising funds for carrying out our ideas no longer existed. So most of us decided to take secular jobs.

The hardest thing of all that we had to endure was our relationships with the general public. Surely to our former colleagues, everything must have looked as though we had abandoned the Gospel and surrendered to the pleasures and security of the world. Dick started selling coffee in Atlanta, John Brown briefly ran a youth camp in Washington and then turned to house painting. I stayed in Evanston for about a year and began writing, as I had done in my last year there. The following year we moved to Memphis, where I took a job at the state university there.

Each of us tried our hand at organizing and building house churches — with varying success. We kept in contact with each other through letters and by phone.

When Marilyn and I arrived in Memphis in the fall of 1969, we already had four children. We bought a large, somewhat old house in central Memphis so we could use its large living room specifically for Christian gatherings. At the university I was hired to run the Development department and serve as executive associate director of the university foundation. Since my work consisted primarily in fundraising, this provided me with daily contact both with the university and with civic authorities. And something even more important — this position kept me in close proximity with the student body.

Upon arriving we found on the university campus a group of fifteen to twenty Christian students who were moving together and who for one reason or another didn't fit into the religious groups already established there. These students shared the same elusive vision for the New Testament Church and wanted something to be done in that direction. The time and place became Sunday evenings and our new home. Perhaps the one basic rule was not to invite new people. We weren't so much seeking to isolate ourselves as we felt the need to first grow in our own understanding of the Church before inviting others to participate.

Marilyn and I made an agreement not to deliberately seek out student leaders as we had before in Campus Crusade for Christ. In our efforts to see the Body of Christ composed of all who would join, we simply tried to be accessible to everyone who showed an interest in the Christian message. Interestingly, by the end of our three-year stay in Memphis, among those who had committed their lives to Christ were the president and vice president of the student council, the presidents of the Student Association and of one of the student fraternities, along with several ordinary people, several drug dealers, prostitutes, runaways, hippies, and a great variety of none of the above. Whatever mistakes we made along the way, on one point we were completely clear: fellowship in Christ could exist even amid full human diversity. It was within the Christian community that one could fully experience the diversity of gifts, the diversity of actions and ministries.

Despite our plans not to become Memphis's public spectacle, this happened. One of the girls in the Sunday group had witnessed to her hairdresser about Jesus Christ, she wanted to be baptized and began coming regularly to the Sunday evenings. And being the open and straightforward people we were, she stayed charmed that she could be part of a group of close-knit Christians who love each other and care for one another. She in turn started inviting everyone she encountered — soon we had doubled, then tripled in number, and on some evenings we had to spread out into the back yard to make room for everyone.

The more we grew, the less we looked like a "Church." Despite all our wishes to the contrary, Sunday evenings were turning into evangelistic meetings consisting of energetic singing, explanatory talks on the Bible, spontaneous intercessory prayers, and thanksgivings. At the end of the meeting I would often call out, "Pray and give your life to Christ, wherever you are in the room." When we were few in number, we shared the Lord's Supper almost every week; as the crowd grew, those moments became less frequent. We could never be sure who would be present and in what spiritual condition.

In other parts of the country my colleagues were also following the home-church pattern in various forms and with various results. Gordon and Mary Sue Walker had moved from Columbus to Mansfield, Ohio, and had begun running a large farm. On their doorstep, for no obvious reason, hitchhikers, runaways, and other adventurers

began appearing. Soon a small community of young men and women grew up around them, and in a newly built basement they set up a church. Gordon baptized everyone who turned to Christ through him (once he baptized twenty-six people at once in the icy pond on the farm during a snowstorm), and on Sunday mornings they regularly took the Lord's Supper.

Harold and Barbara Dunaway had been working with Campus Crusade for Christ in Anchorage but left shortly after us. Harold formed a board to guarantee his purchase of a former Catholic building where they launched a community similar to the Mansfield group but independent of it. They called themselves Maranatha North. In the early seventies this group began transitioning from a Christian fellowship gathering to the initial stages of a church community.

Jack and Esther Sparks continued their work aimed at reaching the counterculture in Berkeley with the message of Christ. From that too a house church began to take shape.

The Ballew family began a house church in Atlanta, which later declined. Together with the Brown couple they moved to the Santa Barbara area to unite with the former Campus Crusade group from the University of California at Santa Barbara, who were also pursuing this dream of the True Church. This brought them into greater geographical proximity with the Sparks family, who, with the waning of the hippie era, also moved to the community near the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1977.

In the early seventies, while we were separated from each other and left to ourselves, we felt a growing desire to work more cohesively. After three years working at the university, I left my post and we moved to the countryside an hour from Memphis to fix up a pre-Civil War house I had purchased. This move also gave me the opportunity to spend more time as husband and father to what would soon become six children. To stay in shape I returned to writing, as I had been doing during my last year in Evanston.

In the summer of 1973 quite a few of us had planned to spend a week in Dallas for a Christian publishers' convention. A proposal was made to try to gather as many of the old faces as possible and see if we could establish at least some informal kind of connection between those of us who were in the process of building New Testament house churches. We gathered about seventy people.

Almost a whole week we ate together, shared, argued, taught, and defended ourselves with new insights from Scripture. Each of us reluctantly eyed starting another new "affair," as we put it, but on the other hand we were all tired — terribly tired — of laboring alone. As passions cooled, several of us decided at least to maintain some contact among ourselves.

A few months later a group of us met at the Sparks home in Berkeley. With not much in common between us except the desire to witness the emergence of a genuine New Testament expression of Christianity, six of us who were over forty decided to serve as "elders" in whatever resulted from our new venture. I was later added as a seventh. This core was to meet for one week every three months in order to exercise some oversight of this small group of churches we were uniting.

One more important characteristic of our group was the shared need on the part of each of us to be accountable to the others and at least to some extent subject to some visible, practical authority. In the weeks and months that followed, however, it became clear to us how little we knew about what we were increasingly calling the "New Testament Church."

"Everyone claims they are the New Testament Church!" Jack Sparks complained at one of our subsequent gatherings. "Catholics say they are, Baptists say so too. The Church of Christ claims that only they are the Church and no one else. We're going to have to figure out who is 'right.'"

Sparks proved so valuable to us precisely because he lacked the evangelical academic foundation that the rest of us shared. He was an evangelical to the marrow, but he brought fresh thinking and constructive ideas for what the Church had been and could be. By background he was not from the Bible Belt and was not familiar with professional jargon.

"What do you mean by 'who is right?'" someone cut in from the back of the room. "Don't we have the Bible? The way to find out something about the New Testament Church is to read the New Testament."

"You're missing the point," replied Jack in his characteristic compassionate way of handling delicate issues. "As Protestants we know our past back to 1517 and the Reformation. As evangelicals — people of the Word — we know our history back to about 95 A.D., when the Apostle John writes Revelation. It's time to fill the gap between those dates."

"He's right," agreed Gordon Walker. "I cannot for the life of me say with certainty where that New Testament Church went."

"Same with me," John Brown chimed in. "What I would like to find out is how long the Church stayed faithful to Christ. To be completely honest, I was taught that as soon as the Apostle John breathed his last, the Church went downhill. But is that really so? And if not, when and in what did it err? And ultimately, how could the Reformation have been avoided?"

"In my view," said Sparks, "the way we achieve this is to divide areas of research among ourselves. Personally I would like to take on worship. I can lead Bible lessons and praise, but conducting worship is what really troubles me. And honestly, I'm not even sure what genuine worship is. Is the charismatic side right? Should we stake everything on spontaneity, or is there another way that Christians were called to worship?"

"Then let me take on church history," Brown said. "I'll try to clarify the historical continuity of the Church — which is the true Church, which are the other churches, how it maintained its course or deviated from it."

"It's important to go to original sources," Sparks pointed out. "It won't work by simply reading commentaries of contemporary scholars. We'll have to get back to the earliest documents and read what their authors had to say — the good ones, and even the heretics."

"I'll tackle the doctrinal teachings," Dick Ballew volunteered. "I'm tired of sweating over every new spiritual fad that comes to town. What I want to discover is what the Church believed and didn't believe from the very beginning. Besides that, I want to find the balance. What, for example, do you make of the weight we give to the details around the Second Coming of Christ? Is that healthy? Did the early believers do that? Sometimes I feel we know more about the Second Coming than God does! But above all else," Dick continued, "I would like to discover what the early Christians believed about Jesus Christ. What are the things that made them willing to die for Him?"

Gordon Walker was silent for almost the entire time. As a former Southern Baptist preacher, he had received his education at a seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and before becoming a Campus Crusade for Christ staff member he had been the pastor of several Southern Baptist churches.

"Now I'll tell you what I'll do, brethren," he said in a somewhat skeptical voice. "I'll take on the Bible. My plan is to compare everything the rest of you discover with Scripture. Because if we can't find it there, I won't agree."

"That's right," John Brown chimed in just as the atmosphere was beginning to heat up. "In the end, that will have to be the measuring rod for everything we accept."

Ken Berven took on the pre-Reformation years, Ray Nethery, who left in 1978, the post-Reformation period. Shortly after I was chosen as administrator.

All of this, of course, would have remained on a purely academic footing if we had stopped our discussions there. But we had not set out simply in search of more facts. Before us stood two challenges.

First, each of us was responsible for some flock, however small. We had already promised our parishioners that we would take them to the historical successor of the New Testament faith. And in doing so, we had no intention of creating yet another new "brand" of Christianity, nor had we set ourselves the goal of remaining Protestant or becoming Catholics, Pentecostal or dispensationalist. Our motivation was to become the best Christians we could be and in the twentieth century to be

a manifestation of the first-century church.

And second, it is hard to convey with words the importance of this decision, but we had already agreed from the start to do and be everything that we discovered the New Testament Church had done and been, as we followed its path through history. If we discovered we were wrong about something, we would change. We had sworn to confess its doctrines, to enter into its worship, and to reflect its governance, insofar as we could determine it. Or to put it another way, if we discovered that Christians everywhere had universally believed some truth or adhered to a certain practice — if it was shared by all and did not contradict Holy Scripture — we would alter our course in the corresponding direction and follow the faith of our fathers.

So there began to develop a type of hermeneutic — a way of interpreting the Scriptures. For many years we had shared the tendency to view the Church and its historical course as a one-story farmhouse twenty centuries long, whose foundations were laid anew each century to reflect the accompanying culture. Now we seemed to be beginning to view the Church as a vertical structure twenty centuries tall, built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles with Christ Himself as the cornerstone.

And instead of having to lay new foundations in every new generation or century, we were trying to understand whether it was possible to hold to the original apostolic foundation, that faith once and for all delivered to the saints, and in turn to build upon it a new story for our own time, where our generation might find shelter. We felt less and less comfortable with the question, "Are the Christians of the second and third century in our church?" Things stood more the other way around: "Are we in their church?"

Few in America — and I suppose even in the entire world — would have been capable of undertaking the task we were proposing. We stood before the eyes of the Lord alone and of one another. We were few in number, free to travel, free to change. Ready to adapt to whatever we might discover, we had no intention of maintaining anyone's "party line." We were not attached to any established church and represented people who had already fallen out of the structures and who also desired change. We had no board of directors, no sponsor who might shut his purse if he didn't like what we discovered in church history. All we were after was Christ and His Church, and instead of judging history, we invited history to judge us.

Our fundamental question was: "What happened to that Church we read about on the pages of the New Testament? Does it still exist? If so, where?" We wanted to be part of it.

CHAPTER THREE: AN UNFORGETTABLE WEEK

The most memorable week (read: most painful) of our journey came in February 1975. Ken Berven had arranged for us to use a cabin on San Juan Island, not far from the shores of Seattle. Outside it was cold and damp, inside damp and cold. The cabin had an enormous expanse of bare concrete floors and two beds for the seven of us. The beds were ceded to the oldest participant and the one with the worst back — Ken Berven and I.

This was the week we were to come together and share with one another the first installments of knowledge in the areas we had each chosen to investigate.

Worship

In my view, the most difficult area of change for any Christian is the Sunday service. The church council can be changed, the pastor can be replaced, even changes in architecture can be made. But the way things are done on Sunday morning — whether you are Reformed or Roman Catholic, Pentecostal or premillennialist — it is best not to change much. Of the seven of us, two had been raised in liturgical churches and the rest in moderately informal to informal independent churches. But in adulthood all of us had oriented ourselves toward an entirely informal, almost spontaneous style of worship, and in almost all our churches we had encouraged spontaneous worship.

We thought we had a whole arsenal of biblical texts to back us up! Such discussions always began with the day of Pentecost from Acts chapter two, then moved on to 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14, plus the incident with Eutychus also from Acts, where Paul preached until midnight. Jack Sparks took the floor to share what he had learned about worship from the earliest records in Church history.

"Christian worship was liturgical from the very beginning," he began. "According to the most ancient sources . . ."

"Come off it!" I interrupted. "That can't be true, it's absurd!"

"I'm not asking you to like what I've discovered," he continued, "but the three earliest manuscripts . . ."

"Wait!" I objected again. "Are you sure you've been studying the right materials? Is what you've read representative? Neither in seminary nor in my own research have I ever come across anyone teaching that the Church was liturgical at the beginning."

I had always assumed that liturgy was what replaced the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church. But whatever one might say about Jack Sparks, no one can accuse him of rigging his research. I have come to the conclusion that he is the best researcher I know. His credentials include not only an exceptional academic career culminating in a doctoral degree, but also years of work with Master's and doctoral students at the University of Pennsylvania. What's more, I had to admit that he was not pursuing any personal agenda. It would have been easier for him if there were no early records of liturgical worship, because he, like me, had also taught his own church to be spontaneous in worship.

He acquainted us with three early and universally accepted sources outside the Scriptures that described early Christian worship. The manuscript almost always discussed first belongs to St. Justin Martyr (in his *First Apology*), written around 150 A.D., where he described on paper for the emperor the form of Christian worship. It looks like this:

THE SYNAXIS:

- Greeting and response
- Hymns alternating with
- Readings from the Scriptures, the Gospels
- Sermon
- Dismissal of those not in the Church

THE EUCHARIST:

- Intercessory prayers
- Offering of bread and wine
- Consecration of the gifts
- Communion
- Thanksgiving
- Blessing

The next document was the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, written around 200 A.D. His manuscript supported Justin's earlier description of worship by showing that this practice was universally accepted throughout the Church.

The earliest source — probably no later than 70 A.D. and originating from the heart of the New Testament era — was found in the *Didache*, or "Teachings of the Twelve." Here the emphasis, particularly regarding the Eucharist, was quite serious and important, appearing so early. This triple testimony in favor of liturgy and the sacraments was consistent with the New Testament and other early sources and formed a unified exposition of worship in the first and second centuries.

"All of this means," Jack Sparks continued, "that in the early Church there existed two types of service which together constituted an initial liturgy. The first part was called the *synaxis*, which simply means 'assembly.' It followed the pattern of Jewish worship in the synagogues in the years immediately before the coming of Christ. And for the newly converted Jews it truly made sense to retain the basic forms of prayer, singing of hymns, reading from Scripture, and preaching. The second part of the early Christian liturgy was called the *eucharistia*, which means 'thanksgiving.' This is the part of worship that leads to and includes the reception of communion. The form of this part was based on the liturgy performed by the Old Testament priests in the Temple, but no longer with the offering of bulls and goats, but the flesh and blood of Christ."

"And is that what the biblical account in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 testifies to?" someone asked.

"Precisely, and in fact these words have always been repeated in Christian worship, from the very beginning," replied Sparks.

"But Jack, what do you say against the objection that liturgical worship leads to spiritual death and loss of vitality?" I asked. "I know churches that have gotten so deep in liturgy and yet appear more dead than death itself."

"I'll admit I still don't know enough to answer your question," he replied. "I'm certain we'll get to that issue in the course of our research. For now I can tell you only one thing: Israel was liturgical throughout its history, and we have the Old Testament to support that. Whether they followed God or not, they were liturgical the whole time. Likewise, the New Testament Church was liturgical from its very beginning according to the earliest sources. That's what we have. The rest we will have to discover over time."

The more we studied the pattern of worship left to us by Justin Martyr, the more we liked it and the more sense it made. Only then did it begin to dawn on us — although we called ourselves spontaneous, our spontaneity had also taken the form of a specific pattern. We had created our own liturgy.

I sank into memories of our house churches. The same people sat in the same chairs every Sunday morning; the "spontaneous" prayers were practically the same every time; each person had a set of favorite hymns; the sermon always followed at the same point in the service; we always ended with communion. In its basic form, incidentally, what we did on Sundays was not all that different from the order described by St. Justin in 150 A.D.

Then we turned to questions regarding the Eucharist.

"What did you find about their attitude toward the bread and wine?" we asked. "Did they view them as a symbol or as the actual flesh and blood of Christ? (Put in contemporary language: real or memorial?)"

"Actually, they were understood as both symbol and actual substance," Jack continued. "But the term *transubstantiation* cannot be found until centuries later. The key word is *mystery*. The Church Fathers looked at the consecrated bread and wine as the real flesh and blood of Christ, but never gave an explanation of the manner and confessed it as a blessed mystery."

I was relieved that we were not being compelled to accept the Roman Catholic concept of transubstantiation, a notion I had often criticized as "chemistry for a better life." Yet as I reflected on Christ's words "This is My body... this is My blood," it became clear to me that we evangelicals had done great injustice to the Lord's words in the opposite direction. And besides everything else, the people in New Testament Corinth weren't getting sick and dying over a mere symbol. When they received the flesh and blood of the Lord, something real must have been happening, something truly serious.

It would be unfair to pass over the unpleasant part of the story — the moment we began preaching and practicing the correct understanding of Holy Communion as a sacrament, people started leaving us. But that was nothing new. From what is recorded in the Gospels, we know that the first people to begin leaving Christ en masse did so when He began teaching them: "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). And several lines further, in verse sixty-six, we read: "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."

From the manuscripts of the early Church, it was clear to us that worship was liturgical and that the sacrament of Holy Communion was at the center of all worship. Honestly, it took us (myself included) some time to stop feeling uncomfortable with the liturgy and sacraments. I was so accustomed to rushing through them quickly. But because of the universal testimony and its consistency with the New Testament, we began teaching and experimenting with this ancient liturgy in our churches. Before long we began to feel more at home.

Church History

After several days of preliminary discussions on worship, we turned to John Brown and his research on church history immediately after the days of the New Testament.

"The most astonishing thing I discovered during these three months of reading is the existence of bishops in the first century," he began. "Until now I had thought bishops appeared in the Church in a later period — somewhere in the middle of the second century. But now I'm finding them long before the end of the first century."

"First there is Polycarp — a man I've certainly heard of. He was bishop of the city of Smyrna around the year 100 A.D. Early authors like Irenaeus write that he was the spiritual son of the Apostle John and that he was ordained as bishop by the apostles themselves."

"Then follows Clement of Rome, ordained as bishop of the city around 90 A.D. plus or minus a few years. His connection with the apostles is clearly visible from his mention by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:3."

"But the most shocking information for me was the evidence about Ignatius of Antioch — this is Syrian Antioch, the very church of none other than the Apostles Paul and Barnabas — who was bishop of the city from around 67 A.D. until his martyrdom in 107 A.D. Brothers, 67 A.D. is biblical time! We're talking about the very heart of the New Testament era. And we only know that two of the Twelve were dead by that time. Wouldn't you think the other ten would have offered tremendous resistance if the episcopal office had not been known and established?"

Of course, Bishop Ignatius is known to all church historians. He left behind seven letters written immediately before his death, addressed to the churches in the cities he passed through on his way to martyrdom. These letters not only present with crystal clarity the role of the episcopal office, but also speak of the existence of bishops in many other churches. He categorically states that these early bishops had been placed in office by the apostles themselves and represent the continuity of apostolic ministry in the Church.

We had just begun recovering from the discovery of liturgy and sacraments in the early Church, and now came bishops too! And early bishops — in the first century. We began eagerly devouring the *Apostolic Fathers* — a collection of works by Christian authors who knew the apostles and were taught by them (including the works of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement) — and before our eyes unfolded an entirely new vision of Christianity.

But the New Testament itself was unambiguously clear on the question of bishops. *Bishop* is not merely a name for the function of an overseer, but a specific office in the Church. Viewed in this light, the New Testament references to *bishop* became perfectly clear.

The earliest New Testament text is from the book of Acts 1:20 and relates to the defection and replacement of Judas. In the King James Version we read: "Let another take his episcopate." Some of the newer Protestant translations hedge around the word and render *episcopate* as "place," "office," "position," or the slightly better "charge." The truth is that the Greek word in the text is *episcopos*, and its literal meaning is *episcopate*: the office of the bishop. By the time the book of Acts was written, this word no longer meant anything other than *bishop*. Incidentally, the Twelve were universally recognized as the first bishops of the Church.

Then follows St. Paul's greeting to the Philippians, written approximately around 65 A.D., where he says: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..." (Philippians 1:1). Taken at face value, this passage clearly shows that the office of bishop had its place in the church at Philippi by the middle of the first century.

The question often arises, as it did with us, about the interchangeability of the words *presbyter* and *bishop* in Acts and the Epistles. Are there not passages like Acts 20, for example (Paul and the leaders of the church at Miletus) or Titus 1:5 ("appoint elders in every city"), where the terms can refer to both the episcopal and the presbyteral office? Undoubtedly in some passages there is the possibility of such overlapping. But by the same standard, in both the New Testament and the earliest works in the history of Christianity there are found three specific pastoral offices: bishop, presbyter, and deacon.

The most interesting passage we came across was again from the book of Acts, chapter 15 — the Council in Jerusalem. In Antioch an uproar arises regarding the observance of Jewish laws, and the local church, unable to resolve the problem on the spot, brings it to the apostles and brothers in Jerusalem. The year is 48 or 49 A.D. A council is convened to establish God's will on the matter and settle the dispute.

Notice what happens. At the Council, in the presence of "the apostles and elders" (verses 4 and 22), including the Apostle Peter, when all have finished speaking, it is the Apostle James, the Lord's brother, and not one of the Twelve, who stands up and says: "Men and brethren, listen to me!" (verse 13). And James determines the final position regarding what is necessary for the resolution of the dispute. Why James? Why not Peter or one of the other apostles? Because according to all early writers who deal with the issue, at the time of the Council, the Bishop of Jerusalem was the Apostle James. And according to what is recorded in the book of Acts, he definitely acted as such!

For my personal transition from a congregational to an episcopal form of church governance, some observations were very helpful. First, just as in the New Testament, every contemporary bishop worth anything needs the "Amen" of his flock. The truth is that a church headed by a bishop is in practice simultaneously episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational — all at once. Together with the presbyters and deacons, the people have a voice. The difference is that in congregational governance it is one person, one vote, and ultimately the flock usually ends up shepherding the shepherd, while in the episcopal order everyone has a voice but the proverbial responsibility rests on the bishop's shoulders. As in the case of the Apostle James in Acts chapter 15, the Bishop makes the final decision.

Another observation I can best share by recounting my breakfast conversation with the president of an evangelical denomination. We had arrived at the discovery of bishops in the New Testament Church and had transitioned to episcopal governance. My friend, whose denomination is one of the congregational churches, was somewhat surprised by our change of course. He was convinced the New Testament preaches only congregational polity.

In the course of the conversation the subject arose of a new movement emerging among some of his churches.

"Many of our pastors are obsessed with the teaching on plural eldership by people like Ray Stedman," he complained. "It's difficult when you've committed to congregational governance and suddenly presbyterian thinking begins to creep in. Some of our churches have already moved in that direction."

"What would you do if the congregation voted to move to plural eldership?" I asked him.

"We won't make a problem of it, we'll accept it, as long as it's not permanent," he said. "So the issue will be resolved in a presbyterian fashion."

"And what if the people as a congregation vote to make it permanent?" I asked.

"Then I'll have to step in personally and put an end to it..."

"But that will be episcopal."

In practice, in the end leadership is always assumed by someone. We can talk about the will of the people, egalitarianism, independence, and so on as much as we like, but in the end one person takes the lead. Doesn't reality teach us this? Even in the Holy Trinity itself, where the three Persons fully share the Divine Nature, the Father is the Source and Fountain of unity. Whether in heaven or on earth, hierarchy exists — among humans and among angels.

I want to share something more about bishops, something quite reassuring. After years of trying to live under less leadership, I at last know who holds the helm. It is an honor for me to bow and kiss the right hand of our Archbishop Philip, with whom I am equal in terms of our brotherhood in Christ, and yet to whom I voluntarily submit as a hierarch who watches over my soul.

Until recently I would have vigorously objected to what I have just said: "Very well, but what happens if the bishop turns out to be bad?" First, Orthodox Christians participate in the election of their bishop. Second, every bishop is accountable to the council of bishops and ultimately to the patriarch. For this reason, when we have had bad bishops, they have been removed. (The heretic Nestorius held the highest position in the Eastern Church, but even he was replaced.) And third, a weak leader is better than no leader at all. Anarchy is the worst form of governance.

I accept the old Baptist truth that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, although no Orthodox bishop has absolute power. But the reverse is also true: independence corrupts, and absolute independence corrupts absolutely. For such independence leads to absolute power — absolute power in the hands of every individual.

Hierarchies existed in ancient Israel, hierarchies exist in the New Testament, as well as throughout the history of the Church. Quite biblically — they come with the territory.

Doctrine

Our heads were spinning from liturgy, sacraments, and bishops too, when Richard Ballew presented his research on the teaching of the Early Church. This was the respite we so needed, because as men dedicated to apostolic teaching, it was comfort and encouragement to our hearts and minds to hear how the first Christians had untiringly preached and defended the teaching about our Lord Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man.

"We find that every great controversy at any of the Ecumenical Councils begins with an attack on Christ Himself," Dick Ballew began. "The first of these reaches its climax in the summer of 325 A.D., when a general church council was convened in Nicaea to deal with the newly arisen heresy called Arianism.

"Arius was a presbyter from the church of Alexandria who caused great turmoil among the flock, teaching that Jesus Christ was a created being and not fully possessed of the Divine nature. According to Arius, His existence had a beginning at some point in time, and typically for almost all false teachers in history, he had a whole arsenal of biblical texts with new interpretations to support himself. Arius had won followers among both clergy and laity, and their numbers were constantly growing. His bishop — the devout Alexander — was deeply concerned and convened several councils that rejected Arius's views. When the heresy spread, this led to the involvement of the entire Church, and even the Emperor.

"Hundreds of representatives from all Christian communities gathered in Nicaea during that memorable summer of 325 to discuss and resolve the issue. Jesus Christ had once promised to His Church the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide her into all truth. And here had come the first fiery test after the apostolic era.

"When the delegates gathered, including Arius and his followers, another young man stepped onto the scene. Athanasius was an outstanding student of the Bible and a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Seven years earlier, at the age of twenty-one, he had already written a book destined to become one of the greatest classical works of Christianity for all time: *On the Incarnation*. In the introduction to the English translation of this work, C.S. Lewis writes that as soon as he opened the book, he realized he was reading a true masterpiece.

"At the Council this wonderful young man became one of the primary defenders of the apostolic faith. Arius could not compete with the devout and flawless Athanasius. As the summer weeks passed amid heated debates in Nicaea, a firm orthodox consensus began to take shape. After three months a brief document was drawn up and published containing the summary of Christian teaching on the Person of Jesus Christ. In the end, 318 bishops of the Church supported and signed

what we know today as the first and longest part of the Nicene Creed.

"The orthodoxy of St. Athanasius prevailed at the Council. Regarding Christ, there was never a time when He did not exist! This truth became a battle cry, because the Church needed almost an entire century to consolidate the positions won at Nicaea. Arius, though defeated, did not give up. In fact, after the Council his movement grew and at one point in the following years Arianism seemed about to prevail. This looked so likely that someone later coined the slogan: 'Athanasius against the world.'

"But Christ's truth prevailed. In the one holy Church they preached and worshiped the One Who 'was begotten of the Father before all ages.'"

The study of the Nicene Council did several things for us on our path toward Orthodoxy. First and most important, it gave us the authoritative interpretation of the New Testament teaching on Jesus Christ. Previously our greatest concern was the work of Christ — specifically what He had done for us — without the necessary deepening into who He is: the eternal Son of the Father who becomes man for our salvation — simultaneously God and man. Certainly we believed in the Divinity of Christ, but the importance of the Incarnation of the Son of God had not struck us with full force. For us the Nicene Creed became what it has always been for Orthodox Christianity: that fence beyond which we do not dare to wander in our understanding of Christ.

Second, Nicaea showed us how Councils should work in the Church — when devout bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laity gather to establish God's will, the Holy Spirit will speak to them. The Jerusalem Council of Acts chapter 15 was not a one-time occurrence. And so the whole idea of discerning God's will in unity took on new meaning for us.

Third, Nicaea led us to the other great councils in Church history. This Council was the first of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, which were convened between 325 and 787 A.D. — each to oppose some error and each triumphant with truth. Together these seven Councils form the foundation of the Church's understanding of the apostolic faith and serve as its guardian.

With the close of our week, we realized our work was only just beginning. If our pursuits had been purely academic, there was nothing much to worry about. But our commitment obligated us to change, to adapt. If what we had discovered in our research on the Church had been shared and practiced everywhere and by all Christians, and if it differed from what we confessed and practiced, we would yield. We were too tired of novelty and innovations; we longed for the fullness of the faith.

We left the island to learn to live with the liturgy and sacraments and to restructure our lives around the worship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We departed with an understanding of and desire for episcopal oversight and the reality of visible authority in the church. And we departed with renewed gratitude and love for our Lord Jesus Christ — the Word of God had truly become flesh and dwelt among us!

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DISCOVERY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

By mid-1975 we were already able to reach several conclusions about the Church from our research on early church history.

Its worship had a specific structure. It was liturgical, structured according to the pattern of the basic features of worship revealed by God in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ, our great High Priest, in the New Testament. What's more, and to our greatest surprise, the writers of the post-apostolic era claimed that this basic type of worship was practically the same in churches around the entire world.

The Early Church was also a Church of the sacraments. It unanimously confessed the sacraments as reality and practiced them. Through them God gave His grace to people. Baptism was truly for the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit, just as the Apostle Peter had promised his listeners on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). The Eucharistic gifts were truly the flesh and blood of Christ, as the Lord Himself assured His disciples before His death (Luke 22:19-20). In the sacrament of matrimony the husband and wife truly became one flesh (Ephesians 5:31).

The governance or polity of the Church was hierarchical from the very beginning, a structure including bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laity. Our response to the discovery of this governance was to found in 1975 the New Covenant Apostolic Order with the hope of creating something functional while still trying to avoid founding yet another denomination. We had committed ourselves to founding churches bearing the following twelve characteristics:

1. Grace
2. Genuine community
3. Vision
4. Authoritative but serving leadership
5. Care
6. Beholding God and the fear of God
7. Good works
8. Godliness
9. Orthodox theology
10. Worship
11. The blessed hope
12. Catholicity

By early 1979 the New Covenant Apostolic Order had become the Evangelical Orthodox Church. The promise remained, one to another and to our flocks, that one day we would become part of the historical Church, as we found it in our own time.

Our understanding of how to discern God's truth and God's will for His people was conciliar. The Early Church had dealt with various problems and challenges arising in its path through councils — whether at a local, regional, or universal level. The wisdom of the early Christians consisted in being able to confess together what course they believed God was giving to the Church.

At the very heart of apostolic teaching were the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of God's Son. These truths were at the beginning of absolutely everything the ancient Church believed, preached, and defended.

Let me again emphasize that it was by no means easy for us to accept some of these truths, such as the liturgy, the sacraments, and episcopal governance. Particularly regarding the liturgy and the sacraments, some of us were literally standing on our heads. That they were correct and that they had been accepted everywhere in the ancient Church was, unfortunately for us, too obvious. We had nothing to say there. The difficulties with early Christianity for us lay in practicing it.

But does this not happen at every conversion?

The worship of the Church at the end of its first millennium had the same form everywhere. The doctrine was the same as well. The whole Church confessed one creed, the same everywhere, and had withstood numerous attacks. The governance of the Church was also the same everywhere. And this one Church was Orthodox.

1054: The West Falls Away

Tensions had been mounting in the latter part of the first millennium, and at the beginning of the second they reached the breaking point (see the diagram on the following two pages). While various doctrinal, political, economic, and cultural factors were at work contributing to a division in the Church that was about to form as

East and West, two other vital issues finally surfaced:

1. Should one man, the Roman Pope, be recognized as Universal Bishop of the Church, and
2. The addition of the newly introduced phrase *filioque* in the Church's Creed.

The Papacy

Early on, the Apostle Peter came to be recognized as the leader among the Twelve Apostles. He served as their spokesman both before and after Pentecost. It is known that he became the first bishop of Antioch and then the first bishop of Rome. No one disputed his leadership.

After the death of the apostles and with the development of leadership structures in the Church, the Bishop of Rome was considered first in honor, though all bishops are equal. After about three hundred years, however, the Bishops of Rome began assuming a position of superiority over the other bishops. And without universal support, they finally began claiming to be the sole true successors of St. Peter.

The vast majority of the other bishops of the Church never disputed Rome's primacy of honor, but even those in Italy firmly rejected the papal claim to be the universal head of the Church on earth. This change in practice established from antiquity came about as a result of two main factors: the location of four of the five patriarchs in the East — only Rome was in the West; and the decline of the power of the Roman Empire in the West. The increased power of the Roman Pope became one of the main causes for the break of the Roman Church and all those it managed to pull along behind it from the historical Orthodox Church.

The Addition to the Creed

Growing disagreement was also developing in the Church regarding the Holy Spirit. Did He proceed from the Father alone? Or from both the Father and the Son?

In John 15:26 our Lord Jesus Christ affirms: "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me" (emphasis mine). This is the most foundational statement about the "procession" of the Holy Spirit in the entire New Testament and it is perfectly clear: He "proceeds from the Father."

And so when the ancient church council in Constantinople in 381 A.D., during its sessions, confirmed the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.), it also supplemented it with the following words: "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, and Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified..."

About two centuries later, however, at a local council in Toledo, Spain (589 A.D.) King Reccared declared that the Holy Spirit should be confessed and preached as proceeding from the Father *and the Son*. (The phrase "and the Son" in Latin is translated by the word *filioque*, hence the whole problem is often addressed as the "*filioque* controversy.") The king may have had good intentions, but in doing so he was contradicting the apostolic teaching on the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately the local Spanish council agreed to accept his error, and it gradually spread throughout the West, though it was initially rejected even by the papacy.

Based on the teaching of Holy Scripture as confessed by the entire Church at Nicaea and Constantinople, and for centuries afterward, we have no grounds to believe anything other than that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Period!

But centuries later, in a move largely motivated by strongly intertwined political factors, the Roman Pope unilaterally, without an ecumenical council, changed the Church's Creed. And although the change was initially rejected in both East and West, even by the bishops closest to Rome, over time Rome succeeded in forcing the West to capitulate.

The consequence for the Western Church was, understandably, a tendency to assign the Holy Spirit a lower place than that of God the Father and God the Son. The change may seem insignificant, but the consequences proved dramatically large. This issue, in which the pope had departed from the Orthodox teaching of the Church, became yet another of the main causes contributing to the break of the Roman Church from the historical Orthodox Church — the New Testament Church.

The Great Schism

Clashes between the Roman Pope and the East continued to grow — especially in relations between the Pope and the Bishop or Patriarch of Constantinople. The Pope even went so far as to claim the power to decide who should become Bishop of Constantinople, something that violated historical precedents and was none of his business. And since the Pope was no longer acting in submission to the governance of the New Testament Church, he sought political means to bring the entire Church under his dominion.

One after another came strange and fateful intrigues, as numerous Roman Popes continued steadily following their policy of acquiring power over all of Christianity. The most extraordinary incident, perhaps, among these political, religious, and even military campaigns, as far as the East was concerned, occurred in 1054 A.D. During the Sunday service a cardinal sent by the Pope threw on the altar of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople a document by which the Patriarch of Constantinople was excommunicated from the Church!

Of course the Pope had no legal right to do this, but the impact was devastating. In the following decades some of the less glorious chapters in Church history were written. The ultimate consequence of papal intrigues was that the entire Roman Church fell away from the New Testament Church. From that day to this, this schism has not been healed.

Over the centuries conflicts continued. All attempts at unification failed and the Roman Church drifted further and further from its historical roots. Falling away from the Church has its inevitable consequences. The separation of the Roman Church from the historical Church was not to be an exception to this.

Our Crossroads

Here we were. In our journey through history we had carefully traced the unbroken continuity in the Church for a thousand years.

There is no point in noting that we approved of the Church as we found it on the pages of the New Testament. We found the same Church in the second and third centuries — facing severe persecution, celebrating its liturgy in private homes, caves, and even cemeteries; governed by dedicated bishops, often ending their lives as martyrs. We found it in the fourth century defending the faith at Nicaea, and in the fifth at Chalcedon. We followed it to the end of the eighth century, studying its Great Councils, falling in love with its heroes, saints, and fathers who had preached the Gospel, fought with heretics, and finally established holy images in the worship of God. We marveled at how boldly the moral and doctrinal corruption in the Church had been met and how the ever-threatening ruin was often avoided. God was with her in the ninth and tenth centuries too, and the missionary work of Cyril and Methodius laid the foundations for the conversion of Russia to Christ, which began in 988 A.D.

But then came 1054, and we stood before a choice. A division had appeared. I still somewhat physically recall the feeling I experienced that day when I said to my cohorts: "The East is right to oppose the papacy; they are right in rejecting the newly introduced *filioque*." Then I took a deep breath. "I think this makes us... Orthodox."

It was simultaneously a feeling of isolation, anxiety, and homelessness. Where was this Church today? Did it still exist? Or had it quietly died out somewhere in the Middle Ages?

The truth is that none of us, as far as I know, had ever stepped inside an Orthodox church. Most of us didn't even know of its existence. And for that reason I must report with great regret that we decided to try to rebuild it ourselves!

The West: The Reformation and the Counter-Reformation

In the centuries following 1054 the growing differences between East and West were indelibly stamped on history. The East continued in the fullness of the New Testament faith, worship, and practice, maintaining the apostolic foundations. The Western, or Roman Catholic Church, launched the Crusades, which would inflict the deepest and most painful wounds ever inflicted by the West upon the East, and perhaps the most difficult to heal. Rome also turned toward a more rational or scholastic faith. It became a political superpower in the Western world. And then, less than five centuries after Rome had committed itself to a course of unilateral action in doctrine and practice, a new uprising began to swell – this time not in the neighboring East, but within the Western borders themselves.

Although many in the West, including some popes, had voiced opposition to the growing number of changes in the teaching and practice of the Roman Church, the waters of decline could not be restrained. And now an almost unknown German monk named Martin Luther inadvertently began an attack on certain Roman Catholic practices, which ultimately had a serious effect on world history. His famous "Ninety-Five Theses," which simply called for discussion of certain issues, were nailed to the church doors in Wittenberg in 1517 A.D. Very soon these theses marked the beginning of what in the West was called the Protestant Reformation. Twice Luther sought an audience with the Pope but was turned away, and in 1521 he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. He had no intention at all of breaking with Rome; he only wanted reformation of the church. Rome's position was unyielding, and Luther's was, "Here I stand." The door to unity in the West slammed shut with a resounding bang.

Luther's protests spread like wildfire fanned by a strong wind. The reforms he pursued in Germany were soon accompanied by the demands of Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich, John Calvin of Geneva, and hundreds of others across all of Western Europe. Fueled by numerous political, social, and economic factors in addition to the religious issues, the Reformation penetrated literally every nook and cranny of the Roman Catholic Church. Its ecclesiastical influence over the West significantly declined with the massive explosion and growth of divisions. The ripple effect resulting from this division continues to the present day.

And as if the troubles in continental Europe were not enough, the church in England was also setting out on its own path. Henry VIII, with all his marital problems, replaced the Roman Pope with himself as the head of the Anglican Church. Later the Pope would regain his supremacy in England, but only once and for only a few brief years. The Anglican Church itself was soon torn by a serious division that would affect the fate of the United States and Canada.

As the decades passed in the West, the numerous Protestant branches took the most varied forms. There were even some that claimed to be neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic. They all seemed to share an equal aversion to the Bishop of Rome and the practices of his church, and most wanted far less centralized forms of governance. And while some, like the Lutherans and Anglicans, adhered to a basic structure of liturgical worship and sacraments, others, like the Reformed churches and the even more radical Anabaptists and their successors, called into question and rejected numerous biblical realities such as hierarchy, sacraments, and historical tradition (regardless of when and where they appeared in history), thinking they were thereby freeing themselves from Roman Catholicism.

And today many sincere and believing Christians reject even the biblical testimony that speaks of the practices of Christ's Church, simply because they consider such historical practices "too Catholic." In their zeal to recover purity, Protestant movements have followed a program of overreaction without even realizing it.

So, although they have preserved to varying degrees portions of New Testament Christianity, neither Protestantism nor Roman Catholicism can make historical claims to the fullness of the New Testament Church. By separating from the Orthodox Church, Rome lost its place as a true historical expression of the New Testament church. And amid the divisions of the Reformation, Protestants, however well-meaning, zealous, and right they were, failed to return to the New Testament Church.

The Orthodox Church Today

We spent an entire decade, from 1977 to 1987, getting to know the Orthodox Church – its clergy and its laity. It was an incredible experience to discover the same faith in Christ that we had accepted, but to find it firmly planted in a cultural framework about which we knew almost nothing. At moments we feared it would not be possible to connect with the Orthodox Church at the end of the twentieth century. The highs and lows, joys and disappointments of that decade are described in Part Three of this book.

In Part Two, "Orthodoxy and the Bible," we will address the specific biblical issues we encountered as evangelical Christians who seriously intended to become Orthodox. I will try to examine them as clearly, fairly, and honestly as I can.

Concluding Part One with the completion of our research on the history of Christianity, let me add a few brief encouraging words. The Church of the New Testament, the Church of Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, the Orthodox Church – despite persecution, political oppression, and the desertion of some of its parts – today in a wonderful way confesses the same faith and lives the same life as the ancient New Testament Church. Naturally, the style of Orthodoxy looks quite complex to the contemporary Protestant eye, and that is understandable. But, bearing in mind the historical record of how the Church developed, the simple, Christ-centered faith of the apostles is clearly preserved in its practices, worship, and even architecture.

In contemporary Orthodoxy, just as in past times, on the fundamental matters of Christian teaching, worship, and governance, negotiations can never be conducted. You cannot be an Orthodox priest, for example, and deny the Divinity of Christ, His virgin birth, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, or His Second Coming. Simply put, for the past two thousand years the Church has not deviated from its course. It is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. It is the New Testament Church. The gates of hell have many times attempted but failed to prevail against it.

Although today there are over 225 million Orthodox Christians in the world, the majority of Americans are not acquainted with the Church. In North America until recently the Orthodox Church has been confined to ethnic boundaries and has not spread much beyond the parishes of believing immigrants who brought it to the shores of our continent. In the words of Metropolitan Philip, until recently Orthodox Christianity was "the best-kept secret in America."

PART TWO: ORTHODOXY AND THE BIBLE

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WORD WITH "T"

It is no secret to anyone that every study of church history inevitably confronts the researcher with one of the most forbidden words – forbidden for many of us coming from evangelical Protestant churches. To ease the discussion a bit, let us call it the word with "T": Tradition.

We can rightly state that in today's evangelical world a tradition of opposition to tradition has developed. And to some extent with reason – this can be traced all the way back to the Reformation. Much of what men like Luther or Calvin despised in the Roman Catholic Church fell under the heading of tradition.

And according to people like us – embarked on a journey toward Orthodox Christianity – the arguments of the Reformation focused quite specifically on the opposition: Bible versus tradition. For this reason it proved quite troubling to us that the word *tradition* had been used in the history of the Church from deepest antiquity. And everyone who had written on the subject had spoken in its favor. What we were opposing was not the passing of things from generation to generation – the literal meaning of the word. It was more the notion of the rigidity that, we believed, moves along with what is passed down through generations, the human innovations and the fear of traditionalism combined with an inability to adapt to necessary changes.

I have heard G.K. Chesterton's definition of tradition: "... giving our ancestors a vote." This helped me breathe more easily, but the painful fear remained. What if the majority turns out to be on their side? I reached for my biblical concordance.

The Two Sides of Tradition

No one was more critical of tradition than Jesus Christ. One of the most devastating indictments in the New Testament is the Lord's condemnation of tradition in Matthew 15:3-9. Notice how firmly He rebukes the Pharisees for their appeal to tradition:

"...why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" — then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

This, together with the warning of St. Paul to the Colossians: *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ..."* constitute the strongest biblical calls to guard against traditions.

But this is far from all that Scripture has to say on the matter. In one of the earliest-written books of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul comes out in favor of tradition. He writes the following: *"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle"* (2 Thessalonians 2:15). A stronger expression of support in favor of tradition can hardly be found! And then several verses later: *"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us"* (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Is this a contradiction, or what?

A closer look at the texts reveals to us that there are two fundamentally different types of tradition. In the Gospel passage and in the passage from Colossians, the reference is to human tradition. In other words, these are traditions created by people and passed down to the generations as if they were from God.

In the passage from Matthew, Jesus points out that human tradition leads to hypocrisy and even vain worship. St. Paul points out that human tradition will deceive and captivate us in the world. Such biblical examples of human traditions are the ritual washings performed by the Pharisees that Jesus opposes in Matthew chapter 15, and the dietary prescriptions or festivals against which Colossians warns.

And how do we oppose such things? Believe it or not — with the other kind of tradition: God's tradition. It is precisely this type of tradition that the Apostle commands us to preserve in his second letter to the Thessalonian church, cited a little earlier. Let us look at it once more.

"Therefore, brethren," he writes, *"stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle."* Here Paul speaks of the traditions — the things passed down — which the church received from him and the other apostles. This is the "apostolic teaching" spoken of in Acts 2:42. This is precisely that Christ-centered truth that Paul and the other apostles preached and taught.

Note that this apostolic tradition takes two forms: both "by word" and "our epistle." Therefore, Scripture itself teaches us that the sacred tradition spread by Christ's apostles included simultaneously both what they spoke when visiting the churches and what they wrote, known to us today as the New Testament Epistles. According to the Bible, Scripture itself is part of sacred tradition — the written, God-inspired part.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who reveals truth to the Church — we call Him the Spirit of Truth. The Twelve were chosen by Jesus Christ to lay the foundations of His Church. He promised that the Holy Spirit would speak through them. Part of what Christ and the apostles did and said was recorded in the New Testament, part was not. The Apostle Paul tells us to hold to both what was preached and what was written.

You will say: "But how can we do everything the apostles did and preach what they preached, since we weren't there to hear it?" Here is the key: Sacred Tradition! What the apostles and those chosen successors they selected planted in the churches has been passed down through the generations to the present day.

You will ask again: "But how can I be sure of this?" Let me draw your attention to two reasons that convinced me I can be sure. First, the Lord truly says that the Holy Spirit will guide His Church into all truth. This is either true or it is not. But it remains His promise. This does not mean that everything any individual Christian has ever said is correct. Even apostles can err. Paul, for example, had to correct Peter for his unwillingness to identify with Gentile Christians, as recorded in Galatians chapter 2. St. John the Apostle, though inadvertently, twice bowed down to angels, as noted in the book of Revelation, and was corrected by the angels! It is precisely for this reason that the Church has convened councils — to discern and decide under the guidance of the Holy Spirit what to do and preach. And thank God, because His promise to guide this Church through the centuries has always been kept, and there have been no small number of years of trial.

The second reason why I believe that the Holy Spirit guides the Church and preserves her traditions is the very way in which He gave us Holy Scripture. The Bible was not only written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but the individual books were also brought together under the Spirit's inspiration.

The Old Testament was written over the course of centuries by numerous authors, with the latest books dating to around 400 B.C. The New Testament was written during the period of approximately 55 to 96 A.D. The view that the New Testament books came together just so, independently of the will of the Church, is a fiction. Although for many years there existed an unwritten agreement regarding the New Testament books, only when the Church recognized the decision of the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. was the canon of the Bible definitively established.

That is precisely the point. If we believe the Holy Spirit guided the Church in its choice of the books to be included in the canon of Holy Scripture, then we must believe that He guided the Church in its other councils as well! And do not forget — how did the Church decide which books were doctrinally correct in order to include them in the Canon? On the basis of the doctrines contained in Sacred Tradition!

There is no way to embrace the Scriptures and get rid of Tradition. They come as a package. Trying to separate the Bible from tradition is like dividing the work of the Holy Spirit into approved and disapproved, and that swims in dangerously close proximity to the whirlpool of the unforgivable sin.

Later Traditions

One of the groans that was wrung from us during our journey was over later traditions. We were aware that until the eleventh century the Church had been one. Until then Christians had looked to the great Ecumenical Councils as guideposts in interpreting the Bible and formulating church teachings.

But with Rome's departure from Orthodox Christianity, things changed dramatically. No longer accountable to the entire historical Church, Rome was free to preach the universal sovereignty of the Pope and the modified Nicene Creed with the *filioque* innovation. Rome could also unilaterally adopt other new dogmas and practices. And it has. No wonder it has adopted others.

Protestants — the Reformers — were not fighting "straw men" when they attacked innovations like purgatory, the papacy, and indulgences. All three are late additions to the faith with no roots in the apostolic tradition.

In 1854 Rome adopted the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. According to this teaching, not only Christ is born sinless on earth — Mary too appears in the world without original sin. If that is the case, why not go back to her parents, and to their parents, and so on back to distant Eden?

In 1870, a little over a century ago, Rome added another dogma to the growing collection of new traditions. Again it was the Pope's turn. This time he was not only the universal ruler but also infallible.

No wonder Protestants have a mortal fear of tradition!

This is hard to say. My Catholic friends don't like it when I say it, but I say it anyway. In 1054 Rome departed from the apostolic tradition and left a millennium of church unity behind it. No, the Catholic Church is not entirely wrong — don't misunderstand me. But it is burdened with a papacy and traditions that simply do not

correspond to Sacred Tradition. And my personal opinion is that it is not only not approaching Orthodox Christianity but is moving away from it. It seems an ever-larger portion of its priests, nuns, and laity are possessed by a spirit of disobedience, even anarchy — liberation theology in South America, feminism and theological liberalism in North America, and in Europe the range extends from lazy apathy to unyielding ultra-conservatism.

It is time for Rome to return to the unity of the Church and to the faith of the apostles and holy fathers that were once so dear to it. It is time to return to the fullness of Sacred Tradition!

Even more burdened with later traditions is the Protestant movement. While Rome has generally been adding to the faith, Protestantism has been taking away from it. In their efforts to break free from Catholic extremes, modern Protestants have overshot the corrections. The oversimplification that followed continues to cripple Protestants in their search for full maturity in Christ and the maintenance of a steady course.

Mary has become a Nobody, Holy Communion has become a rare symbolic custom, authority and order in the church have become a distant memory, teachings have become a matter of personal interpretation regularly up for renegotiation. Name me a Protestant denomination that has remained fully faithful even to the teaching of its own founders, let alone adherence to the apostolic faith.

Finding a Family

We were in search of our spiritual family. And many of the emotions experienced and situations encountered were close to those experienced by adopted children searching for their biological parents.

We have some good friends in Santa Barbara. Let's call them Don and Polly Brauner. Polly is an adopted child. When she was born in 1948, her mother and father were separated and she couldn't afford to keep and raise her. And so, even before the day of her birth, it had been arranged for the baby to be adopted by an eager Christian family where the parents had one daughter but couldn't have other children.

Polly learned she was adopted at age four. She was playing one day when for no apparent reason she asked:

"Mommy, are you my real mother?"

Caught unprepared, her mother said she was not, but that even if she had been, she couldn't have loved her more.

From that day on, Polly began a secret and invisible search. A relentless search. At thirteen she was already obsessed with the thought of her adoption. Not because she was unhappy, nor because she thought her parents were raising her poorly. She simply couldn't get the thought out of her head that somewhere in the wide world there were people related to her by blood, who might even look like her.

Shortly after that, while rummaging through her father's papers, she came across the documents connected with her adoption. She went through all the papers, and at the bottom of one of them she saw the signatures of both her biological parents. The family name was not hard to remember — in fact, not at all: who knows how many Americans bear that very name: Smith. During her teenage years, Polly's desire to find her biological parents grew enormously.

When she was on the street, she peered into the faces of passersby — faces she hoped might resemble her own. If she found someone who looked like her, she would stop them and begin asking questions. If she was in another city, she would look up people named Smith in the telephone directory.

In 1968 Polly met Don, who was to become her husband one day. He committed himself just as strongly as Polly to uncovering the mystery. On their very first meeting they went to the City Archives of Los Angeles — the city where she was born — but there they found that the vital records were kept sealed elsewhere, in Sacramento. They went to the hospital where Polly was born, but found nothing there either.

In mid-December 1975, knowing that her biological mother had at some point held a California driver's license, she and Don searched for her through the computers of the Department of Motor Vehicles. The information that surfaced rewarded them with an address in one of the small California towns. They headed for the nearest telephone booth, but found no one with her father's first name listed under the surname Smith. After about two more days spent studying the information, they discovered that her father had purchased a car through the National Bank.

A new paper chase began. From the bank they told Polly that Mr. Smith had indeed taken a loan from them but had since moved to live in one of the large cities in the Midwest. A call to Information in that city yielded no result. From the tax assessor's office in the same town, however, they were told that a family named Walker had a year earlier purchased their house from Mr. Smith, Polly's father. It turned out the assessor also had Mrs. Walker's telephone number. By this time it was already New Year's Eve 1976.

On the first day of the new year, when the Brauner family decided it was already late enough in the Midwest, they called Mrs. Walker. Don, by then Polly's lawful husband, spoke with her. And when he asked her if she knew Mr. Smith, she replied, "Of course he's my nephew!" Don began asking questions, so many of them, that in the end he had to admit to her why he was calling. In reply she told him that to her knowledge the Smith family had three children and she had not heard of a fourth. This was the first time Polly learned she had a brother and two sisters.

Finally, Mrs. Walker offered to call the information to the sister of Polly's father, who also lived in town. She even gave them the phone number of Polly's aunt.

But the aunt proved quite evasive. She didn't believe a word of what she heard from Don and didn't want to give him any information about where to find Polly's father or anything else about him.

Two more hours passed. Finally Polly managed to convince Don to call the aunt again. Even when Polly herself repeated the entire story, the aunt continued to act suspiciously. Then Polly asked her at least to relay this information to her father and let him decide whether he wanted to get in touch with them.

About another hour and a half later the telephone rang. A collect call from Mr. Smith. Polly swallowed and accepted the call. During the ensuing forty-five-minute conversation Polly discovered that after her adoption, her biological parents had gotten back together for a while and had two other children. For about ten years her mother had been living alone in Southern California.

Shortly after, the phone rang again. This time it was her biological sister, Betty. They talked for about twenty-five minutes. Polly simply couldn't believe how alike their voices sounded.

Twenty more minutes passed and the phone rang for the third time. On the other end was her biological mother. By the end of this conversation Polly felt she was about to burst! Although emotionally exhausted, Polly was in rapture. Two days later the first photographs began arriving. Some resemblances were noticeable, but no one of them looked anything like she had imagined them.

Happy New Year 1976! In the following weeks and months Polly managed to personally meet her biological parents, her sisters, and her brother. She had found her biological family.

If you are anything like me or Polly Brauner, you too are in search of your spiritual family. Well, when you find it, it will not be the Church of the first century, because now we are on the threshold of the twenty-first. Now it will be (as they say) a bit older, and perhaps even wiser. But it will be the same Church. Because it has kept intact the traditions of its Founder and His apostles.

The Family Tradition

What is our Sacred Tradition? It is *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..."* (Ephesians 4:5-6). It is that precious faith *"once for all delivered to*

the saints" (Jude 3). It is Orthodox Christianity.

At this point some of you might object: "All right, I understand there is good as well as bad tradition — God's tradition and human tradition. But instead of using the word with 'T,' can't we simply say we believe in the Bible?"

We can. And we do. But we need to say something more. Why? Because the Jehovah's Witness standing on your doorstep also carries a Bible and claims to believe in it. Tradition serves not only to preserve the Bible but also to interpret it. Without the interpretations of the Church, which pours the light of sacred tradition onto all those chapters and verses, you and the Jehovah's Witness are locked in a dead grip — his interpretation versus yours.

And so the Church is our guardian of truth. In the words of the Apostle Paul himself, it is "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Imagine you are driving at eighty kilometers per hour in a sixty-kilometer zone. The civil authorities have determined sixty kilometers per hour to be the maximum permissible speed in populated areas. But who stops your car — the traffic code? Not at all, the traffic police stops you. Because the same civil laws that set the speed limits also provide for the police. The officer is there to enforce the laws and regulations.

It is the same with the Bible, the Church, and Tradition. Scripture is true — holy, righteous, and good. But it was never intended to exist alone. Its application and interpretation, and why not also its authorship, is in the hands of the Church. The Church is also the executor of the Word. And the way everything has been done and continues to be done is preserved through sacred tradition. But even the Church is not the source of its tradition.

Tradition has one single source — God Himself. In the beginning the apostles receive it from Jesus Christ and pass it on unchanged and unfaded to the churches they founded. Jesus tells the apostles they have more to learn, and that the Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth [John 16:13].

On the day of Pentecost the Old Testament people of God become the New Testament people of God by being baptized in Christ. The Church developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and its members brought with them the worship given to them hundreds of years earlier according to "the pattern of the heavenly" (see Hebrews 9:23), but now focused on Christ Himself. The tradition of Christian worship was born as the old gave way to the new.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church learned early to correct itself. If some error appeared, the apostles immediately responded to set things back in order — sometimes through personal visits, sometimes through letters, sometimes through both. This itself became a tradition, and the letters inspired by the Holy Spirit were read, reread, copied, and distributed. Today they are known as the New Testament Epistles.

At roughly the same time the Holy Spirit prompted Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to leave for the Church in written form the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What was written corresponded to what was preached by them, because the source was the same. The written word was received by those who had previously believed the spoken word. For they were all one message, one truth, one tradition. They labored to pass it on to faithful men who would in turn teach others.

In this way, in the Church and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Bible came into being — the unique part of its tradition — which the Church carefully preserved, interpreted, defended, and preached. But from the same Church and under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit arose the apostolic traditions not recorded in Scripture but consistent with it, and to which Scripture tells us to hold fast.

Not long ago I spoke before a group of students from a large independent Protestant seminary known for its firm stance on the inspiration of the Bible, but which adheres to numerous doctrinal fads unknown even among other branches of Protestantism. They seemed to have focused so intently on defending the inspiration of Scripture that they had neglected its interpretation and had fallen victim to their new dogmas. They had retreated from, even despised, Sacred Tradition.

In closing I said to them:

"Look here, boys, you have the right Bible. There is no argument there. And you serve the right Savior. Jesus Christ is our Lord. What you need is the right Church, that family of united Christianity which has preserved the faith and worship of the apostles and their successors."

And it is precisely in this Orthodox Church, which for twenty centuries has been paying with its blood to preserve its sacred tradition, that we finally found ourselves. It took us a whole decade, but we are grateful to God, because we checked thoroughly and everything is still in its place.

CHAPTER SIX: WHY OUR WORSHIP IS THE WAY IT IS

It was one of those late nights — early mornings when I woke up and couldn't fall back asleep. In such cases I either watch Charlie Rose on channel twelve, or I get up and read the Bible. For some time I had been working through something from the book of Acts, and so that particular night I chose Scripture.

When I study the Bible on a particular theme or prepare for a sermon, I use the New King James Version (NKJV). But in midnight moments like this I usually choose some other edition to take a fresh look at a more familiar text. That night I chose the New American Bible (NAB) — a colloquial and engaging translation made under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Liturgical Worship in Scripture

I was browsing through the book of Acts and gradually came to chapter 13, which begins with the moment in the church at Antioch when they send Paul and Barnabas on a mission. I read verse 2: "While they were performing the liturgy of the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said..." (NAB). Wait a minute! — I thought — Everyone knows the text says they "were ministering to the Lord and fasting." There couldn't have been a liturgy as early as Acts chapter 13.

I grabbed my Greek New Testament from the shelf next to the desk. And right there, in Acts 13:2, in full view of everyone, there it was: *leitourgounton* — that was the Greek word. You didn't even need to know Greek to verify it! In Acts 13 there is a liturgy! And it was precisely the Protestants who had changed the translation.

According to the teaching of the New Testament in Antioch, in the Apostle Paul's own church, we have a liturgy before 50 A.D. So much for the theory that liturgy crept into the church when people forgot to rely on the Holy Spirit for spontaneity in worship. In fact, in Acts 13:2 there is not only liturgical worship, but it is precisely during the liturgy that the Holy Spirit speaks to the Church! I recalled past sermons of my own. A great many of them would need to be rewritten before being brought out from the mothballs again.

This passage gives great hope to those of us who struggle with the fear of "dead liturgy." In practice there is no such thing as dead liturgy. Liturgy is either genuine or it is not. Living or dead are the people. Let me share my vision of Orthodox Christianity at its best: living, spiritual Christians serving God in a genuine liturgy! Nothing can compare with that. And it is precisely this that Jesus had in mind when He told the woman at the well that the Father seeks those who will worship Him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

That night prompted me to embark on an entirely new study of worship in the Bible. By that point in our journey, it was no secret to me or any of my colleagues that all early works — the Didache, Justin Martyr, Hippolytus — speak of the New Testament Church as a church liturgical in its worship. But now the verbal form of the ancient Greek noun *leitourgia* was appearing in the New Testament itself. What were the roots of this phenomenon?

My mind leaped ahead to that place in Hebrews where it says God commanded His Old Testament people to serve according to His instructions, following the pattern of the heavenly (Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23). In other words, Israel did not serve however it pleased. God told them how, and everything was done in this way, to resemble what was done in heaven.

A Vision of Heavenly Worship

This opened the next question: How is worship conducted in heaven? The first passage that came to mind was Revelation chapter 4, where the Apostle John witnesses the heavenly service in his vision of the throne, the twenty-four elders clothed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads, the seven fiery lamps, and everything else. "This doesn't look at all like evangelical Protestantism," I mumbled quietly. "Shouldn't there be something earlier, for example in the Old Testament, an account of someone who sees heaven — like Ezekiel, or Elijah, or Isaiah? Yes! Isaiah. Isaiah chapter six. If the Old Testament liturgy was built according to the heavenly worship, Isaiah chapter six can certainly be considered the prototype."

The easiest way for me to absorb the message of Isaiah 6 was to underline the verbs connected with sensory perception; in this way I will convey it to you as well. The event takes place in "the year that King Uzziah died," around 700 B.C. Isaiah's description is extremely detailed regarding what he experienced. And what he recorded resembles not only the worship in the Old Testament tabernacle, which is fully understandable, but also bears an extraordinary resemblance to the historical worship of Christ's Church! Take a minute or two and read this description slowly and thoroughly.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said:

"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said:

"Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"

So I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:1-8)

What would you say if Sunday worship could be that powerful? The truth is, we can come close to it! Let us focus our attention on the individual parts, the details of Isaiah's account as he witnesses the heavenly liturgy, and see how it affected him through his five senses and his consciousness of mission.

Worship as Sight

Isaiah saw something. First of all he saw the Lord, seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of His robe filling the temple. "Lord" in this passage is the eternally existent Son of God. In his Gospel the Apostle John quotes the prophecies of Isaiah that refer to Christ and has in mind the prophet's heavenly vision when he writes: "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (John 12:41).

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever wished you could see Jesus Christ? I mean see Him the way you see other people? I remember a particular stage in my life, first as a child and then as a young man, when I thought it would be much easier for me to have faith if I could see the Lord at least once.

In the end the faithful will see Him face to face. We are also called to walk by faith, not by sight. But Isaiah did see Him, as did all those people in the Gospels who knew Him, and also Stephen, and Paul, and John, who saw Him even after the Ascension. So what about people like you and me?

Since ancient times the Church has provided its people with a means of seeing the Lord, visual aids if you will. In his classic book *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Gregory Dix recounts how in the primitive house churches of Rome, when believers gathered for worship, the dark, old paintings of ancestors were taken down from the walls. They were "replaced with mosaics of Old Testament figures and saints of the Church" (p. 27).

Then, when persecutions ceased and church buildings were no longer the homes of volunteers but permanent structures, the symbols and images became bolder. Above the altar of almost every church, according to Dix, appeared "an image focused on the figure of the Son, who is the 'image of God'" (p. 32). In the Eastern churches this was the image or icon of Christ Pantocrator, or Almighty, and in the Western churches, Christ as the Lamb of God, our Savior.

So you have seen Jesus Christ during worship. Throughout its history, instead of placing a bare wall or arranged flowers before people, the Church in its wisdom has placed icons of the Lord Jesus Christ and His beloved saints. These images, these windows into heaven, give those who worship Him the ability, through the means of pigments and canvas and with the eyes of faith, to see the Original.

Sometimes the objection is raised: "But doesn't the Second Commandment in Exodus chapter twenty prohibit images?" It prohibits false images — idols — not images as such. For if true images had been prohibited, how is it that only six chapters later, in Exodus 26:1, God commands: "Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them?"

Thomas Howard says somewhere that the divine liturgy is the greatest multimedia event of all time. It is also more than multimedia, because we participate in it. We experience worship with all five senses plus the senses of faith. And according to Dorothy Sayers, we cannot think in any other way than through images.

It is time to engage our imagination for Christ again — the Church has done this through the historical use of icons in its worship.

But the prophet Isaiah saw not only the Son of God. There was also a throne, there were seraphim, there were doors in the heavenly sanctuary. And there was an altar.

Honestly, for many years I wrote off altars as something "Old Testament" and unnecessary, due to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Unfortunately, however, the entire ancient church had them. Could it be that the early Christians knew something we don't know? Often when services were conducted in the catacombs, the tomb of some deceased brother or sister in Christ served as the altar. In house churches the altar was usually where the dining room was in everyday life.

In Hebrews it is clearly stated: "We have an altar..." (Hebrews 13:10). Certainly Christ's sacrifice is complete — we cannot add anything to it. For the early Christians the altar represented the Cross. It was no longer the sacrificial altar with the blood of bulls and goats, but the reality of Christ's cross, where He eternally offers for us His broken body and shed blood. And so it is to this day. It is precisely from His holy altar that we are deemed worthy to receive His holy gifts: His flesh and blood in the glorious Eucharistic feast!

Worship as Sound

During those moments in heaven Isaiah not only saw but also heard. The hymn he heard the angels sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" has become the biblical basis for the Cherubic Hymn and the Trisagion, as it is called in the East, the Thrice-Holy Song. For centuries it has been sung on earth just as it is sung in heaven, perhaps for all eternity.

When I was young, Guy Lombardo was one of the most famous big band leaders in America. And his motto was equally as famous as himself: "The sweetest music this side of heaven." I don't claim to know Lombardo's religious convictions, but we can safely state that in his time people somehow understood that the most exquisite music must be the heavenly kind. And Isaiah heard precisely the heavenly music.

While we may perhaps suspect the existence of choirs of singers in the temple, about the angelic choirs in the heavens there is no doubt. The angelic choir becomes the basis for our own choirs in worship. Their purpose is not to replace the singing of the people, but to support it with the superior art of choral beauty. And as the priest comes through the doors (the so-called Great Entrance) and passes through the worshippers, carrying the bread and wine about to be consecrated, the choir sings:

We who mystically represent the Cherubim, And chant the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, Let us now lay aside all earthly care, That we may receive the King of all, Invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

One of the things in worshipping God through the time-tested liturgy of the Church that has comforted me most is watching how numerous biblical passages that I had never underlined come alive. As if the heavenly drama of worship is being enacted live in my hometown and in the very Christian community to which I belong. Since the liturgy is a procession of God's people toward His heavenly throne, not only is Christ present with us, but in fact we are also present together with Him, as Scripture says, "in the heavens."

The truth is there exists only one Divine Liturgy, one single Holy Communion in the entire universe — that of heaven. We who gather here on earth as the Church are called to join and participate in it together with the heavenly hosts. But to do this, we make significant efforts in our worship to make it compatible — rather than at odds — with worship before God's throne. Or, using the words of the Lord's Prayer, we want to make sure that in our service we are doing God's will "on earth as it is in heaven."

And why have the majority of Protestant denominations — traditional, evangelical, and charismatic — abandoned this historical form of Christian worship? To give an answer, let me coin a new word: Romophobia. How often have you heard people oppose liturgy with the excuse "It's too Catholic"? Well, so what! Is that the issue — whether Rome practices it or not? It is time for all of us to return to the Bible. And the Bible teaches us that worship is liturgical — on earth as in heaven.

An Orthodox priest friend of mine had never in his life attended a service in an evangelical church. Since Sunday mornings he was occupied, he decided to visit a local evangelical church one Sunday evening.

"How did it affect you?" I inquired. "What can you say?"

"Well, the sermon was truly good," he replied. "The pastor carefully adhered to the text and in my opinion conveyed the Gospel quite clearly. I'm truly impressed."

He paused for a moment, trying to put into words the remaining part of his impressions. After several unsuccessful attempts, my friend finally mumbled:

"The rest of the service, however, was like... well, I suppose it could be described as a Christian Lawrence Welk show."

And he described the special musical tricks, the choral arrangements, and the words of all those songs focused on the I, whose needs are being met, rather than on our Triune God before Whom we bow in worship. In contemporary Christianity we have lost true worship and by God's grace we must get it back!

Worship as Taste and Touch

"He touched my mouth," says Isaiah about the seraph who came to him with a coal taken from the altar. He had seen something, heard something, now the prophet feels something. A live coal is taken with tongs from the heavenly altar and, carried by a seraph, it meets his lips. What could be the significance of this act?

After Isaiah sees the Lord and hears the hymn of the angels praising His holiness, the prophet responds in a very predictable way: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" The child psychologist on a recent television program called this "the 'oops' feeling" and described it as the feeling a child has when caught in an act of disobedience and mentally begins to cringe upon seeing his father approaching.

You and I would feel the same as Isaiah. He finds himself there as an Israelite, during a time when God is deeply disappointed with His chosen people because of their lack of faith and disobedience. Only one chapter earlier, in Isaiah 5, we read how God had expected good grapes from His vineyard but it produced wild grapes. "I will leave it desolate," He warns in verse six. And Isaiah knew he was part of all this.

And now, quite unexpectedly, he finds himself transported to heaven and standing before the Lord of Glory! The train of His robe fills the entire temple. The angels sing so powerfully that the doors shake. Look at his reaction:

Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts. (Isaiah 6:5)

Standing before the almighty Son of God, he confesses the uncleanness of his lips and acknowledges that he lives among an unclean people. What provokes this conviction of sin? "My eyes have seen the King." When any of us truly sees Christ, we are undone, we perish, to use the biblical word, because then we see most clearly our own sin. This is the "oops feeling" elevated to its highest degree.

And what happened then? The same thing that always happens when we confess our sins before the Son of God. The angel took the coal — a symbol of communion — from the altar, touched it to Isaiah's lips, and announced before all creation: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged!"

Is this not precisely what the Son of God does — not only frees us from sin, but takes it away, removes it from us, as we read elsewhere, "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He will do the same for us if today we confess our sins and receive His gift from the altar. Do you notice how the coal teaches us about the power of communion? That is why, for long centuries to this day, when an Orthodox priest receives the flesh and blood of Christ at the altar, his confession is the same as that of the God-pleasing Isaiah, after which he repeats: "Behold, this has touched my mouth, and my iniquity is taken away, and my sins are purged!"

Those of us who have lived separated from Christ's ministry and communion need His holy touch. You can attend this or that church, seek the teaching of this or that preacher, this spiritual experience or some other, but the truth is you will never find true worship, heavenly worship — nowhere — nowhere else — apart from the life-giving grace of Christ in His holy Communion. I, along with thousands of others, know. We tried. But always in vain.

The psalmist says: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8). At His holy Table we are given to taste, to see, and to trust. Isaiah was touched by the live coal of God's forgiveness and personally tasted of His goodness. From God's altar the same healing is offered to us and our sins to this day. Therefore, let us approach boldly, with faith and love, and draw near to the throne of His mercy.

Worship as Smell

When Isaiah found himself in the heavenly temple, yet another of his senses was engaged. He smelled something, because "the house was filled with smoke."

I remember so clearly, as if it happened yesterday, the moment when I first stepped across the threshold of Saint Innocent Orthodox Church in Tarzana, California and smelled for the first time the still perceptible fragrance of the incense used several hours earlier at the morning service. I felt affected. "I'll accept this Orthodox teaching," I began to protest internally (actually I had already accepted it), "but they'll never make me use incense!"

A few months later I was again at Saint Innocent, this time for the service, and inevitably, for a new experience of the familiar scent. This time it struck me as quite pleasant, as it brought back memories of other pleasant moments from my previous visit.

The following week I began mentally rummaging through Scripture. Israel used incense in its worship. The incense altar is often mentioned, with its rising smoke symbolizing the prayers of the saints. In his heavenly vision of Christ and His angelic hosts, Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne and "the house was

filled with smoke" (Isaiah 6:4). Incense was one of the three gifts brought to the infant Jesus by the wise men. Revelation chapter 8 speaks of incense in the eternal heavens. Why not now too? I remember thinking this and realizing that it was the modern Protestants who were the exception, not the rule. The rest of Christianity has been using incense in worship for two thousand years!

But then another thought occurred to me: "So what is the big deal? Does incense really need to be made into an issue? Is it worth imposing?"

A few years ago I was planning a trip to Minneapolis to help move my mother-in-law, Olga Grinder, to the West Coast, closer to us in Santa Barbara. She was then seventy-nine and, according to the family council and her own wishes, didn't need another Minnesota winter, especially one spent in solitude. I was to visit her, help with packing, list the house for sale, and return with her to the West. Peter John, the youngest of our six children, who was then eleven years old, asked to come along.

"PJ, you're in the middle of the school year," Marilyn began to dissuade him. "And besides, the trip is quite expensive."

"I'll catch up with my schoolwork, I'll even take my homework on the road," PJ insisted. "And I'll contribute something for the trip from my own savings."

It wasn't at all convincing and we both shook our heads negatively. But then came the next sentence — there we had nothing to say:

"Dad, Mom, all the others were grown up when we last went to Grandma's! They remember, and I don't. She's going to sell her house and I'll go through my whole life without remembering what Grandma's house looked like."

The next morning I called the agency to reserve two places instead of one.

When we set out for "Grandma's," it was late October, the end of the picturesque autumn season. That first evening there, the three of us sat together in her study and were having some Chinese food. PJ had settled on the couch with the remote control in front of him.

"Do you remember anything about Grandma's house?" I asked him.

"Yes, two things," he answered immediately, as if he had been preparing for the question. "I remember the wallpaper in this room. The last time I was here, the little girl from across the street pushed me off her swing and I scraped my knee. Grandma brought me here and put me on the couch, and I looked at the wallpaper all afternoon."

"And what is the other thing?" I asked again.

"The smell," he replied. Then he giggled at what he had just said. "I don't want to sound strange, but grandmothers' houses always have a special smell."

Olga and I swallowed our tears.

Of course all grandmothers' homes have a characteristic smell. The same is true of God's homes. The tabernacle had a smell, the Temple had a smell, heaven has a smell, the Church has a smell. It is the smell of incense, and it engages in worship our sense of smell.

For me personally, incense helps me not to be distracted during worship. And now, the moment I step inside the church, my sense of smell signals my brain why I have come here — to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and to pray. Well, is it worth holding on to incense?

Let the prophet Malachi give God's answer to this question:

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations, Says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:11)

Scripture tells us that in the age of the Church, as the Gospel spreads among the nations, in every place incense will be offered. In the worship of the Christian church incense is supposed to come with the territory, and something that God has revealed to us is missing from worship when it is absent.

Worship as Mission

On the day when Isaiah saw, heard, tasted, touched, and smelled the heavenly worship, the event ended fittingly. More precisely, he did something. When his sins had been purged, the Lord spoke with Isaiah. Because of the discouraging state of affairs in Israel, the Lord was seeking a prophet who would call them back to the center. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" (Here "Us" is a wonderful Old Testament reference to the Holy Trinity.)

And Isaiah answered immediately: "Here am I! Send me."

Not all of us are called to be God's prophets ("are all prophets?"), and the liturgy, though the same, is rarely that dramatic. But one thing is certain: all of us who worship God are called to freely and firmly say yes to Jesus Christ, whatever He might seek from us.

That is why during the Divine Liturgy, at the end of several litanies, we say together with the priest or deacon: "Let us commit ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God!" How much of ourselves do we give to the Lord? Everything — our whole life. This is our yes to Him.

Let us never leave the liturgy without having afresh given our lives to Jesus Christ — to be His servants, His ambassadors in the world to which we go.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CALL NO MAN FATHER

Several decades have passed since Bing Crosby donned priestly vestments and played on the silver screen a role that still wins people's hearts — Father O'Malley. For many years Marilyn and I have gathered the children and stayed up late to watch the Christmas program with old films.

Also in our century, but earlier, one of the great representatives of humanity in our time, Father Flanagan, founded Boys Town in Nebraska. It became a nationwide refuge for homeless youth. In many ways Mother Teresa is his contemporary counterpart in India, caring for the poor and oppressed there.

But how are we to take these titles? We admire the work and character of these people, but doesn't the Bible command us not to call anyone father?

In my most radical Protestant days, I would call a priest "Father" only if I absolutely had to, sometimes silently asking the Lord to forgive me. And now, being a priest myself, I notice the same hesitation in others. This was one of those issues we had to wrestle with on our path to Orthodoxy.

Some statements made by Jesus have often formed the basis for major disputes, both within and outside the Church. His words in Matthew 23:9 — "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" — are no exception. I must admit that for us as evangelical Christians it was truly a major issue to call the pastors of Orthodox parishes "father."

Different Interpretations

Some interpreters from Protestant circles are convinced that Jesus commanded that church leaders not be called fathers. In this biblical passage they, of course,

interpret "father" as spiritual father. For this reason they refuse to call their clergy fathers, preferring instead to call them pastors, reverends, or perhaps even brothers.

And so from the very start I want to emphasize that "spiritual father" is more of an interpretation of the Lord's words than something He actually said. Bear in mind that I am not denying the need to interpret Scripture. I am only pointing out that the Lord says "father," not "spiritual father."

What is the argument then? Simply this: Taken literally, Jesus's instruction that no one be called father means not calling fathers not only the clergy but also our earthly fathers and grandfathers. We could not use this title for the ancient fathers of the church, nor for the founders of our cities, right? Because in practice the Lord's statement, as it appears in the text, means that only One — a single One — can be called father, namely, our Heavenly Father.

But must Christ's words be taken literally, as we did? Must we indeed not call our Orthodox pastors fathers? If so, what will become of certain other passages in the Bible, including some statements of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament? To the church in Corinth the Apostle writes: "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). Is Paul not claiming to be the spiritual father of the Corinthians — "Father Paul," if you will?

And not only that, he boldly speaks of his spiritual predecessors as "our fathers." Moreover he addresses the earthly fathers in Colossae in the following manner: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). It seems that according to the interpretation of the Apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ did not say that only One should be called father, i.e. the Heavenly Father.

In addition to this, when the rich man saw Abraham and Lazarus in his bosom and addressed him as "Father Abraham," Abraham's response was not "Do you not know that only God the Father can be called Father?" No, he responded: "Son, remember..." (Luke 16:20-31).

Other Titles

But let us not stop there. For in addition to saying "one is your Father," Jesus also says: "Do not be called 'Teacher'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ" (Matthew 23:8). But Jesus Himself acknowledges Nicodemus as "a teacher of Israel" (John 3:10). And in the church at Antioch certain people were called "prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1).

The Apostle Paul not only recognizes teachers as God's gift to the Church, but does not hesitate to call himself "a teacher of the Gentiles" (1 Timothy 2:7). Moreover, in our daily lives nearly all of us at one time or another call some people in Sunday school "teachers." In theological institutions one of the most appreciative ways to introduce a preacher is to recognize him as a gifted Bible teacher. Thus the debate far exceeds any Protestant-Catholic boundaries.

Therefore, in His statement that we should call neither father nor teacher anyone except God the Father and Christ Himself, the Lord Jesus appears not to be prohibiting the use of these specific titles in themselves. The context of the passage itself gives us the key we need for interpreting it.

In it our Lord speaks about certain teachers of His time who were using the specific titles to achieve their own selfish ends. And if these same teachers had been using other titles such as, for example, reverend or pastor, in my opinion Jesus would have said the same about them: "Do not call anyone reverend or pastor."

What Did the Rabbis Mean?

For what purposes then were the rabbis using titles like father and teacher? The answer revolves around at least two important aspects of leadership: teaching and personal character.

Let us first examine the teachings of these particular teachers. They started from the right place — the Law of Moses. Jesus says: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2). The Mosaic Law was the true tradition. God gave it to Israel through Moses. The responsibility of the rabbis was to preserve this tradition and reverently pass it on to the next generations.

Very often, however, one of the rabbis would happen to add his own grain of wisdom to the true tradition and thereby cloud it. And instead of transmitting the riches of the sacred texts along with their correct interpretations, he would add his own interpretation. In turn his students, upon becoming rabbis, did the same as their teachers. Human tradition again and again. (Some things never change, do they!)

The final result of all this was a human tradition that invalidated the true Mosaic tradition. To these same rabbis Jesus says: "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). And again: "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down" (Mark 7:9, 13).

And to put an end to all those human traditions that transgressed the Mosaic tradition, and to turn the people back to truth, Jesus says to His disciples: "Do not be called teachers." In other words, He tells them not to use the position of fathers and teachers as an opportunity to accumulate their own disciples around their own private opinions. For this would only serve to "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men."

Instead, after the coming of Christ, these teachers — in fact all who would preach God's Word — must reverently pass on to the generations the true tradition of the one Teacher, Christ Himself. Through the pen of the Apostle John, the Bible calls this tradition "the doctrine of Christ." That is why, as we noted earlier, the teaching of the Twelve became known under the name "the Apostolic Teaching."

And from their time onward, generations of fathers and teachers of the Church have successively and carefully passed on and preserved the apostolic teaching about Christ, since it represents the true interpretation of Holy Scripture.

This faithfulness to the true Christian teaching, incidentally, can be particularly clearly traced in the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church, held between the fourth and eighth centuries. It is right that everyone who claims to be a teacher of Christ should be faithful to the apostolic teaching handed down through these Councils. Otherwise he risks introducing his own "private interpretations."

And while it remains true that all teachers of Christ's doctrine must start from the right place, namely Holy Scripture, it is also true that they must give the right and true interpretations of that Scripture, as passed down by the holy and devout teachers and fathers of the Church, especially from the Seven Councils.

Why are these Seven Ecumenical Councils so important? Because they articulate what the entire Church has recognized as the correct teaching regarding the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. They remain faithful to what Holy Scripture also teaches about the one true Teacher — Jesus Christ. Teachers and fathers who impart their personal interpretations contrary to the doctrine of Christ as recognized by the Seven Ecumenical Councils should in my view not be recognized as true fathers and teachers.

The Rabbis and Personal Character

The second important feature of rabbinic leadership that Jesus deals with is the character of the man. He identifies a serious deficiency in the characters of the scribes and Pharisees, a sin we might call self-promotion. They used their position as fathers and teachers of God's people to exalt themselves. They wanted to make sure they received appropriate recognition — carpeted office and adjacent bathroom, engraved personal accessories, and a silver four-door Buick. In light of this defect Jesus says: "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:11-12).

Their self-exalting spirit manifested itself in various ways. First, in their hypocrisy. "For they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:3), says Jesus. All talk without substance. Their words proved cheap precisely because they completely contradicted their behavior. In speech they offered long prayers, but in deed they devoured widows'

houses.

They made oaths, swearing by the gold of the temple rather than the temple that sanctified the gold, thereby making plain their secret passion for money. Although they tithed mint, dill, and cumin, which they should have done, they neglected the far weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.

Because they were shown to be hypocrites in these and many other ways, the Lord summed up His critique with the words: "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28). Simply put, their "inside" did not match their "outside," because they were filled with a self-exalting and selfish spirit.

Another manifestation of their self-exalting spirit was the conspicuous lack of genuine service on their part. "For," says Jesus, "they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4).

There was to be no dirt under their fingernails, no mud on their robes. They were simply a group of idle leaders who wanted to be served rather than to serve. No wonder then that Jesus says not to be like them, for from God's vantage point "he who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11).

A third manifestation of their self-exalting spirit was the self-love displayed in their desire to be noticed by people. It was evident also in their attachment to the places of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, as well as in their longing to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have people call out to them: "Teacher, Teacher."

This self-love was in complete contradiction to the Mosaic Law they claimed to keep. Because the whole Mosaic law was summed up in the two first commandments, the greater of which is "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). The other is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

And so these fathers and teachers were not leading their people in love for God and neighbor. Quite the contrary, they showed a self-exalting, selfish spirit full of self-love.

Christ's Verdict

It is precisely because of the stench and shame of the apostasy of these religious leaders that Jesus orders the people: "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." While Father Abraham deserves this title by his faith, as do other titans of Israel's history, these men forfeit their role as fathers. They were to cease and refrain from using these titles and in turn bow before God Himself as the source of all fatherhood.

In pronouncing His warning, Jesus today addresses us with the greatest of all commandments. He directs the fathers and teachers in His Church, as well as all those guided by them, toward love for God and love for neighbor.

What Should We Do?

From the dawn of church history, as it was in Israel, all those anointed by God for some ministry have been called by certain names: prophets, teachers, rabbis (in Israel), and fathers. In the same way other titles appeared such as reverend, pastor, professor, or brother (for some evangelical pastors and Catholic monks). These designations speak simultaneously of warmth and dignity.

Just as in our families there is one who is lovingly called father, so in God's household there are those whom we will continue to honor, who have brought us to new birth through our Lord Jesus Christ. And indeed, what else can we call them but father?

Jesus orders that unworthy men not be called fathers and teachers, so that the leadership of His holy people may remain pure. Whether they are bishops, fathers, teachers, deacons, or pastors, they all must remain faithful to the true teaching of Christ and demonstrate a character of appropriately devout humility that leads the Church in love for God — the Holy Trinity — and for neighbor.

As a priest, I myself find a certain personal peace in calling a priest older than me "father," because I truly regard him as such. In the parish this title represents a warm and intimate dividing line that highlights (rather than separates) those in the Body of Christ who are called to lead and extend their care.

During our journey, when we agreed to use the word "father" as the proper designation of a priest, we informed people that they were free to continue using the title "pastor" if they found it more comfortable. Soon the more natural designation became "father," and this is what is used to this day.

From this arose two things. People know there is a "spiritual head of the household" who is there to represent the lordship of Jesus Christ and to convey His mercy and love. In addition to this, being called fathers reminds priests who they are: not simply good speakers or administrators, rulers or counselors, but primarily fathers, dads, of God's people. If they are that, then everything else that they are is in far better perspective.

CHAPTER EIGHT: LOOKING UP TO MARY

We can safely state that no woman in history has been more misunderstood by contemporary Christianity than the Virgin Mary.

Moreover, the most likely reason for a disagreement between two Christians regarding Mary that might remain unresolved will be their stubborn refusal to turn to the biblical evidence.

Not once but at least half a dozen times over the years I have heard Billy Graham say: "We evangelical Christians do not give Mary her due."

His statement raises the primary question regarding Christ's mother. What is her rightful place? Before we turn to Scripture for an answer, let us also be clear about another problem that further complicates our task.

The highly emotionally charged atmosphere that surrounds this topic blunts our objectivity regarding how to receive Mary. Many of us have been nurtured on doubts or aversion to the honor paid her in Christian worship and art. For this reason we often approach with preformed positions. We allow our prejudices to distort our understanding even of the biblical passages that relate to her. We do not let the facts speak for themselves.

When we honestly and openly tried to turn to Mary — and this was by no means easy for us — we first took up the Bible, and specifically the New Testament. Then we turned to the Old Testament as well. While studying them, we did not neglect what the early Church Fathers had to say on the matter. We examined the entire church history, trying to understand not only how she was correctly honored, but also how incorrect dogmas regarding her came to appear.

New Testament Evidence

What does the New Testament teach us then regarding the Virgin Mary? We will find at least four main answers.

Mary is the greatest woman who ever lived.

While our Lord Jesus Christ says there is no greater person on earth than John the Baptist, both the Archangel Gabriel and the devout Elizabeth confess to Mary: *"Blessed are you among women"* (Luke 1:28, 42).

She is the most blessed among women for several reasons, the most important of which is that she conceives, carries, gives birth to, and nurses the very Savior of our souls. The One who today occupies the heavenly throne of David and reigns from the right hand of God the Father takes on human nature and becomes our Savior through her womb. She is the one chosen by the Father to bear His only-begotten Son.

In this role Mary becomes the first person in history to receive and welcome Christ as her Savior. You, like me, are called to enthrone the Lord in your heart and life — to follow Mary's example. Early in Christian history she was called "the first of the redeemed."

I remember how a few years ago I walked into a church in the Chicago suburbs and saw an icon of Mary with open arms, painted right at the front of the central wall above the altar. My first reaction was to wonder why the image of Christ Himself was not in this place of honor, though He was depicted in a large circle above her heart.

When I asked why she was depicted in this place of honor, the theologian with me explained:

"This is one of the most evangelistic icons in the entire Church. What you see is Christ living as Lord in Mary's life, and her open arms are an invitation to you and me to let Him live in our lives as well, just as He did in hers."

The power of that icon lives on in my mind to this day. Because it gives for all of us the example of personally and completely surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ.

Mary is blessed also because she obtained God's *favor*. Gabriel's greeting to her is: *"Rejoice, highly favored one! The Lord is with you..."* (Luke 1:28). Then he reassures her: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God"* (Luke 1:30, emphasis mine).

What must a person do to become one of God's favorites, to be singled out by Him? Remember Cornelius from Acts chapter 10? He becomes the first Gentile to convert to Christ, "a devout man and one who feared God... who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2). Two verses further he receives a vision and hears: "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God." The Lord notices his devout deeds and brings him salvation. Similarly, Mary's purity obtains God's favor and she is chosen to bear His Son.

Am I implying that human merit can earn salvation? Absolutely not. As commendable as it is for us to live in purity, a devout life can never by itself merit salvation. Otherwise why is Mary called the first of the redeemed, or why must Cornelius be baptized by St. Peter? But prayer and devotion do attract God's attention. When we seek Him with all our heart, we find Him! When we give Him everything we have, our whole life, we will obtain God's favor. This is exactly what Mary did, and it is precisely for this reason that she is considered the greatest woman on earth.

Mary is our example for the Christian life.

From its very founding the Orthodox Church has taught that Mary is the perfect example, or prototype, of what happens to a person who fully places their faith and trust in God. Everything we strive to become in Christ we find in her. All of us must "receive" Christ (John 1:12), and as we noted above, Mary is the first human being to receive the Savior. Among the millions of decisions "for" Christ, the first is hers. Consequently, whatever promises are contained in Holy Scripture for us, she already possesses.

Our example in obedience. While God certainly knew of Mary's desire to please Him, He does not take her obedience for granted. The Archangel explains to her how she will bear the Savior: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Mary must make her choice. Will she agree? Listen to her answer, for it represents the gateway to the life of spiritual service for all of us. "Behold the maidservant of the Lord," she says. "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Even if we are completely sincere in our desire to follow God, He will never enroll us without our consent! Like Mary, we must freely choose to submit to Him and do His will.

Incidentally, about thirty years later Mary was again given the opportunity to glorify her Lord. Together with Jesus she was at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The servants in charge of the feast discovered that the wine had run out. For Mary there was no doubt who could solve their problem. Turning to her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, she advised the servants: "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). Throughout her life Mary practiced in deed the advice she herself gave the servants. That is why she is our example of Christian obedience.

Our example in purity and holiness. Those of us called holy brethren (Hebrews 3:1) are commanded to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). We must present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Is it so unthinkable that she, whose holy body becomes the vessel for the Incarnate God, should be called "all-holy" by the Church?

If the Church represented by us is called to be without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27), does it not follow from this that she who is the forerunner of the Lord of this Church must be equally holy? Surely we must be able to look at Mary as our example of holiness and purity.

Our example in royalty and intercession. If Holy Scripture declares that all of us are kings (Revelation 1:6), is it so strange that the Church speaks of Mary as Queen? If the Holy Bible promises that you and I will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3), is it so unusual that the Church sings of Mary: "More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim"?

Not only does Mary through God's power and mercy overcome sin and death, but the psalmist also sees her in heaven with prophetic gaze. For in Psalm 45:9 Christ is the King, and Mary is at His right hand as Queen — quite rightly so. If God can make us "kings and priests" (Revelation 1:6) for all eternity, He most certainly possesses the exclusive right to crown her with even greater honor in the royal heavenly procession.

If St. Paul commands us as a holy priesthood to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions... for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18), is it so impious to acknowledge together with the Church that the holy Mary (together with all the saints who have passed from death to life and continually dwell in Christ's presence) intercedes before her Son for all people? Because she is the example of what we all must become.

Mary is the Mother of God.

Here things become a little more sensitive for some of us. This is one of those emotional stumbling blocks I mentioned earlier. Whether we want to accept it or not, the Bible teaches that Mary is the mother of God. Let us first get acquainted with the text, then discuss why this title is so important for our lives as Christians in the Church.

After Christ was conceived in her womb, the Virgin Mary made a visit to the home of her relatives Zachariah and Elizabeth, who were about to become the parents of John the Baptist. When the Virgin Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth called her blessed and said: "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43, emphasis mine). Elizabeth knew that her Lord, the Messiah of Israel, was God. From her childhood she had known the call: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4). And she knew that her Lord was in Mary's womb.

This title — Mother of God — gained great significance in the fourth century when a heretic named Nestorius, who held a high position in the Church, began claiming that the One conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb was certainly a man but not God. Orthodox Christians unanimously cut in: "Not true!" To receive Jesus Christ as

anything less than the Incarnate God is sub-Christian. For if the One in Mary's womb was not, and is not, God, then we are dead in our sins. And to protect the full Divinity of Christ from encroachment, the Church has always insisted that the Virgin Mary should be called what is correct (and as she revealed herself to Elizabeth) – the Mother of God.

Of course this title does not mean mother of the Holy Trinity, since the Holy Trinity has no mother. Nor does it mean that she gives birth to the Person who is God the Son. It means that the Virgin Mary is the Theotokos (Greek for God-bearer) – the mother of the Son of God who took on full human nature in her womb.

When a man buys a parcel of land and lets his livestock graze on it, he fences it. This is done to protect the livestock, to prevent it from wandering, and to keep out troublemakers. In the same way the Church places dogmatic fences around its foundational truths. And for us nothing is more important and foundational than the Divinity of Christ. Since Jesus Christ is God, we place a high and unyielding fence around His Divinity through our unwavering confession that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God.

And in the same way that we insist on the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, we also insist on the fact that during those nine months when she carried Him in His human form, He was also fully God. Thus we declare boldly and insistently that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God, the Theotokos. To say anything less means siding with those who deny His Divinity.

We must honor the Virgin Mary and call her blessed.

Now comes the most difficult test. The Virgin Mary is not only the most blessed of all women, our example for the Christian life, and the Mother of God, but we are also called to honor her and bless her. Where do we know this from? From the Bible, of course.

During her three-month stay in Elizabeth's home, the Virgin Mary pronounced one of the most beautiful prayers of praise to the Lord in all of Scripture. It begins: "My soul magnifies the Lord..." and today is known as the Magnificat.

In this prayer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary prophesies: "...henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). And of course all generations in church history have done so, except for some of the past two centuries. The majority of American Christians of our generations refuse to bless her, but we will need to change our behavior.

From the very first written records of Christian worship, Orthodox Christians have been at particular pains to honor the Virgin Mary during the liturgy. There is an ancient hymn that begins: "It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos..." In this song she is called "ever-blessed and all-blameless." The biblical prescription for paying honor to the Virgin Mary is taken seriously and observed.

Of course we do not offer worship to the Virgin Mary, since our worship is only before the Holy Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But it is absolutely certain that she must be honored and blessed. And since Jesus Christ is our elder brother, the firstborn among many brethren, we honor the Virgin Mary also as our Mother, our Lady. Just as Eve was the mother of the old Adamic humanity, so the Virgin Mary is the true Mother of the new humanity – the Body of Christ, the Church.

And perhaps partly because we refuse to honor the Virgin Mary, our generations seem to experience difficulty in honoring anyone at all. The next time you watch a presidential press conference on television, for instance, notice carefully how some journalists behave! They are not simply trying to get the facts, but many have gone there deliberately to provoke embarrassment and dishonor.

God's word teaches us to honor the king (1 Peter 2:17) and to outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10), and yet our generations seem to enjoy dishonoring and degrading the other, especially if they are in a position of authority. We Christians who believe the Bible are urged not only to honor those to whom honor is due (see Romans 13:7), we are called by God in an unambiguous way to bless the mother of our God. This place in Scripture cannot be bypassed.

The Old Testament and the Virgin

We know that the Old Testament is more than an inspired chronicle of human history, or more specifically of Israel's history. On its pages, and undoubtedly in a central place in its message, are also the prophecies concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. He is depicted from beginning to end. Moses serves as a type of Christ in that he leads his people from captivity into the promised land. David depicts Christ as King of Israel. Adam is a type of Christ as the head of humanity.

What is often overlooked, however, is the fact that the Virgin Mary is also present on the prophetic pages of the Old Testament. Most Christians know that the prophet Isaiah foretells the virgin conception of Christ by writing: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). But there are also numerous other passages that speak of the Virgin Mary.

Ever Virgin

From the earliest years of the Church, Mary has been called not only Virgin but Ever-Virgin. It is held that she never entered into sexual union with St. Joseph, neither before nor after the birth of Christ. In this connection Ezekiel 44:1-2 is a passage often cited by the early Church Fathers. It says: "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me, 'This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut.'"

According to the traditional interpretation of this passage, the Virgin Mary is the sanctuary and Christ is the Prince of peace. The gate mentioned is understood as an image of the gates of Mary's womb, through which Christ enters our world. You may not find this interpretation in some contemporary commentaries, but it has been upheld by the vast majority of the early Church Fathers, as well as many Reformation leaders and especially Martin Luther.

A Virgin until...

At this point, however, a truly legitimate question might arise. If she remained a virgin, why does the Gospel of Matthew speak of Joseph not knowing his wife *until* she gave birth to the Savior (see Matthew 1:25)?

From a biblical standpoint the presence of the expression "until she brought forth her firstborn Son" does not automatically mean that thereafter Joseph had sexual relations with her. Both in Greek and in Hebrew the word *until* or *until when* can have several meanings. We find it in 2 Samuel 6:23: "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death." It is used again in Matthew 28:20, where the risen Christ says: "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And in Deuteronomy 34:6 we read: "...and no one knows his grave to this day."

Obviously the use of the word in these passages does not imply that Michal had children after her death, that Christ will no longer be with us after the end of the age, or that Moses's grave was discovered after the book of Deuteronomy was written. In the same way, the word *until* in Matthew 1:25 does not mean that St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary began a sexual union after Christ's birth. Such teaching finds no support anywhere in Scripture and contradicts the unanimous voice of the entire ancient Church.

The Brothers and Sisters of Christ

But does not the Bible also mention brothers and sisters of Christ? Who were they and where did they come from?

We do not know for certain, and Scripture nowhere calls them sons and daughters of St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. In several other places the Bible speaks of close

relatives as "brothers." Abraham and Lot are called brothers, although Lot is actually Abraham's nephew. Jacob and Laban are also called brothers, although Jacob is the son of Laban's sister Rebekah.

Scripture is silent as to the nature of the relationships between Christ and these brothers and sisters. The early Fathers also differ slightly in their understanding of the meaning of these words. Some, like St. Ambrose, believed they were children from a previous marriage between St. Joseph and a woman who died before the narrative in Matthew chapter 1. Others taught that they were cousins. But on one point agreement is nearly unanimous — St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary had no sexual union whatsoever, neither before nor after the birth of Jesus Christ.

I must say quite frankly that if my fiancée had been the woman chosen by the Father to bear in the flesh His eternal Son, my view of her would have been completely transformed, and my respect for her would have grown boundlessly. Imagine being engaged to God's mother. That was St. Joseph's situation. His fiancée remained ever a virgin.

Other Traditions — True and False

There are two more beliefs regarding the Virgin Mary that must be briefly mentioned and clarified. One is her bodily assumption into heaven, and the other — her Immaculate Conception.

The Dormition

In the early Christian Church the report circulated widely that shortly after her death, the body of the Virgin Mary was taken up into heaven. In later centuries the Roman Catholic Church declared this tradition to be a dogma, while the Eastern Church refrained from such an official statement. Most Christians agree that such a miracle does not fall outside purely biblical precedents, given examples like Elijah and Enoch. Moreover, no record of any relics of the Holy Virgin is known to exist. The assumption into heaven of Mary's body can safely be accepted and venerated as a historical Christian tradition, even though it is not mentioned in Holy Scripture.

The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, however, is a teaching unknown to the ancient Church and characteristic solely of the modern Roman Catholic Church. As an attempt to remove the Virgin Mary (and protect Jesus Christ) from the taint of sin, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception establishes that the Virgin Mary was conceived and born without original sin. This teaching finds no foundation either in Scripture or in the creeds of the Church.

Whatever other new teachings they have produced throughout history, even the Roman Catholic Church has never officially believed or preached that the Virgin Mary is in any way equal to the Holy Trinity, nor that she should be an object of worship alongside the Trinity. Such accusations are sometimes leveled at the Catholic Church by its critics without being grounded in fact.

Mary and Salvation

Toward the end of the evening service of the Orthodox Church the presider says: "Most Holy Theotokos, save us." Can the Virgin Mary really save us? Yes, and here is why.

Of course we believe that the Virgin Mary is pure and holy, that she reigns with Christ, and even that she prays for us. We know that she surrenders her will to God's will, thus fully participating in God's purpose. And we know that God's explicit intention is to save all who have faith in Christ. We can at least say that the Virgin Mary is concerned for our salvation and desires it. This should be so with all believers.

And so the initial question — "Can the Virgin Mary save us?" — leads to another: "Can we save others?" Again Holy Scripture speaks clearly and unambiguously. Here are a few examples:

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

"...let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

"And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire..." (Jude 22-23).

Fire saves (1 Corinthians 3:15); prayer saves (James 5:15); angels save (Isaiah 63:9); baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21); preaching saves (1 Corinthians 1:21); and the Apostle Paul saves (Romans 11:14).

New life in Christ, or salvation, represents both personal union with Him and being built into the fullness of the Body, which is the Church. Salvation is a church matter, the concern of the entire Church, because we are all affected by it. And therefore in Christ we are all entrusted with a role to play in the overall nature of His saving work.

We do not save by ourselves; nor does the Virgin Mary save by herself. Jesus Christ is our source of salvation. He says: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Also: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

The Virgin Mary plays a unique role in our salvation, because she gave a body to Christ and through this became the "mother" of all those who will be saved. It is precisely for this reason that when He was hanging on the cross, Jesus said to His mother: "Woman, behold your son!" and then turned to St. John: "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27). Understood in this way, does the Mother of God truly save us? Thanks be to God, yes!

Changing Our Positions Regarding Mary

Over the past hundred and fifty years many Christians have been seriously misinformed about the Church's historical attitude toward the Virgin Mary. We have forgotten that she has obtained the Father's favor, that she is the example for you and me — and in fact the flagship for all humanity. She alone gave her flesh to the Son of God and alone must be "*blessed by all generations*" (Luke 1:48).

What we do regarding the Virgin Mary is directly connected to what we do regarding the Church. The community of Christ's followers is called to act together. Taking any action regarding the Virgin Mary is not simply something intimate or personal; it must be in concert with the response of the entire Church.

And where in Christianity has the fullness of truth about the Virgin Mary been preserved? Even most Protestants — both liberal and conservative — know that in their circles she is neglected. The answer for Protestants who take the biblical and historical evidence seriously is found neither in Protestant churches nor in the Roman Catholic Church with its questionable and late dogmatic additions regarding the Virgin Mary.

The answer is in the historical Orthodox Church, which has preserved its biblical faithfulness to the Virgin Mary. The hour has come for all of us who love Christ and take Holy Scripture seriously to engage our hearts and minds to give Mary what is truly due to her in the true Church. To do this, because God has done great things for and through her (Luke 1:49).

As Christians, we do not live by feelings; we live by faith. Let us once and for all rise above those things that the devil has planted in our hearts to estrange us from this wonderful woman who bore our Savior. Bless her in the assembly of God's people. Follow her example in glorifying Christ. Confess her as the Mother of God.

Return to the Church which has kept our holy faith intact. And let us help to bring our generations back to the honoring and blessing of the Virgin Mary, which is also commanded by God.

CHAPTER NINE: A SIGN FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Many years ago, on Easter — I must have been seven or eight years old at the time — we went out to lunch after church at a restaurant. While ordering our meal, I remember looking up and noticing the people at the table across from us bowing their heads in prayer and crossing themselves before the meal. My reaction was astonishment. What could that mean? I thought to myself.

A few years later in the Minneapolis sports arena I was attending one of my first Lakers games. (Yes, the LA Lakers were then called the Minneapolis Lakers. Has anyone heard of a lake in LA?) At one point the center George Mikan stepped up to the free throw line to execute a foul shot and crossed himself before shooting. What is this? I wondered while he scored both times. Is this some kind of "rabbit's foot" gesture? What is this sign of the cross?

Or let us put the question another way. What is the most recognized symbol of all time? Whoever you ask — philosopher, historian, or artist — most likely everyone will answer: "The cross." This so familiar symbol can be found in all areas of every person's life — from the cradle to the grave.

Beyond the influence of the Crucifixion itself, history was dramatically changed by the visual appearance of the cross before the Roman Emperor Constantine. Having witnessed a cross sign in the skies, he converted to the faith and in 312 A.D. ended a long and painful period of persecution against Christians.

How is it possible that two simple lines, which a child can draw, one horizontal and one vertical, can force kings to alter the course of history and at the same time give grieving relatives such hope and comfort as they say their goodbyes at the death of their dearest? Is this merely a symbol? Or can something much more powerful be found in the use of this symbol by Christians? There is far more to the sign of the cross than the majority of twentieth-century Christians have been taught to understand. I personally believe that rediscovering this biblical truth is vitally important for the spiritual health of every Christian.

A Sign of Victory

The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is what makes the cross so powerful, so full of meaning, and so important for our salvation. Our Lord, who took upon Himself in fullness our human nature, also in that same flesh accepted the usual form of Roman crucifixion, making the cross once and for all glory and victory for all Christians.

Scripture says that in His death Christ "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Imagine what unimaginably powerful forces stand between us and death, between us and the clutches of the kingdom of darkness, between us and eternal punishment. Yes, the cross is more than a secular decoration: it is the weapon of peace that liberates us from the slavery of sin, death, and the devil.

No wonder the Apostle Paul declares with faith: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). The reality of the cross was imprinted on the soul of the holy apostle, who managed to withstand the plots of the evil one and finish the race to the end. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

A Sign for All Ages

Let us for a moment set aside all our preconceptions or prior attitudes, which we probably have, regarding the use of the sign of the cross. Let us go back to the centuries when the Church was not divided, and see whether those early Christians held the same strong convictions about the cross as the Apostle Paul.

In the second century of Christianity we encounter Tertullian (145-220 A.D.), who says: "In all our travels and movements, in all our comings and goings, when we put on our clothes, when we are in the bath, when we light our candles, when we lie down, when we sit, whatever activity we may be engaged in, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross" (*De Corona Militis*, chapter 3).

A century later, the glorious St. Athanasius writes: "By the sign of the cross... every curse is restrained, every sorcery is destroyed, idols are abandoned and forsaken, every senseless passion ceases, when the eye of faith looks from earth to heaven" (*On the Incarnation*, IV, 31).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.) was even more insistent about using the sign of the cross: "Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Let the cross, as our seal, be boldly imprinted on our foreheads on every occasion: over the bread we eat, over the cup we drink; at all our comings and goings; before sleep; when we lie down and when we rise; when we are traveling and when we are at rest. It is a great protection; it costs nothing for the poor; it is not laborious for the sick; for it is a gracious gift from God, a badge for the faithful, and a terror to demons; for He displayed them openly, triumphing over them through it (Colossians 2:15). For when they see the cross, they remember the Crucified; they are afraid of Him who crushed the heads of the dragon (Psalm 74:13). Do not despise the cross as a free gift, but for that very reason honor your Lord all the more" (*Catechesis*, XIII, chapter 36).

Even Martin Luther, who is called the father of the Protestant Reformation, called his congregation to use the sign of the cross. For instance, in his instructions on morning prayer he writes: "In the morning, when you rise, make the sign of the cross and say: In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen" (Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, VII, 1).

The Neglected Sign

Astonishingly, it was only from the seventeenth century, in the time of King James, that a small group of Puritans began writing and preaching against the use of the sign of the cross. Reacting against the failings of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, they considered it a human invention designed to appease the superstitious. These same English Puritans, who significantly influenced the North American continent, renounced one of the most powerful and valuable weapons in the entire history of the Church. Their mentor was Romophobia.

And today many Americans are misled by the actions of a vocal minority and feel ashamed of the glory of the sign of the cross imprinted on their chests. Thirsting, however, for a way to physically express their attachment to Christ, many of those who reject imprinting the sign of the cross have gone as far as creating their own Christian signs or gestures.

I remember quite well the days of the "Jesus Movement," when many of us were trying to devise a universally accessible sign to use to distinguish ourselves from the student movement that powerfully employed the peace sign. One day in 1970 a close friend of mine hit upon the idea for the "one way" sign, inspired by the teaching that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Thousands of posters were printed and distributed and soon this "one way" sign began to be used by Christians around the world. Even Billy Graham was photographed demonstrating the sign in a national magazine.

The "one way" did help Christians identify with each other. But it didn't last long. I still see it used by a few veterans, but it will soon disappear entirely. Why? Because it was not orthodox; it was not the sign of the Church. It was not the sign of the cross. The distinctive symbol of Jesus is not a raised index finger but the cross: the true sign of every Christian.

Imprinting signs on oneself is not something exclusively Christian. In 1892 the government of the United States adopted a ceremony from a patriotic magazine called *The Youth's Companion*, and shortly thereafter decreed by law that every student in the public education system salute the American flag. Until very recently students were expelled from classrooms if they refused to honor their country in this way. Even today most American Christians would question the loyalty of anyone who refuses the patriotic placing of hand on heart as a salute to the national flag. And yet many of these same Christians take offense and feel ashamed to imprint the sign of the cross on their chests. They refuse to use it and dismiss it as some Catholic or pagan remnant. Thus the loss they incur is all the greater!

A Sign with Power

While some say that signs have no actual power, they have always been important for God's people. Remember the incident with the first Passover as described in the Old Testament? God commands the Israelites to *"take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it"* (Exodus 12:7). He promises: *"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 12:12-13).

What is remarkable here is that the doorposts marked with blood were not a mere symbol. They were a powerful sign — so powerful that they prevented the destroying angel from striking the firstborn of Israel. Imagine then what the power is of the life-giving cross, which bore the death of the Savior, when we imprint it over our hearts.

Remember the time in the wilderness when the children of Israel were dying from the bites of venomous snakes because of their disobedience. And God commanded Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). As incredible as it sounds to the modern person, the people who looked survived. This is precisely what Jesus was teaching the Pharisee Nicodemus when He said: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up..." (John 3:14).

Lifted up on what? On the cross! Doctors to this day use the symbol of the Mosaic staff with the serpent as the sign of healers. How much more will those who bear Christ's sign of the cross receive healing? That is precisely why the Apostle Paul boasts in the cross.

The Sign Upon Ourselves

Through Christ's cross Satan was struck, our sins were blotted out, our debt was paid in full. By identifying with the cross, we are as if presenting our new passport to sin, death, and the evil one. And when temptation comes, or when our body wants to prevail with its passions, if we physically imprint the cross upon ourselves, this sets in motion its power like a released arrow.

Let us look the facts in the face! We Christians imprint the cross on our church buildings, on our Bibles, on our tombstones, we wear it on a chain and more. But what do you say about also using it upon ourselves?

And how is the sign of the cross traditionally imprinted by Orthodox Christians? We press the thumb, index finger, and middle finger of our right hand together, extended toward one another. This reminds us of the Holy Trinity. The other two fingers are folded toward the palm — this speaks of the two natures of Jesus Christ: His full Divinity and His full human nature. Holding our hand in this way, we touch in succession first our forehead, chest, right shoulder, and finally left shoulder. In this way we apply the cross to our minds, hearts, and strength.

During our journey toward Orthodoxy, Jack Sparks wrote an article entitled "The Sign of the Cross." He summarized the central place of the sign of the cross as follows:

1. It has been and continues to be a practice of the majority of Christians, many of whom have died for the faith and for the preservation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in which you believe. If we truly believe in the words of our Lord in John chapter seventeen, that the Church should be one, why not use the sign of the cross as our predecessors did?
2. We freely use the sign of the cross on our church buildings, on the lectern, on our altars, on our brochures, and printed on our Bibles. Why not use it also on ourselves — the people for whom Christ died?
3. Imprinting the sign of the cross gives us a personal physical and visible means to glorify the cross. In addition to performing the specific action, a person is compelled to glorify Christ's cross mentally as well. We use our voices and lips to declare the cross to those around us. Why hold back our hands, which are also a gift from God, to do the same? All of this is part of glorifying God in our bodies. (Jack Sparks, "The Sign of the Cross," *New Oxford Review*, January-February, 1982.)

If only we used the sign to express our reverence to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — to remind ourselves of God's presence — that would take us far along the path of doing good and refraining from sin. For the cross is our weapon of peace and our power to live a holier life. Satan and his demons fear the cross. Therefore imprinting it can be a protective means for God's children.

The fourth-century saint John Chrysostom says: "When, therefore, you make the sign of the cross, think of the great significance of the cross and extinguish all anger and all other passions. Reckon with the price that has been paid for you" (*Commentary on Matthew*, Homily 54).

The sign of the cross is for all Christians!

PART THREE: THE GREAT ENTRANCE

CHAPTER TEN: A DECADE OF DECISIONS

Unlike almost everyone else who has found it, we discovered the Orthodox Church in the history books. We were studying the New Testament, the early Church Fathers, the Councils, and the Great Schism. We made our choice. The East had preserved the fullness of apostolic Christianity.

But we had yet to encounter the Orthodox Church as it existed in our own time. What did it look like? Would it accept us? And most importantly, was it alive, committed, spiritually vital — in short, was it still Orthodox?

First Contacts

John Bartke had grown up as a member of a conservative Presbyterian congregation, with his family later moving to the Free Evangelical Church. During his second-to-last year of high school in 1969, he happened upon a Bible study group led by Jack Sparks in Berkeley, California. For two years, until he entered university, John was a regular participant in this group. He eventually found his name on the mailing list of the Christian World Liberation Front, an organization founded by Jack Sparks as an effort to reach the counterculture in Berkeley.

As a result of his own personal searching for a deeper ecclesial experience, Bartke became an Orthodox Christian just before his final year as a student. After finishing university he went directly to Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, located in the New York suburbs — an institution under the direction of the Orthodox Church in America, the American offshoot of the Russian Orthodox Church. He remained on the mailing list of the Christian World Liberation Front. By 1976 the Front's correspondence began looking increasingly Orthodox. There was talk of sacraments, councils, and creeds. Bartke wrote to his old Bible teacher with a request for more information. In early 1977 Jack Sparks sent some preliminary research with the explicit understanding that it not be shown to anyone: they were still unedited first drafts. John read them and without delay took them to Father Alexander Schmemmann, dean of the Seminary. "These things are Orthodox!" John announced to Father Schmemmann, having informed him of his friendship with Jack Sparks.

Father Schmemmann in turn got in touch with Bishop Dmitri, who as a young man had converted to Orthodoxy from being a Southern Baptist from Texas. At that time he was governing the Western Diocese of the Orthodox Church in America.

"Several of these men live around Santa Barbara. They are a group of evangelicals who seem to be discovering the Orthodox Church," Father Schmemmann explained. "Could you visit them?"

Later that spring Bishop Dmitri called Father Theodore Wojcik, pastor of Saint Innocent Orthodox Church in the Los Angeles suburb of Tarzana, and asked him to visit Santa Barbara. Because of Lent, followed by graduations and summer vacation, Fr. Ted Wojcik was able to make the trip only in early fall.

When he arrived in Santa Barbara in the fall of 1977, Father Ted stopped at a telephone booth, called the Sparks home, and found that Jack was conducting classes at the newly opened Academy for Orthodox Theology. Father Richard Ballew recalls how right in the middle of his lecture on the Arian controversy, "this priest walked into the auditorium, unknown to all of us, quietly sat down and listened to the lecture together with the students. After that we introduced ourselves and we invited Father Ted to lunch." That was our first contact with an Orthodox Christian and the beginning of a long and lasting friendship.

In 1977, two important steps were taken in a positive direction. First, Ken Berven launched our publishing initiative, Conciliar Press, and began publishing a periodical — the quarterly *Again*. This provided us with immediate and effective publishing contact with both evangelicals and Orthodox Christians. Second, we founded in Santa Barbara the Academy for Orthodox Theology (later named after St. Athanasius) with the aim of concentrating in one place a community of scholars who would research the Orthodox faith, translate, and train the young. In 1978 we invited Bishop Dmitri to speak to our students during his visit to Santa Barbara.

Earlier in 1978 a group of us traveled to Saint Innocent Church in Tarzana to attend a service during Holy Week. At Saint Innocent we saw live everything we had read about. But from a cultural point of view the service seemed light years away from us. By the time the bishop arrived, we were already gasping with questions.

"Why do they repeat 'Lord have mercy' so often?"

"Tell us more about the priests' vestments."

"What do all those ordered candles mean?"

"Is there incense at every service?"

Being himself acquainted with evangelical Protestantism, the bishop understood our cultural shock. We were accepting the basic teachings of this ancient faith, but the detailed rules of liturgical worship simply were not in the history books.

"Let us start with our faith in Christ," Bishop Dmitri advised us. "We need to be sure we are in agreement on the question posed by our Lord Himself: Who do people say that I am? If we are unanimous that He was born of the Father before all ages, that He became incarnate in Mary's womb and is the Savior of our souls, everything else in Orthodox Christianity will fall into place. Because everything we do here is connected specifically to Christ — the vestments, the prayers, the icons, everything."

We discussed in detail the teaching on Christ and were in complete agreement. Categorically! From the dogma of the Incarnation we arrived at the other things that accompany it. And piece by piece, truth by truth, a comprehensive picture began to take shape.

In 1978 several of us had the opportunity to visit Saint Vladimir's Seminary in New York. Still full of questions and learning the protocol (how patient they are there!), we were warmly greeted by Metropolitan Theodosius, head of the Orthodox Church in America, and Professors Alexander Schmemmann, John Meyendorff, Thomas Hopko, Paul Lazor, and Veselin Kesich. Most of these men also came periodically to teach at St. Athanasius, Santa Barbara. We are filled with memories of wonderful conversations, full of inspiration, instruction, and laughter with each of these brothers. But let me highlight at least one of them: that champion for Christ, Father Alexander Schmemmann.

He was a true statesman in the Kingdom of God (this truly could have been, but he went to be with the Lord in 1983). A heavy lump catches in my throat when I write about this blessed man. Speaking humanly, if it can be said that any one person "brought us to the Church" (as some would say "so-and-so brought me to Christ"), Father Alexander was the pivotal point that brought us to the Orthodox Church of the twentieth century.

Three times he traveled west to be with us in Santa Barbara. By the time of his first visit in late 1978, we had arrived in our tracing of Church history at the point where after 1054 we had taken the side of the East. Doctrinally we were on our way to becoming Orthodox. We had the conviction in our heads, somewhat in our hearts, but liturgically we practiced very little of what we had learned. Our sanctuary, for example, was little more than four bare walls with a lectern.

Somehow Father Alexander was not put off by our lack of expressiveness and managed to see into the depths of our minds and hearts. It was love at first sight, and mutual. After the trip he even told his wife, Juliana: "They are Orthodox, they just haven't quite realized it yet."

Of course, while he was with us, we asked for some guidance. Now, looking back, I understand that he was very careful not to give or teach us more than we could bear.

"It would benefit you to build an altar and place some icons," he advised us.

By the time of his next visit in early 1981, we had already built the altar, and on the wall next to it, one on each side, were two small icons, slightly larger than postcards — one of the Savior and one of the Virgin Mary. With exceptional pride at our remarkable progress, I led Father to our sanctuary and to the altar. He finally came close enough to squint and notice our icon embellishments. He smiled.

"Well, now I can go home and report that you are no longer actively opposed to icons!"

There were days when he simply laughed us into Orthodoxy.

It was during this second visit that he gave us another piece of guidance, which proved to be a pivotal point for the rest of our journey. Speaking before our synodal council about the various Orthodox jurisdictions in North America, he advised us:

"Do not limit yourselves to getting to know only the Orthodox Church in America. When the moment comes to join Orthodoxy, you will be joining the whole Church. So get to know the Greeks, the Antiochians, the Serbs."

A Widening Circle of Friends

Around the same time, one of our presbyters in the Midwest had met a Greek Orthodox priest, Father James Karellas, who, our brother noted, "preached just like an evangelist." On my next trip in that direction, a meeting with Father Jim was arranged. I know this is not the only indicator, but when you talk with a fellow pastor about Jesus Christ and your eyes fill with tears, you can rightly suspect you have found a true brother in spirit.

"One person you absolutely must meet is Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh," Father Jim told me after listening to our story. "This man has a genuine vision for Orthodoxy

in America and loves those who have converted to it from other confessions."

Two months later I had to travel to Pittsburgh, so I made a mental note and later called there to arrange a meeting.

The phrase I always use to describe Bishop Maximos is "Christ-loving," a term he himself often uses. I tell people he is half man, half angel. As we conversed in his beautiful early twentieth-century residence on Ellsworth Avenue in Pittsburgh, he asked me if I could come back to the city and speak to the students of his diocese about my commitment to Christ and to the Church.

This university gathering several months later remained one of the spiritual milestones of my life. Nearly two hundred students, Orthodox from birth, gathered to hear about our journey. Quite a few of them subsequently testified to me that that evening they committed themselves to the Lord in a new way. A young man who had just returned to the city from a two-month trip around the country remarked:

"Father, you gave me the kick in the pants I so badly needed!"

Two more memories stand out from that same trip. The following evening I spoke before a group of laypersons at Saint Nicholas Cathedral. After my presentation I began answering questions. One lady observed:

"I cannot believe that according to you we should participate in the service and take communion every week. My grandmother taught me that we are not worthy to take communion more than once or twice a year."

"If it were a matter of our own worthiness, we could never come to Christ," I replied. "But because of our union with Him, He has directed us along the path of renewal. Therefore, through His grace and His mercy, we are called to a whole life of unceasing communion with Him." And just as I was concluding with the words:

"Perhaps His Eminence would also like to comment on this" — I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the Bishop was already making his way to the pulpit. And as he called his flock to a deeper commitment to Christ, I found that in addition to his love for God, he also felt a hatred of minimalism. In fact, when the crowd dispersed, I even went to check whether the lectern had cracked, since the pastor's fist had twice descended heavily upon it during his teaching. (I'm happy to think I noticed at least one hairline crack in the wood pattern!)

The next day I was again at the Bishop's residence, giving a talk on a portion of the Epistle to the Romans before a group of laypersons and priests. Someone interrupted my presentation to declare that as Orthodox Christians, everything they needed to hear was in the liturgy, and that there was no need to know the Bible. This time I did not get the opportunity to respond. Bishop Maximos had jumped to his feet to set things straight, starting in English and finishing in Greek! I have no idea about everything he said, but as in New Testament times, the intruder "dared not trouble him anymore."

The truth is that in any group, political or primitive, Baptist or Byzantine, there are those who are on fire and those who are lukewarm. Under "Bishop Max's" leadership the Pittsburgh Diocese had undergone a wonderful revival. From him I have learned how to encourage people toward love and good deeds.

Our next contact with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese took place the following year at the Holy Cross Seminary in Boston. A group of us were invited for dialogue with the faculty leadership. Dean Father Alkiviadis Calivas hosted the meeting, which included Fathers Stanley Harakas, Theodore Stylianopoulos, Tom Fitzgerald (a convert!), George Papadimitriou, and Michael Vapouris, as well as a considerable number of priests from the Boston region. Before our second visit to the same seminary I also met and visited Archbishop Iakovos in New York, together with his kind assistant, the late Father Alexander Doumouras.

During that same period of time I was doing everything possible to arrange a meeting with the man about whom so many people shared wonderful impressions — Metropolitan Philip Saliba, head of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America. In fact someone from the Holy Cross Seminary had even made the prediction that in the end the door through which we would enter Orthodoxy would be that of the Antiochian Church. But at least three times when I was in New York, Metropolitan Philip turned out to be somewhere else. We kept failing to match our schedules.

Byzantine Intrigues

Our mutual courting with the Orthodox Church had progressed considerably. But as with all love relationships, there are two possible ways of spoiling things. On the one hand, the wedding can be planned too soon, without the couple having enough time to get to know each other. We were confident that if we erred, it would not be in this direction. The other mistake, of course, is to wait too long. In this second scenario the relationship drags on so long that the lovers risk falling out of love.

In 1985 we gathered, already as the Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church. According to Father Gordon Walker, to wait any longer before taking some concrete steps toward reception into the Orthodox Church would mean risking a falling away.

"Let me make a proposal," he began. "I think we should call Bishop Maximos right here from the conference itself and ask him to arrange a trip for us to Constantinople. With so many Orthodox jurisdictions in America, in my opinion we must present ourselves directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch and seek his guidance on how we should be received into the Church. It is clear that as Ecumenical Patriarch, he can give us specific directions, rather than us trying on our own to decide what to do."

After a comparatively brief discussion everyone agreed that this was the course we should follow. I glanced at my watch. We were in California, and in Pittsburgh it was three hours later.

"It's too late to call now," I said. "I'll call Bishop Max in the morning."

At exactly that moment Tom Webster entered the room and handed me a note: "Marilyn calling. Bishop Maximos is trying to reach Father Gordon. He should call him back."

"Thank you, Lord!" I whispered under my breath.

"Good morning, Your Eminence!" Father Gordon began at 7:00 the next morning, with me on the extension. "I understand you called. And I think we have some news you would be glad to hear."

Bishop Max had called to invite Father Gordon as a speaker at a renewal conference and was overjoyed when he learned of our decision regarding Constantinople. He went out and started making initial arrangements through the New York office of the archdiocese.

"These dates are excellent! If we go in early August, we can spend the afternoon of Pentecost on the island of Halki, where I studied at the seminary. This will also be the seventh anniversary of my consecration to the episcopate," said Bishop Maximos later. "There is no place on earth where I would rather be on Pentecost Sunday."

All nineteen of us who were serving as bishops in the Evangelical Orthodox Church returned to our homes after the synodal meeting and immediately started arranging our passports and passing the hat for voluntary contributions for the flights, accommodation, and a monetary gift to the Patriarchate. Then each of us had to present a gift representative of his part of North America — an Eskimo craft from Alaska, a crate of fruit from the Northwest, an illustrated book from Nashville.

In April 1985 we had a visit from John Bartke, now a priest, assigned as pastor to St. Michael's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Van Nuys, California.

"We've just received word that the Antiochian Patriarch Ignatius IV will be here in LA at the end of June or beginning of July. Metropolitan Philip will be with him. I would like to arrange a meeting for you to see them," he informed us.

I was not sure exactly how to respond. On the one hand I had repeatedly tried to meet with Metropolitan Philip, and here an opportunity was presenting itself to meet the Patriarch as well. But on the other hand we had decided to travel to Constantinople and I did not want things to look as if we were hedging on both sides and looking for the "best deal."

While I was weighing my response, Father John interrupted me:

"Look, I know you're on your way to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch, and it's entirely likely that he will give you the guidance you need for your entry into the Church. If nothing else, at least bring some of your men with you and as a courtesy come to get acquainted with the Patriarch and the Metropolitan. After all, it will always be important for you to have met with the leaders of the Antiochian Church."

"You're absolutely right," I replied. "Put us in the schedule and call me with the date and place."

In May, Marilyn and I had planned a four-day trip to New York for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

"There is an official visit I would like to make," I shared with her. "But I won't plan it unless you also agree."

"And what is it?" she asked, knowing we had limited time.

"I would like to stop briefly to meet with Archbishop Iakovos and ask him for his blessing for our trip to Constantinople."

"I would love to meet him," she agreed.

I called his secretary and arranged a meeting. The next day, however, we received a call with the news that he had rescheduled one of his meetings and would like to see us over lunch on the Friday of our arrival. He had already given his approval for Bishop Maximos to head our delegation to the Patriarchate, but somehow I wanted to personally assure him of the sincerity of our journey.

On the scheduled Friday in May we arrived at the headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in New York, to learn that the Archbishop had fallen ill with the flu that morning and gone home. We were given a warm welcome by some of the other hierarchs and left a gift for Archbishop Iakovos, along with wishes for a quick recovery. Then we took the train to Crestwood for the Friday evening service at Saint Vladimir's and spent the rest of the week celebrating our twenty-five wonderful years of married life.

The morning of the day before our departure for Constantinople I was at home helping with the children's breakfast when the phone rang. It was Bishop Maximos. His voice sounded deeply disappointed.

"I don't know what happened," he said, "but the Archbishop won't let me come with you. I recommend that instead of me, Father Gregory Wingenbach accompany you."

When Orthodox people joke about such sudden changes, they call it Byzantine intrigues. It happens when unexpected events occur at the highest hierarchical levels of the Church and seemingly no one knows the reasons for it. But all this was entirely new to us. And the joke wasn't funny at all.

I called Father Gregory, with whom we had been close friends for years, and he was equally puzzled.

"The Lord's hand is still upon this work," he assured me. "The Bishop is heartbroken about missing his anniversary at Halki with us, but he promised to call us Sunday evening at the hotel. I'll meet tomorrow evening at Kennedy Airport with those of you who will be flying through New York."

I reminded myself that when you're an archbishop, sometimes you have to change your decisions.

The next day, all of those of us who were traveling together from Santa Barbara jumped into a rented car and headed up the 101 and 405 freeways to Los Angeles International Airport. We were to meet Father Wingenbach and the other bishops of the Evangelical Orthodox Church traveling from the Eastern states in London, spend the night there, and fly to Constantinople the next day.

What I didn't learn until I returned home two weeks later was that at the last moment Archbishop Iakovos had sent me a telegram informing me that "we must postpone the journey for another time." The telegram had arrived after we were already airborne, flying over the pole from Los Angeles International Airport to London.

After that we learned that some Greek Orthodox clergy along with one member of the Greek government had been firmly against our going to Constantinople and entering the Church. According to our information, they thought that somehow we would "dilute" Orthodoxy in America to an almost pop-version of the ancient faith and would not support adherence to Hellenic culture in the parishes. One report even suggested we had gone "to take over the Church."

The majority of our delegation learned on the way to New York or London that Bishop Maximos would not be coming with us and that we might not even be received by the Patriarch. In my view, if we were going to fail in our mission, at least let us do so boldly. And so we simply continued hoping that things would somehow work out.

Yet another surprise awaited us. We were arriving in Constantinople during Ramadan — a time when many Muslims fast all day and then stay up all night eating, drinking, and making noise! Then around three in the morning they pray and make even more noise. And in June it is so hot there that if your hotel has no air conditioning, you need to keep your windows open all night. And since we were in one of the oldest hotels in the "historic" part of this ancient city, and since the bathrooms emitted an ominous odor, we had almost no choice. In Constantinople you can either close the windows and not sleep because of the heat and smells, or open them and not sleep because of the noise. And on some nights it is so hot that you can't sleep for both reasons!

In Constantinople another key figure joined us — our neighbor Dr. Apostolos Athanassakis, chairman of the Classics Department at the University of California at Santa Barbara. He was spending the year at the University of Crete and flew to Istanbul to meet us. Dr. Apostolos had close friends in both the Turkish government and the Patriarchate. In addition he proved an excellent and diplomatically sensitive interpreter for us. His assistance was invaluable.

Two days after our arrival came Pentecost Sunday. We rose early, took the rented bus to the Patriarchate, and participated in the service of this great feast at Saint George's Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch, Demetrios, was there together with the synod of metropolitans at his two sides. The twenty-odd of us stood opposite them on the carved chairs or on the stone floor. The customarily lengthy liturgy was lengthened further by the beautiful Pentecostal kneeling prayers. Father Gregory Wingenbach had an English translation of the service and passed it around among us as we knelt together on the stone floor of the church.

After the liturgy we received the antidoron — blessed bread — from the Patriarch's hand. Father Gregory quickly explained in Greek who we were. By that point the Patriarch was fully briefed on us. Although we understood it was quite unlikely for our entire group to have the opportunity for the dialogue we had come to conduct, we expected at least a brief courteous meeting. But nothing of the sort followed.

Instead the Patriarch and synod of metropolitans began leaving the church, leaving us standing alone. Father Gordon Walker burst out:

"What are they doing?" he turned to Father Gregory. "Does this mean we have spent fifty thousand dollars and traveled thousands of miles just to watch them turn their backs and leave? If we were Muslims, they would have treated us more honorably! Father Gregory, ask them to come back and at least talk with us!"

Father Gregory immediately hurried after them and engaged in an animated discussion with some of the metropolitans. A few moments later Metropolitans Chrysostomos and Bartholomew kindly returned to speak with us. They greeted us in the name of the Patriarch, but said no conversation of any kind could be arranged with him, nor any meeting. They began urging us to return home and continue our conversations there.

After a brief pause for photos in front of the iconostasis of Saint George's Church, we headed back to the bus. Heated discussions and arguments broke out. Father Gregory selflessly tried to remain loyal to his hierarchs while trying to understand and comfort us in our disappointment and despair.

That same afternoon the travel company that had arranged our trip had hired a private ferry to take us up the Bosphorus to the Black Sea and back. No one felt much like going. We were too crushed in spirit to enjoy the trip. But refusing would have hurt the local people who had planned the outing, so we went ahead with it. It turned out to be a fitting way of soothing our wounded feelings.

On Sunday evening we held a meeting in the hotel annex provided for our synodal sessions. The hall was spacious and all four walls were glass, giving us a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree panorama of old Constantinople. Our memories are marked by the sad but beautiful view of the numerous domes of churches long since closed by the Turks. What a city and culture this must once have been!

At our synodal meeting that evening we decided to make one last desperate attempt to see the Patriarch or at least his representatives in an official meeting. We asked Dr. Athanassakis (whose surname means "little Athanasius") to write a petition to the Patriarch on our behalf and personally deliver it to him. Several of us worked with him for several hours until we composed a beautiful letter in English, which he then translated into official Greek.

Monday morning he set out for the Patriarchate, to find that both metropolitans, Chrysostomos and Bartholomew, were celebrating the Pentecost liturgy in distant suburbs. He spent the entire day in taxis traveling to various churches and personally approaching these men. In response they invited us to send representatives to a meeting at the Patriarchate the next day, Tuesday.

Meanwhile all the rest of us boarded a large ferry to Halki Island to visit the seminary where Bishop Maximos had studied, which had been closed for years by the Turks. From the pier to the institution we traveled by horse-drawn carriages and I will always remember the unparalleled view of the bay from the seminary on top of the hill. But even more, we will remember the kind hospitality shown by the already late Metropolitan Maximos — a devout man who was spending his last days there in what was practically solitude. This incredibly beautiful building with its incomparable library containing ancient manuscripts in uncial Greek script is under Turkish administration and no longer accessible for Church use.

Tuesday morning, I chose Richard Ballew, who at that time was serving as Bishop of the Western Archdiocese of the Evangelical Orthodox Church, and Gordon Walker, who was serving as Bishop of the Eastern Archdiocese, to go with me to the Patriarchate. Tom Webster and Mark Dunaway came along to help carry the many heavy crates of gifts and to take photographs. Dr. Athanassakis and Father Gregory Wingenbach also accompanied us as interpreter and liaison.

Dr. Athanassakis had done his work completely. Our one-hour meeting with Metropolitan Chrysostomos and Metropolitan Bartholomew was warm and cordial. We showed them photographs of our congregations and presented our gifts, which included a check for three thousand dollars. The metropolitans said the money would be used for an orphanage near Istanbul. The final result, however, was the same as on Sunday. No meaningful recommendation or assistance for our reception into the Orthodox Church had been given.

All that remained was to make a few tourist tours of this beautiful and ancient city, including awe-inspiring visits to Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. Toward the end of our stay we flew to Thessaloniki, Greece, and from there to Athens, before boarding the plane for home.

Instead of New York, we deliberately landed in Boston. By the gracious invitation of the faculty, we had decided to return to the Holy Cross Seminary for our synodal meeting — by common consent to discuss the recommendations received from Constantinople and together decide what to undertake in response. But there was nothing to respond to.

The morning after our arrival in Boston, we gathered in the conference room of the Seminary. Never in my entire life have I been more grateful that no recording was made of one of our meetings. That was the time we came closest to collectively turning our backs on the Orthodox Church. But to leave the Church you would have to leave the faith, and that we could not do. We already knew too much. And besides, there was nowhere else to go.

When later that day we were leaving the administrative building in various degrees of despair, we looked up and there was Bishop Maximos! Like Christ Himself, he was not going to abandon or forget us. Joining us for dinner, he reminded us to continue seeking God's will. God bless you, Your Eminence!

The flight from Boston's Logan Airport to our various destinations was very quiet for all of us. I can personally testify that it was exceptionally oppressive for those of us traveling to LA. This was the end of the most grandiose journey any of us had ever undertaken. The ancient churches were magnificent. In Thessaloniki all of us gathered and prayed at the place where the holy Apostle Paul had stood and preached when he first came to that city. That day I rededicated my life to Christ and the preaching of His Gospel, accompanied by a wonderful sense of God's presence.

On another day we sang the Thrice-Holy together, tears streaming down our faces with joy, before the altar area of the oldest known church building in Christianity, just outside Constantinople. Christians had been singing this hymn there for hundreds and hundreds of years. Some of the other tourists also wept, and I'm not sure they even knew why.

Our entire journey was like that, one spiritual height after another. Yet this remained an enormous loss. We had knocked on the door of Orthodoxy so hard our knuckles were bleeding. There had been discussions, nods, and jokes, but not a single invitation to enter the sheepfold of the Church. Or as they say in the West, we were not offered a cigar.

Back home even sunny Santa Barbara looked gray.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: WELCOME HOME

"Hold on!" I said. John Brown, Richard Ballew, and I were sitting together with Jack Sparks in his backyard on Sunday afternoon — two days after the flights from Constantinople to Boston and we were still recovering from the time zone change. "Do you remember that in three days we have an appointment and will be meeting with the Antiochian Patriarch?"

"At least we won't have to fly halfway around the world to keep it," someone muttered.

"I had already forgotten about that," someone else put in.

The anticipation gave us just enough encouragement to get through the rest of the day. And the next. And the one after.

It was Wednesday when Bishops Brown, Ballew, and I set out at sunrise for Los Angeles. Jack Sparks stayed home because of his increasingly bad back.

"Do you know what I think we should do today?" John Brown asked. "I think we should have fun!"

"What has gotten into you?" I asked. Both Bishop Richard and I braced ourselves for the most terrible philosophical reasoning we would hear all week.

"We all went to Constantinople very serious, worried about how to greet everyone, where to stand, when to sit. Let's just be ourselves today and enjoy it."

Neither Bishop Richard nor I could say anything. "Let him sing," I thought to myself. He did.

"Here, for instance, is what I will personally do. I'll say to Metropolitan Philip: 'Your Eminence, I'm thrilled to meet you.' And I'll mean it. And I won't act either religious, or stuffy, or even pious." ("As if you usually do," I mouthed silently.) "I'm just planning to walk in there and be enthusiastic, and if the Patriarch and the Metropolitan like our program — fine. And if not, well... that's fine too. Then we'll find another Patriarch and another Metropolitan somewhere else. But I'll tell you one thing — I'm tired of all this tension. I'm planning to just be myself and have fun."

By this point the two of us were already beginning to catch his mood. We perfectly understood that we needed to shake off the dark cloud of Constantinople. It would have been insulting both to these hierarchs and to the people of the Evangelical Orthodox Church we represented to simply walk in there humbly. It was time to shake off the despondency and take action. And one more thing — we agreed to avoid chewing on the tough morsel if asked about Constantinople. After all, we still hadn't understood why our mission had failed. We would tell what we knew: nothing came of it. We would avoid interpretations or accusations.

Just after we stepped through the enormous glass doors of the Sheraton Universal Hotel, we met Dr. Fred Milkie, who had been appointed to greet us and take us to the Patriarch's suite on the seventh floor. Dr. Milkie is a tall and intriguing personality with a warm smile — exactly what we needed to get our meeting started in the relaxed tone we were pursuing. We passed through the lobby, the elevator, the seventh floor, down the corridor to its far end. Fred knocked on the door.

One of the deacons opened for us and invited us in. Metropolitan Philip stepped forward to greet us.

"What a pleasure after such a long time," he said with a firm handshake and a wonderful direct look in the eyes. He seemed so genuine; there was no trace of hierarchical professionalism around him. It seemed as if I was meeting an exceptionally outstanding Christian leader. An exceptionally warm and caring atmosphere surrounded him. "Come, let me introduce you to our Patriarch, Ignatius."

At the far end of the spacious central room, right by the window, sat the Antiochian Patriarch. Occasionally one meets people who immediately and strikingly look like Christians to him. Such was my distinct impression of him. His expression was holy... and joyful. As we approached him he opened his arms and smiled at us.

"Brethren, welcome!"

Could these three prodigal sons have just found their home?

We talked for nearly an hour, the five of us — the Patriarch, the Metropolitan, John Brown, Richard Ballew, and I. They asked us to tell about the history of our conversion to Orthodoxy, about our families, and about our recent overseas journey. We also told them something about each of the parishes in the Evangelical Orthodox Church, described our ministries as well — the St. Athanasius Seminary, Conciliar Press, and our work among students.

After about forty-five minutes Metropolitan Philip turned to Patriarch Ignatius with a request for his opinion.

"Let us do everything within our power to help them," replied the Patriarch.

"Very well," said the Metropolitan, turning back to us. "Now you will learn something about this archdiocese. We make decisions and we make them fast."

That was the best news I had heard in months!

"I would like you to provide me with two things. First, I would like a brief history of the Evangelical Orthodox Church covering your journey toward Orthodoxy step by step. Then, second, you can prepare a brief summary for each parish — who the pastor is, what his education is, the number of people, the facilities it has — no longer than a page for each parish."

"I would suggest I take that on," said John Brown.

"And when can I have everything?"

"Let me think... now we're at the end of June..." Bishop John was calculating. "What would you say to Labor Day?"

"Excellent. Send it to my office in Englewood. And send along with it copies of the issues of your *Again* magazine, as well as from the books and other literature published by the Evangelical Orthodox Church, and things written about you. We will study everything thoroughly and will be in touch."

We stood to say goodbye. The Metropolitan once more gripped my hand firmly and looked me straight in the eyes.

"We won't keep you waiting long," he said.

I think each of the three of us mentally wished the same thing — that there would be no one in the elevator, so we could press the button for the ground floor, wait for the door to close, and scream!

"Where have these people been all our lives?" I was shouting, filled with joy.

We were too excited to get in the car and drive home. We were too dazed to go anywhere. So we simply slumped down the stairs to a little bar and ordered lunch. I don't remember a word of what we said for the rest of the day.

The report together with two boxes of literature was mailed just before Labor Day, and in the late fall I was again in contact with the Metropolitan's office. The Episcopal Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church was to meet in mid-January 1986, and Metropolitan Philip asked us to prepare a proposal for how we envisioned our integration into the Church: an estimated time frame, an estimated scheme for integrating our parishes and auxiliary activities into the Archdiocese's structure, and anticipated issues. The efforts of our January synodal sessions produced an exceptionally detailed two-and-a-half-page proposal. We set a date in early March 1986 for me to arrive in Englewood to discuss this proposal.

Agreeing on the Details

As March approached I was asked to attend a National Association of Evangelicals conference in Kansas City. This suited me well — first to participate in the sessions, then fly directly to Newark for my meeting with Metropolitan Philip.

On the second day of the National Association of Evangelicals conference, a message was handed to me to call my secretary in Santa Barbara in our church office.

"Kathy Meyer called this morning — Metropolitan Philip's secretary," Linda Wallis began. "He and his staff have finished the final reading of all the materials we sent them and he wants to meet with you tomorrow. For the whole day, not just an hour or two. He wants you to fly tonight."

"I can do that," I said. "But I'll need your help to change my flight reservation and find a hotel room. Call me back, I'm in sessions all day here."

"You won't need a hotel reservation," Linda said. "He offered for you to stay in his residence."

When Linda called me again with the flight information, she had already informed Kathy Meyer that I would be arriving there at ten in the evening.

"The Metropolitan's assistant's name is Deacon Hans and he'll meet you at the exit. Kathy said you'll easily recognize him because he looks exactly like Omar Sharif!"

Deacon Hans is one of the kindest people I have ever met, and everyone who knows him says the same about him. He is an icon of Christian service, a celibate middle-aged man, a native of Lebanon and a graduate of Saint Vladimir's Seminary. And he truly looks exactly like Omar Sharif.

By the time we reached Englewood it was past eleven. The residence, which serves both as the Metropolitan's home and as the headquarters of his archdiocese, is a large Tudor-style building in one of the suburbs of New York City. The house was quiet when we tiptoed through the entrance door and headed up the stairs to my room. The deacon followed me inside with my suitcase as I left my briefcase on a chair and hung my carry-on bag on the bathroom door. I thanked and wished good night to Deacon Hans as I saw him to the door, and there, down the corridor, appeared Metropolitan Philip in a bathrobe. He had gotten up to welcome me to his home.

"Bishop Peter, it is an honor to welcome you here," he said, ignoring my extended hand and opening his arms for an embrace. "God has granted you a safe journey. Rest now, and tomorrow morning we will meet downstairs at ten."

Father Paul Schneirla, pastor of the Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in Brooklyn, was to join us for our morning meeting. He arrived early and we had breakfast together. Father Paul is a former Lutheran pastor who more than forty-five years ago converted to Orthodoxy and has since brought many others into the Orthodox

Church.

Just before ten, Metropolitan Philip came down to join us with a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Good morning," he greeted us. "I'm ready for the meeting. I asked you to bring your proposal, but I have one for you too."

He handed me his copy and I handed him ours. We stood in the lobby before his office as each studied the other's document.

"I see we are on the same page," he said. His proposal, consisting of nine points on a single page, in content overlapped almost entirely with what we had written. "Let us go into the dining room, sit down and talk over the table. Kathy will bring us coffee."

The dining room at the back of the house was a recent addition and in size resembled a small banquet hall (each year numerous meetings and receptions take place there). The back wall was all glass, with a sliding glass door opening onto a spacious stone-paved backyard. This in turn was surrounded by an expansive lawn with numerous trees. On the long table to the left side of the dining room, at its far end, lay three sets of note-taking materials.

The day passed in conversations, primarily on our proposals. Since the Metropolitan's was the shorter of the two, we used his as a working draft and incorporated into it some of our points. We ended the day with the following document as a result, on which all three of us were in complete agreement:

PRELIMINARY AGREEMENT BETWEEN METROPOLITAN PHILIP AND BISHOP PETER GILLQUIST

1. Expression of hope for full union in the near future.
2. Union will require some change in relationships on both sides. The issue of married episcopate will necessarily be resolved. Work on this will be done during some future meeting between the Metropolitan and the Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church.
3. Through chrismation and/or ordination of those who are willing and qualify, a connection can be established for the introduction of the Evangelical Orthodox Church into the Antiochian Archdiocese.
4. The structure now called the Evangelical Orthodox Church will continue its mission of spreading Orthodoxy in American society.
5. Under the Metropolitan's leadership, the new structure will be governed by a Council under the direction of its chairman.
6. The Metropolitan will designate an acceptable liaison officer to work with the current headquarters of the Evangelical Orthodox Church. This officer will advise and answer questions put by the Council, and after a certain period of time his post will be closed.
7. The Metropolitan will form a committee of theologians to which the Council may turn for the resolution of theological and liturgical problems.
8. The new structure will follow the financial system currently operating in the Archdiocese and will report quarterly to the Archdiocese on its financial status, growth, or decrease.
9. The new structure in the Archdiocese, in consultation with the Theological Committee, will establish an internal liturgical unity acceptable to all.

In June I was to present this document to the Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church for discussion and response. We broke for lunch, and after eating we withdrew to the sitting room to complete everything.

"I would like to make an important request of you, Your Eminence," I began once we were settled. "Most likely our people will agree with what we wrote this morning. But since we are talking about reception into the Antiochian Archdiocese, it will be of paramount importance for all nineteen of us to have the opportunity to meet with you soon and share your vision for bringing Orthodoxy to North America, as well as to discuss personally with you some of these individual points. Is it possible, after our synodal meeting in June, say in late summer, for all of us to come here and spend a day with you?"

"Certainly," he stated without the slightest hesitation. "Let us do this in early September."

Our June Synod, however, consisted not of nineteen but of fifteen. Four of our bishops had chosen to leave the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Their desire was to cease in every way their efforts toward reception into the Orthodox Church and to continue building the Evangelical Orthodox Church. We urged them to wait until September 1986 with their decision — at that time at least they would have the opportunity to talk with the Metropolitan, whom they had never met. But it was not to be. Had the Constantinople disappointment contributed to taking these casualties? No one could say, and we were unable to convince them to attend.

September came, and here we were, the Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church, on a plane again, this time to New York. We arrived in the city on a Thursday evening — fifteen bishops and fifteen other observers. We rented cars and headed to the motel right before Englewood. Per the schedule, our meeting with the Metropolitan was to last throughout Friday. On Saturday morning we were to gather at Saint Anthony's Church in nearby Bergenfield, New Jersey, to conduct the Divine Liturgy before the Metropolitan for his assessment and approval. On Sunday we were to serve together at Saint Anthony's and then cross the George Washington Bridge to Crestwood. There on Sunday afternoon, at Saint Vladimir's Seminary, the Synod would gather again. We were to stay there for the next several days to reach some final decision about entering the Church.

Meeting with the Metropolitan

The mood at the start of our Friday meeting with Metropolitan Philip was solemn. A number of us were ready to become Orthodox. Others still hesitated, voicing the fear that we would be "absorbed" — the same fear that had caused the other men to withdraw.

We gathered Friday morning around the same long table where the three of us had sat together in March. The note-taking sets were in their places again, this time two dozen of them. Seated with the Metropolitan at his end of the table were His Eminence Constantine, Metropolitan of Baghdad, who was visiting that week, His Grace Bishop Antoun — the Metropolitan's auxiliary — and Fr. Joseph Allen, vicar general of the Antiochian Archdiocese in North America. The observers settled in directly behind us. Kathy Meyer and Deacon Hans kept us well supplied with coffee.

Metropolitan Philip opened the meeting with prayer and a prepared statement containing the following key points:

To some extent we are acquainted with your past and your search for the full acceptance of the Holy Orthodox Faith. We are also aware that your journey toward Orthodoxy has not been easy due to the multiplicity of Orthodox jurisdictions on this continent. I am convinced, however, that the Holy Spirit, who is always present in the Church, according to the words of the Pentecost service, will "lead you into the land of righteousness." Orthodoxy, despite its jurisdictional situation in North America, is still Christ's eternal truth, yesterday, today, and forever.

I would like to advise you not to make hasty decisions; at the same time, my brotherly counsel to you is not to delay until the end of your days. Whatever decision you make, now or in the future, make it together — with one mind, one heart, and one spirit. Do not allow Satan, who is the prince of deception and discord, to insinuate himself among you and destroy your unity. God knows that we already have enough splinter religious groups in this country, as well as

enough spiritual blindness.

We admire your evangelical zeal and are deeply convinced that our Lord did not die on the cross and rise from the dead to establish His Church for Slavs, Greeks, or Arabs, but for all of humanity. In Him, east and west, north and south do not exist. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is in this spirit that we again welcome you to your home. And may the All-Holy Spirit guide all of us to do what is pleasing to His holy Church.

By the end of the day we had nearly completed a detailed review of the proposal document, with the Metropolitan and the others graciously and patiently answering our questions. Most of the observers also took part in the discussion. Saturday's liturgy and the discussions that accompanied it were also beneficial, since we had been studying Orthodox worship "from books" and needed some corrections. On Sunday the people of St. Anthony welcomed us with a wonderful and abundant feast after the Divine Liturgy.

Now our courtship had risen to a new level. And the ball was clearly in our court. For fifteen years we had been studying Orthodox Christianity, and we had spent a decade in contact with its representatives. The Metropolitan had given us more time than we had asked for, had answered every question posed to him, and had offered to become our father in Christ. In less than a year he would bring us into the Church if we were ready to make our commitment. We departed for St. Vladimir's and settled in for the night. The most important meeting of our lives was scheduled for nine o'clock Monday morning. I remember it vividly.

After the opening prayer I said:

"Brothers, I have never chaired a meeting like this, nor have I attended anything like it. So I am simply going to sit down and let you speak."

Harold Dunaway was the first to take the floor. Since the Constantinople trip he had developed an intensifying hesitation about our entering the Church. I assumed he would speak negatively.

"Gentlemen, we have no choice," he said. "I am for it. I am ready to be received."

He is a man of few words, and that was probably one of his longest speeches!

After him came Weldon Hardenbrook. He too had been negatively disposed over the past year, in much the same frame of mind as Harold.

"I'm in," he said. "I liked what I saw during these days."

Given that these two spoke affirmatively, it was settled. We all knew it. In no more than five minutes the meeting was over, not counting the formality of the others saying their "yes." There was one "maybe" that needed more time and over the following weeks evolved into a "no." But even he felt that we needed to enter the Church. In the Synod we were fourteen men, with seventeen parishes and nearly two thousand people from Alaska to Atlanta.

I would like to say this was the happiest day of my life, but that day was yet to come. Without question I was happy. But that part of me responsible for producing feelings had been overloaded for several days and the magnitude of what had just been accomplished was somewhat dulled. We closed the morning session before noon and I decided to go to the phone to call Metropolitan Philip. But I happened upon a friend from the St. Vladimir's faculty and never made the call. By the time we finished lunch, it was time to gather again.

We finished for the day just before four o'clock, and I quickly left the hall to telephone Engelwood. Kathy Meyer answered.

"I have good news for the Metropolitan, if he is there," I said.

"Bishop Peter, thank you for calling," he said as he picked up the phone.

"I am happy to report that our answer is 'yes,'" I said. "But we would like to tell you in person. If we come by on Wednesday at three in the afternoon, would you come to the front steps and give us your blessing? Just five minutes, no more."

"Kathy, am I here Wednesday at three?" I heard him ask, away from the receiver. From the other room they mumbled that he would have to leave a meeting or something like that.

"I am here and will be happy to see you. Come at three."

The next morning when we opened our session, I reported to the other men that we needed to promise ourselves to be very brief on Wednesday.

"He is leaving a meeting to see us," I told them. "Let us arrive on time, I will say 'yes' on behalf of all of us, we will ask for his blessing, and then we're off."

All day Tuesday and Wednesday morning we dealt with the business of the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Wednesday afternoon we jumped into our cars and made the forty-minute drive to Engelwood. At two fifty-five the last car had pulled to the curb. We waited a moment in the driveway.

"Let us go together to the front steps. Deacon Shannon will knock on the door, and from there I take over. And remember — five minutes maximum."

We walked up the driveway and gathered at the base of the steps. Deacon Howard knocked on the door and Deacon Hans came to open it, followed by the Metropolitan.

"Come in," Metropolitan Philip invited us with a gesture.

"Your Eminence, thank you, but you are busy and all we want is to give you our decision and ask for your . . ."

"I said come in," he interrupted, perhaps a little moved. "Hans, bring them inside. Come now, come."

He headed toward the banquet hall in the back, and we followed reluctantly. There I looked up and could not believe my eyes. The tables had been arranged in a U-shape at the near end of the hall and along both of its sides. They were covered with tablecloths and set with porcelain, silver, and crystal, as well as countless trays of every possible Middle Eastern delicacy. Tears sprang to my eyes as he invited us to find places and sit down. Metropolitan Philip remained standing at his place in the center.

"Brothers," he said with a wide smile, "welcome home!"

At last my happiness button had been pushed!

After the blessing we all set to work on the coffee, pastries, and conversation. But somehow it still was not enough. It was like wanting to run out into the street, dance, and celebrate. But more than thirty men in clerical vestments cannot dance with one another (at least not in the Orthodox Church, not there). Could we sing, crown a king, or hire a brass band?

"Is something wrong, Bishop Peter?" the Metropolitan asked. I was sitting directly across from him at the table and evidently the overflow of emotion was written on my face.

"I am so excited that I want to do something to celebrate. All of this is wonderful, everything you have done. But there must be something we could do, something to release all this feeling of joy . . ."

"Hans," he called, summoning the deacon to the table. "Bring out the cigars!"

The whole room erupted in laughter. The moment called for exactly that. Deacon Hans returned to the hall with two boxes of huge imported cigars. Men who had never, ever smoked took one and lit up. It was like a giant relief valve being opened. After about a minute Kathy came into the hall with a fresh pot of coffee.

"Your Eminence," she announced, "it looks like a drug den in here!"

At that we all doubled over. It was as if for a few precious moments we had surrendered our reputations, but we treasured every second of it.

As emotions settled over coffee, pastries, and now cigars, Fr. Gordon Walker stood with a request.

"Your Eminence," he began, "many of us come from churches that have been quite pro-Israel in their orientation. Now we are becoming members of a church that was established in the United States by Arab Christians. Would you use the time while these corrupted men finish their cigars" — he had lit one too, despite detesting them — "and tell us how you view the ingathering of the Israeli nation?"

It is a pity his response was not recorded. For thirty minutes, beginning with Abraham in the Old Testament, Metropolitan Philip gave us the most compelling Biblical lesson on Israel and the Arab peoples I have ever heard. He carefully distinguished between Zionism as a political movement, often inaccessible and apartheid, and Judaism as a respected nation and faith. I cannot think of a single evangelical who would not stand in line and pay admission to attend. And I was left with a greater desire for peace and justice in the Middle East — for both Israel and the Palestinians — than I had ever had.

"May the Lord be with all of you," the Metropolitan said, bringing the subject to a close. "And please convey my love to all your people. Let us use the coming year to get to know one another. We look forward to beginning the chrismations and ordinations to receive you into the Church next summer or, at the latest, next fall."

There is a song Orthodox Christians sing at weddings, anniversaries, and above all during the Divine Liturgy when the Bishop comes to serve. We had learned this song years before and it had already become a part of our tradition. As we rose to leave the table, without any prompting, we turned to our fatherly friend and in one voice sang: "*Many Years, Many Years, Many, Many Years!*" We sang with all our might. The entire room swam in tears and embraces. Never before in my entire life had I put so much meaning into the words of any song!

On the way to the front door, Fr. Joe Allen, who had appeared during the festivities, took me by the hand and drew me aside.

"I want to ask something of you. In December we will celebrate the Metropolitan's twentieth anniversary in the episcopate. On Sunday morning, December 9th, there will be a festal liturgy at the Brooklyn cathedral, followed by a banquet on Staten Island. Would you and your wife like to come as our guests and representatives of the Evangelical Orthodox Church?"

Celebrations in New York

We had decided to arrive in New York a few days early to do our Christmas shopping in Manhattan. About a month before we were to depart, I was arranging the flight reservations by phone when something prompted me to call our friends Tom and Lovelis Howard in Boston, to see if they would like to come shopping with us on Saturday and have dinner afterward. "*Is God trying to tell me something?*" I thought. "*No. The Howards already have more work than they can handle at that time of year.*" I booked the tickets and made hotel reservations.

The plane landed at La Guardia and after dinner Meredith and I boarded the bus for Manhattan. It was nine o'clock when we checked into the hotel, but still too early to stay in. We bundled up and went out for a walk. We went everywhere — the Rockefeller Center to see the skaters and the Christmas tree, to Saks to see the decorated Christmas windows, to St. Patrick's Cathedral, up Fifth Avenue to Trump Tower and back to the hotel.

Saturday was set aside for shopping. We decided to start at Saks on Fifth Avenue. As we stepped out of the hotel and headed down the street, we came to the Waldorf Astoria.

"Let us go through the lobby and look at the Christmas decorations," I told Meredith, feeling somehow that we should go through there. We entered, took the escalator, and walked through the corridor to the spacious lobby. The decorations were up and truly beautiful. Without hurrying, we walked the lobby from end to end and slipped back out the door onto the street. Outside, the crowd was shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow. I looked up at the corner and there, making their way along the sidewalk, were Tom and Lovelis Howard along with their son Charles!

It was something like yet another sign along the way. "*The Lord has led me on the right road . . .*" says the servant of Isaac (Genesis 24:27). Unable to believe our eyes, we all went back into the Waldorf, caught up quickly on several years apart from one another, and made arrangements to have dinner together.

Sunday morning came early. We caught a taxi to the cathedral and managed to arrive just after nine o'clock. Orthodox Christians had come from all over the country, laity and clergy alike, including Metropolitan Theodosius and Archbishop Iakovos. Fr. Paul Schneirla preached during the Divine Liturgy. After the service Fr. Anthony Gabriel from Montreal drove us to Staten Island for the festal banquet. For several hours we served and feasted together in honor of the man we would soon call *Sayidna*, the warm Arabic word for master. We spent Monday with friends at St. Vladimir's, and on Tuesday Meredith and I kept our appointment with Metropolitan Philip to report on our progress over the previous three months.

The agenda had two items: Lunch and Surprise. Because in addition to a beautiful copper tray from the Middle East, Sayidna Philip also had another Christmas gift for us . . .

"How are the people in the Evangelical Orthodox Church?" he asked when after lunch we withdrew to the sitting room. "Are they ready to be brought into the Church?"

"They are ready," I assured him, assuming he would suggest the chrismations and ordinations begin at the Congress of the North American Archdioceses the coming summer in Detroit.

"Good! I will be in California in early February and we will begin the chrismations and ordinations on February 8th at St. Michael's Church in Van Nuys," he replied without hesitation.

February 8th! That was only two months away. A year had been reduced to two months.

"That is excellent," I believe I said then. Or something like it. In two months some two thousand Protestant worshipers would complete their journey to Orthodox Christianity.

"Kathy, come here with the calendar. We will begin the chrismations of the Evangelical Orthodox Church people in February," he called to his secretary in the adjoining room.

We spent the rest of the afternoon planning the schedule. In the Los Angeles area, most of the members of the Evangelical Orthodox Church would be chrismated, and the priests ordained as deacons, on February 8th. The following Sunday at St. Nicholas Cathedral, the remaining laity from the Los Angeles area would be chrismated, and the deacons would be ordained to the priesthood. From there Metropolitan Philip would move up the coast and repeat the procedure in Santa Cruz, and then repeat the chrismations and ordinations in Nashville the following Sunday.

During March, Bishop Antoun would come to bring our parishes in Jackson, Memphis, Gary Indiana, and three others in Canada into the Church. And finally the Metropolitan would fly to Anchorage and Seattle to complete everything in early April.

"In this way the entire Evangelical Orthodox Church will be in the bosom of Holy Orthodoxy by Pascha," Metropolitan Philip smiled. "My friend Peter, your journey is almost over — or rather, your journey will be able to begin."

We said our farewells with wishes for a blessed Nativity of Christ. We had so much to be thankful for that year. And 1987 was shaping up to be even better.

On the plane home the following day I made a list of the people I needed to call. Seventeen parishes had two months to make their final preparations for receiving one of our new bishops. The courtship was nearly over. The wedding day was approaching.

CHAPTER TWELVE. FORWARD TOWARD THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Deacon Hans said it best.

"Each of these services with chrismations and ordinations is like a little Pentecost," he observed during the Divine Liturgy in Nashville, as the people came forward to receive their first communion as Orthodox Christians.

Two weeks earlier, the service at St. Michael's in Van Nuys had lasted nearly four hours, as more than two hundred people were chrismated and many others ordained as deacons. In fact, the crowd was so large that the glass panels on the western wall of the sanctuary had to be removed and a large rented tent erected to help accommodate the overflowing multitude.

"This looks like a Pentecost revival," I said to Fr. John Bartke before the service. In the classical sense of the word, it was just that.

The first person I met upon entering the church on that February morning was Juliana Schmemmann, the wife of the late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. She had traveled all the way from New York to Los Angeles to witness the event. Her presence was noted by everyone, and I myself could barely express my gratitude to her for that visit.

All of us — laity and clergy of the Evangelical Orthodox Church — were chrismated at the beginning of the service. Then, during the Divine Liturgy, the deacons were ordained, with the Metropolitan personally laying hands on each of them. The newly-formed California parishes were: St. Barnabas, Huntington Beach, Fr. Wayne Wilson; St. Athanasius, Santa Barbara, Fr. Richard Balew; St. Timothy, Lompoc, Fr. David Ogan; St. Athanasius, Sacramento, Fr. Thomas Renfree; and from Nevada — St. James, Reno, Fr. Timothy McCoy.

Although in New Testament times and during much of the Church's history multiple ordinations were practiced, the more prevalent modern custom in Orthodoxy is to ordain only one deacon or presbyter per service. But we were so many that custom yielded to the centuries-old tradition, and as with the Apostle Paul, Metropolitan Philip "laid hands on them" (Acts 19:6) for the descent of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Together we were entering the holy diaconal order, begun with seven men including St. Stephen, the first martyr for Jesus Christ in the newborn Church.

One person was absent from St. Michael's that morning. Peggy Thomas was at home in Santa Barbara, fighting her advanced cancer and too ill to travel. Her family had been chrismated, and her husband Steve ordained in her absence.

"She needs to do it next week," he said as he was leaving the church. "Pray for her."

After the service, the people of St. Michael's welcomed us with a true feast. That was one of the few times I have admitted to myself that part of the reason I became Orthodox was for the food!

The following Sunday brought more chrismations and the ordination of the deacons to the priesthood at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles, where Fr. Paul Romley is pastor. Our dear Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh was with us, as was Japanese Bishop Seraphim, who years earlier had graduated from Nyack Bible College as an evangelical Protestant. In addition, some twenty Orthodox priests had arrived from all over North America. Besides the cathedral parishioners, dozens of friends and parents were present, including my own, to witness the glorious event.

It was as if yet another Pentecost had come. Joy of the Lord filled His temple. As he ordained the priests one by one, Metropolitan Philip prayed:

"The divine grace, which always heals what is infirm and supplies what is lacking, elevates through the laying on of hands this devout deacon to be a presbyter."

I knew that from the moment those words were spoken, I would be called to rely on the grace that supplies what is lacking for the rest of my life and ministry. The Lord truly uses the lowly things of this world to confound the wise.

During the celebration that followed, Bishop Maximos rose to speak. He praised God for His faithfulness to us as pilgrims, and for the Metropolitan and his courage and resolve in opening the doors of the Church to us. I was glad to introduce my parents that afternoon to these two men of God who had received us so graciously.

As I went out the back entrance of the cathedral and headed toward my car, I noticed a parked van by the nearby curb. The sliding side door was still open and I glanced inside as I walked by. And there, lying down and smiling broadly, was Peggy Thomas.

"I made it!" she said. "This was my dream, to become Orthodox."

Only about a month later, Metropolitan Philip sent the following letter to Fr. Steve Thomas:

We have just learned with infinite sorrow of the repose in the Lord of your beloved wife, Peggy. May the Almighty God receive her in His holy habitations, where the faces of the saints shine like the stars of heaven. Beyond this world of tears and suffering, Christ has promised us another world where there is no sickness, nor grief, nor pain. Our consolation is that sooner or later we will join those we love, beyond the veil of this temporary existence.

Parish by Parish

Each of the parishes, though sharing the same Lord, the same faith, and the same hope, nevertheless has its own character. At Orthodox Church Sts. Peter and Paul, located just outside Santa Cruz and served by Fr. Weldon Hardenbrook, the characteristic trait is enthusiasm. It shows in how the priests pray during the service and in how the people sing. More than five hundred people were chrismated there by Metropolitan Philip only three days after the Sunday at St. Nicholas. Quite honestly, I thought the heavens would open and receive us when the congregation rose and sang "Many Years" to the Metropolitan.

The following day we boarded a plane for Nashville, to receive into the Church the people and ministers of Holy Trinity, Franklin, served by Fr. Gordon Walker, as well as St. Stephen, Atlanta, with Fr. Andrew Moore as pastor.

During the following month, March 1987, our parishes — including St. Peter, Jackson, Mississippi; St. John, Memphis; and Holy Resurrection, Gary, Indiana — on two consecutive Sundays welcomed Bishop Antoun and experienced the same Spirit-filled joy as the others before them. Three more bishops of the Evangelical Orthodox Church — Clark Henderson, Dale Autrey, and Gregory Rogers, the pastors of those churches — were ordained to the priesthood. Later that month the Bishop flew to Saskatoon in central Canada to chrismate the faithful there and ordain their priests. By the end of the month, Fr. Daniel Mathison's parish in Ottawa — St. Theophany; Fr. Bernard Funk's in Saskatoon — St. Vincent; and Fr. Larry Reinheimer's in nearby Borden — St. Andrew, were all received into Orthodoxy.

The final two stops were in early April: Anchorage, Alaska, where the parish of St. John in the Eagle River suburb — served by Fr. Harold Dunaway — was received, and finally Seattle, Washington, for the reception of the parishes of Fr. Joseph Copeland — Holy Cross, Yakima — and St. Paul of Fr. Kenneth Berven and Fr. Melvin Gimaka, now served by Fr. David Anderson.

Metropolitan Philip was to meet us in Anchorage on the first Wednesday of April. A few days before, Kathy Meyer called with the message that his flight would be on Tuesday. At the airport he and Deacon Hans were met by Fr. Harold and taken to the community in Eagle River.

"When Sayidna Philip stepped into the church," Fr. Harold told me the next day, "he exclaimed: 'This is a real cathedral.'"

At the Metropolitan's request the whole congregation had been summoned that evening, and the church was consecrated as the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. The people were dumbfounded. Three years earlier they had designed and built the church with their own hands. And now the building had entered Orthodoxy one day ahead of them!

Besides the services, something else awaited us in Alaska. On the second day, right after lunch, eight of us including the Metropolitan were invited to take a two-hour sightseeing flight over Mt. McKinley and several glaciers. We arrived on time at the nearby airstrip, but the plane never came. We learned that it had crashed that morning, tragically killing both pilots. We decided to postpone the excursion to the next day, knowing that our fate is in God's hands.

"This is the most beautiful flight I have ever made," Metropolitan Philip remarked as we approached the majestic Mt. McKinley.

Friday came and we headed for Seattle. The same joy prevailed there, and though we were tired, we grew sad at the approaching end of the festive series.

"I will miss you — we won't see each other so often now," I said to Deacon Hans as we set off for the airport.

That summer at the national congress in Detroit, Metropolitan Philip again welcomed us, this time officially.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this year we celebrate an event that did not happen in the distant past, but only a few months ago," he began.

The Metropolitan recounted our initial meeting with the Patriarch in Los Angeles and then turned to his meeting with the Synod of the Evangelical Orthodox Church on September 5, 1986.

"And after a four-hour intensive theological discussion something happened that I will never forget. Bishop Gordon Walker of Tennessee began to weep and, with tears in his eyes, turned to us. 'Brothers, we have been knocking on Orthodox doors for ten years, but to no avail. Now we have come to your threshold seeking the holy universal and apostolic faith. If you will not receive us, where shall we go?' I was deeply moved by the sincerity of Bishop Walker, and from that moment on I had no doubt that such a dialogue, baptized in tears, would be crowned with heavenly joy."

Later in his address, the Metropolitan spoke of his reaction to the chrismation services across North America.

"I wish I could describe in words the joy I felt as I was chrismating those little children from the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Each successive experience was like a chapter from the Book of Acts. I felt that the Church was regaining its apostolic spirit and rediscovering its missionary dimension.

"There is among us Orthodox a distorted notion that the Orthodox Church does not proselytize. Nothing could be further from the truth. Can you imagine where the Church would be if Peter and Paul, Philip and Andrew, and the rest of the apostles had not proselytized? What America needs today, especially after the collapse of the television pulpit, is an evangelical Orthodoxy founded on the true interpretation of Scripture, on the teachings of the apostles and the Fathers of the Church, and on the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

"Once again, from the bottom of my heart, I say to the people of the Evangelical Orthodox Church: Welcome home!"

The Beginning

The Order of St. Athanasius is an action group of more than eight hundred members within the Antiochian Archdiocese that provides the development of certain special projects. One of them is a twenty-two-minute video presentation called "Welcome Home," which has captured on tape the reception of the Evangelical Orthodox Church into Orthodoxy. At the end of the film, where you would normally expect to see the word *THE END*, the screen instead reads *THE BEGINNING*. I believe those words are prophetic.

Only a few months after our entry into the Orthodox Church, hundreds of other people found their home in Orthodoxy. New missions were opened in several American cities — places like Fargo, North Dakota; Salt Lake City, Utah; East Lansing, Michigan; Bloomington, Indiana; Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania; and Wheaton, Illinois. In addition, requests began arriving — sometimes several in a single day — from pastors who had come to love Christ and His Church and were seeking the fullness of Orthodox worship and faith.

Many of them were evangelical Protestants who had for years been ambivalent about Orthodox Christianity, but feared it would prove too ethnic for them. Others were Episcopalians or members of traditional Protestant denominations, or Roman Catholics — devout men who had grown frustrated each time they turned around to find that the doctrinal foundation had shifted beneath their feet. All of them were seeking theological, liturgical, and ecclesial roots.

Another visible center of interest proved to be Christian seminaries and universities. We received invitations and lectured at a considerable number of these institutions, often with the support of the administration. Schools that would have immediately expelled any Orthodox priest twenty years ago — and I would undoubtedly have personally participated in that — today take this ancient faith seriously. Why?

In the last book of the Old Testament, in fact in its very last verse, an inspired prophecy is laid down. God promises that He will turn "the hearts of the children to their fathers . . ." (Malachi 4:6). God's people share a common thirst for discovering the founders of their faith, the Church that Jesus Christ established through His apostles, and the Fathers of the Church. Malachi tells us this will happen before "the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5).

When the Incarnate God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to earth the first time, it was those who took the Law and the Prophets seriously who recognized Him and followed Him. What of His second coming — will we know Him? Will we be prepared? Jesus warns that some who say they are will not be.

Today a great part of Christendom is stricken. A large number of believing Christians have in one way or another abandoned the faith. Believers have been left orphaned and isolated from their roots. But as tragic as this sounds, remember that God uses even human wrath for His glory. For from apostasy is born a hunger for the fullness of the New Testament faith, for new life in Christ, for worship of the Holy Trinity, for the Church herself.

What is it that we, Orthodox Christians, desire? What is our vision, our longing? Simply this: we long to be the Church for all truly committed Christians in the English-speaking world. Christians in North America, for example, have had the opportunity to choose whether to be Roman Catholics or Baptists, Presbyterians or Methodists, or even Independents. But few have had the opportunity to choose whether they wish to be Orthodox. We long to make that choice possible and to encourage people to become part of the original Church of Jesus Christ.

Several times in the Book of Revelation Jesus says: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." I believe that in these times the Holy Spirit is sounding a trumpet call to God's people: *Children, come home to the faith of your fathers, to your roots in Christianity, to the green pastures and still waters of the Church that has stood the test of time.*

Before we became Orthodox we had the right Savior, though we now know Him better together with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. We had the right Bible, though we now know it even better. But we had missed that vital missing link — the right Church. The Spirit and the Bible called us and we joyfully responded to the call.

This is the treasure we have found. And we dare not hide it.

Fr. James Mina proved right that day at St. Nicholas Cathedral. Our fathers had embraced the Orthodox faith and brought it to America. Now it is our turn to bring America — and all the West — into Orthodox Christianity. Forward toward the third millennium!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Fr. Peter received his education at the University of Minnesota, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Wheaton College. During the 1960s he served as a regional director for Campus Crusade for Christ, followed by eleven years as senior editor at Thomas Nelson Publishers. He has written a considerable number of books, among them: *Present Love* (Zondervan), *The Physical Side of Being Spiritual* (Zondervan), and *Making America Orthodox* (Servant).

Translation from Bulgarian.

NOTES

[1] In Bulgaria this organization is known as "Agape Bulgaria" and has branches in Sofia and Plovdiv (translator's note).

[2] In the United States, a seminary is an educational institution that usually offers advanced education after completion of university (translator's note).

[3] One of Chicago's nicknames (translator's note).

[4] New York: Macmillan Company, 1946 (author's note).

[5] This refers to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, known as the Council of Chalcedon after the city where in AD 451 more than six hundred bishops of the Church gathered to reject several heresies concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. The Church unanimously declared that Christ the Lord is perfect God and perfect man, consisting of two natures — unconfused, unchangeable, undivided, and inseparable — and therefore He is consubstantial with the Father in His divinity, and in all things like unto us in His humanity, except sin (translator's note).

[7] John 16:13 (translator's note).

[8] The Teaching of the Twelve (translator's note).

[9] In support of the same example may be cited the passage from Psalm 110:1, where David says: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool." Obviously we cannot imagine Christ ceasing to sit at the right hand of the Father (translator's note).

[10] According to most early Christian sources, the "brothers" of Jesus were His second cousins, or children of the Virgin Mary's first cousin — Mary of Clopas, wife of Alphaeus. The "sisters" of the Lord were Mary and Salome of Clopas, first cousins of the Mother of the Lord, but raised by Joseph as daughters under the levirate law for continuing the line of Clopas and his wife (also) Mary, who was the sister of Anna — the mother of the Virgin Mary (translator's note).

[11] Dormition — falling asleep; this term refers to the event of the death of the Virgin Mary in the Lord, as well as the feast commemorating that event (translator's note).

[12] A diocese is a territorial-administrative unit under the governance of one bishop (archbishop, metropolitan) (translator's note).

[13] This is a characteristic example of the proverbial "pious and Orthodox" deliberateness, which apparently is not limited only to Orthodox Churches in Europe and the Middle East. According to many, however, this apparent inertia has played a key role in preserving the purity of the faith and avoiding the repellent effect of intrusive and hasty missionary work (translator's note).

[14] This is perhaps the only Sunday in the year when one kneels for prayer. Ordinarily, in honor of Christ's resurrection, all pray standing on Sundays (translator's note).

[15] Metropolitan Bartholomew is currently the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church (translator's note).

[16] Uncial script dates from the 4th–8th centuries. It is characterized by large capital letters, somewhat different from and relatively more rounded than modern ones (translator's note).

[17] Americans celebrate this day on the second Monday of September (translator's note).

[18] In the Orthodox Bible, the last book of the Old Testament is the Third Book of Ezra (translator's note).