**A Call to a Living, Hospitable, and Incarnational Orthodoxy**

By Fr. Steve Smith

The term Orthodoxy comes from two Greek words – *orthos* (which means right or true) and *doxa* (belief, worship). The Greek noun *doxa* is from the verb *dokein*, meaning to appear, to think, to accept. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament translates the word *doxa* for the Hebrew for *“glory”* (or *splendor* or *brilliance*). We also have the word doxology from this word.

Orthodox beliefs are those that are handed down from generation to generation within the church. God has revealed Himself and that revelation is articulated and passed along from community to community throughout history. An example of such a belief is that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.

The Orthodox Church includes seventeen separate autocephalous jurisdictions. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople serves as a “first among equals” over these churches; while disputed, some refer to his role as the “spiritual leader” of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Early in Christian history, five patriarchs ruled: the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Each led over their geographic region and did not overlap. The Bulgarian Patriarchate joined the five in 927. The Patriarchate of Rome was then considered the “first among equals”.

National patriarchates today include Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Georgian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Romanian Orthodox Church. Autocephalous archbishoprics are Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece. Albanian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church. Autocephalous metropolises are Polish Orthodox Church and Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. Recognized as canonical but autocephaly disputed is Orthodox Church in America (granted by the Russian Orthodox Church). Status disputed for canonicity and independence is Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Canonical and autocephalous status disputed is Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Unrecognized are a minority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) as well as the Old Calendarists and True Orthodox.

Churches not recognized also include Abkhazian Orthodox Church, American Orthodox Catholic Church, Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Latvian Orthodox Church, Montenegrin Orthodox Church, Turkish Orthodox Church, Evangelical Orthodox Church, Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, Nordic Catholic Church in Italy, Lusitanian Catholic Orthodox Church.

It is interesting to note that Father Alexander Schmemann was one of the leaders in forming the Orthodox Church in America and its independent status from the Russian Orthodox Church. His intent was to have it independent of ethnic and national ties. He was a strong proponent of the liturgy reflecting theology (*lex orandi lex est credenda*) – *“the law of prayer is the law of belief”.* (This topic will be further addressed later.)

As the reader may note, the “recognized” Orthodox churches (as well as the vast majority of those not recognized) are identified with a national/ethnic designation. (The Roman Catholic Church retains its patriarchal title and is known throughout the world with this name, not dividing itself into jurisdictional designations.)

Fr. Schmemann, in his book “Church World Mission” (Chapter IV A Meaningful Storm, pages 90-91), wrote*: “Even a superficial reading of the canons show that the Church they depict is not, as it is today for us, a network of ‘sovereign’ and ‘independent’ entities called patriarchates or autocephalous or autonomous churches, each having ‘under’ itself (in its ‘jurisdiction’) smaller and subordinated units such as ‘dioceses,’ ‘exarchates,’ ‘parishes,’ etc. This ‘jurisdictional’ or ‘subordinationist’ dimension is absent here because, when dealing with the Church, the early ecclesiological tradition has its starting point and its basic term of reference is the* ***local church****. This early tradition has been analyzed and studied so many times in recent years that no detailed elaboration is needed here. What is important for us is that this local church, i.e. a community gathered around its bishop and* ***clerus****, is a* ***full*** *church. It is the manifestation and the presence in a given place of the Church of Christ. And thus, the main aim and purpose of the canonical tradition is precisely to ‘protect’ this fullness, to ‘guarantee,’ so to speak, that this local church fully manifests the oneness, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity of the Church of Christ. It is in function of this fullness, therefore, that the canonical tradition regulates the relation of each church with other churches, their unity and interdependence…. No church is ‘under’ any other church and no bishop is ‘under’ any other bishop. The very nature of this dependence and, therefore, of unity among churches, is not ‘jurisdictional.’ It is the unity of the faith and life, the unbroken continuity of Tradition, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that is expressed, fulfilled and preserved in the consecration of one bishop by other bishops, in their regular synods, and, in brief, in the organic unity of the episcopate which all bishops hold* ***in******solidum*** *(St. Cyprian).”*

Fr. Schmemann continues (pages 102-103): “*In America, however, this situation was bound to reach a ‘moment of truth.’ Here in the main center Of Orthodox diaspora, of Orthodox mission and witness to the West,* ***the*** *ecclesiological question – that of the* ***nature*** *and* ***unity*** *of the Church, that of the relationship within her canonical order and her life, that ultimately of the true meaning and true implications of the very term* ***Orthodox*** *– was finally revealed as an existential, not academic question. Here the tragic discrepancy between the various ‘layers’ of the Orthodox past, the multisecular lack of any serious ecclesiological reflection, the absence of a ‘common mind,’ were revealed in their truly tragic dimension.*

*In the first place the American situation revealed the hypertrophy of the* ***national*** *principle, its virtually total disconnection from the ‘essential’ ecclesiology. The national principle which, in a different ecclesiological context and in continuity with the genuine canonical tradition, had been indeed a principle of unity and thus a valid form of the Church’s self-fulfillment (‘one Church in one place’), became in America the opposite: a principle of division, the very expression of the Church’s subordination to the divisions of ‘this world.’ If in the past the Church* ***united*** *and even* ***made*** *a nation, here nationalism* ***divided*** *the Church and became thus a real denial, a caricature of its own initial function.”*

In the Theology and Liturgy chapter of *Church, World, Mission* (chapter VI, page 129), he states: “*The time has come for a deep re-evaluation of the relationship between theology and liturgy. My purpose here is to explain the reason for that affirmation, and to indicate, be it only tentatively, its meaning for the Orthodox theological enterprise as a whole, and also for the liturgical problems whose existence and urgency are acknowledged today by nearly everyone.*

*Very few people, I am sure, would deny that the Orthodox Church is in a state of crisis; yet very few also are those, it seems to me, who realize that at the bottom of this crisis, as one of its main sources, lies the double crisis of theology and liturgy.*

*A crisis of theology! Is it not obvious indeed that the confusion and the divisions we witness today on virtually every level of the Church’s life – the canonical, the administrative, the educational, the ‘ecumenical’ – are rooted, first of all, in the absence of commonly accepted and acknowledged terms of reference or criteria which normally are to be supplied precisely by theology? Contemporary Orthodoxy is unable to supply such norms because it is itself ‘broken’. It is characterized, on the one hand, by an unhealthy pluralism and, on the other hand, by a peculiar inability to communicate with the ‘real’ Church”.*

Fr. Schmemann continues in the same book in Renewal (Chapter VII, page 148): “*My purpose in this paper is to question not the new awareness of the world in Christian consciousness, but that which, to me at least, appears as a dangerous one-sidedness in that awareness. I have no doubts about the urgent need for the Church to remember that she exists not for herself but for the world and its salvation. I am not sure, however, that all aspects of this necessary renewal in the Church-world relationship have been given equal attention. I even wonder whether one really begins at the beginning. Speaking of liturgy and prayer, I am not trying simply to add a touch of piety to an otherwise healthy process but to raise what I am convinced is the fundamental question of all renewal. This paper is written by an Eastern Orthodox, and, therefore, in a perspective, which may differ from that of the Christian West. It is hoped, however, that here as elsewhere, the Orthodox point of view may contribute to the basic issues.”*

I have heard a quote used by Orthodox leaders: *“We know where the Church is, but we don’t know where is isn’t”.* Out of context, this statement sounds arrogant, condescending, egotistical, and uncaring.

Someone attributed this phrase from Met. Kallistos Ware in his *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 16 page 308) and it reads in context: *“There is first a moderate group, which includes most of those Orthodox who have had close personal contact with other Christians. This group holds that, while it is true that Orthodoxy is the Church, it is false to conclude from this that those who are not Orthodox cannot possibly belong to the Church. Many people may be members of the Church who are not visibly so, invisible bonds may exist despite an outward separation. The Spirit of God blows where it Chooses and, as Irenaeus said, where the Spirit is, there is the Church.* ***We know where the Church is but we cannot be sure where it is not.*** *This means, as Khomakov insists, that we must refrain from passing judgment on non-Orthodox Christians: ‘Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord appointed to appear at the final judgment of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits… She does not judge the rest of humankind, and only looks upon those excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of humankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgment of the great day’”.*

When immigrants arrived in the United States of America, they faithfully brought their culture and worship with them as they did when scattered to other countries. Being part of their diaspora, it was natural for them to desire to maintain their faith and customs in a new land.

But, what about immigrants from Germany, Ireland, or England, who do not have Orthodox faith as part of their heritage? Where should they go?

If one lives in a large city such as Chicago, IL or a nearby suburb, options to attend an Orthodox Church are choices of Greek, Ukranian, Serbian, Romanian, Albanian, Macedonian, Antiochian, Bulgarian, Russian versions. Smaller cities, such as Indianapolis, IN offer the following: Russian, Serbian, Greek, Bulgarian. Terre Haute, IN only has one choice: St. George Orthodox Church, part of the Antiochian Orthodox Church and thereby part of Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

While we have the Book of Acts of the Apostles and writings of the early church fathers, we have limited records for the last 2000 years that show the succession. And were all of those men who had hands laid on them faithful? Is canonicity only a physical act or is it a spiritual act? Is it only in the past or does it exist today?

What does the phrase “equal to the apostles” title mean? Was it not a special title attributed to special saints whose spread and support of Christianity was considered comparable to the original apostles?

What about Saul whose conversion led him to be St. Paul? He was a tormentor and persecutor of Christians but became the apostle to the Gentiles. But he was not one of the original Twelve nor part of the Seventy. Nonetheless, God chose him!

Which begs the question, can God raise up and choose apostles today?

Are the fruits of the Holy Spirit still existing today? St. Paul wrote, “*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!” (Galatians 5:22-23)*

What about the gifts of the Spirit? In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 states: “*Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.**Therefore, I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.*

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.  There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.  There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*

*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.**All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”*

What about the leadership of the Church: “*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?  Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.” (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)*

St. Paul continues in Ephesians 4:10-12: *“He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”*

 Our Lord Jesus declared, *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)*

In our relationships with others, Jesus stated, *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” (Matthew 20:25-26)*

What about the example of how Apollos was treated: “*Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” (Acts 18:24-27)*

What was the decision of the Jerusalem council concerning the Gentiles and circumcision? Acts 15:22-29 reads: “*Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers.*

*With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.*

*We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—**men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.”*

What is the purpose of this writing? Is this an attack on the Eastern Orthodox Churches?

No, far from it! Instead, it is a call to action, a call to change!

We no longer have the luxury of a learned scholar, a great teacher and speaker as Fr. Alexander Schmemann to remind all of us. Fr. Thomas Hopko has likewise departed our midst to be with the Lord. Whose voice will fill the vacuum in their absence?

Fr. Schmemann used words like *“crisis,” “urgent need,”* and *“renewal”.* What has changed since he wrote his books? Is his voice only speaking of an academic matter and is no concern to the Church today?

Organic life involves growth and change; without them, we stagnate and die.

What we believe and how we are to live needs to be constant. Our Lord Jesus gave us the most important commandment: *“The most important one, is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” (Mark 12:29-31)*

We are to worship the Lord with all that we are and all that we have. This is why it’s vital for *lex orandi lex est credenda;* our worship and our beliefs need to be in sync. Periodically, we need to reflect on our lives and our liturgies to insure that they are in line with our worship. We don’t change the liturgy to please the culture around us but it needs to align with what we believe (and not just because how it has been performed for years).

Our procession, more specifically, our ascension in the Eucharist is the pinnacle of our experience in the Kingdom of God. As Fr. Schmemann so well explained: “*Hence, the unique, the central, ecclesiological significance of the Eucharist, which is the all-embracing sacrament of the Church. In the Eucharist, ‘the Church becomes what it is,’ fulfills itself as the Body of Christ, as the divine* ***parousia*** *– the presence and the communication of Christ and His Kingdom. which is the all-embracing sacrament of the Church”. (Church World Mission, XI The Missionary Imperative, page 212)*

Clearly, the Church needs to resist both nominalism and pluralism. Much more can be said about these dangers but hopefully it is self-evident.

And we need to be aware and impactful in our culture, in our world: “*The second (commandment) is this:* *‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mark 12:31)*

Again, Fr. Schmemann speaks to this topic: “*The second aspect of the Church as* ***response*** *is* ***man-*** *or* ***world-centered.*** *It is the understanding of the Church as being left in this world, in its time, space and history, with a specific task or mission ‘to walk in the same way in which He walked’ (1 John 2:6). The Church is fullness, and its home is in heaven. But this fullness is given to the world, sent into the world as its salvation and redemption. (Church World Mission, XI The Missionary Imperative, page 213)*

We have an obligation to our family members, our friends, our acquaintances, and to the strangers that God brings to us every day. As members of Christ’s Body, the Church, we are responsible to pray for, to encourage, to empathize and to admonish our “neighbor” (when necessary) as God gives us opportunity.

Sadly, we must acknowledge that the visible Church is broken, fractured, separated. Nevertheless, God is able to speak to and through His Christendom.

There are clearly cults and heresies in this world, and we must direct people away from them. But we ought to recognize those who are truly “Church” (and definitely not part of the Unitarian Universalist Church, the Church of Latter-day Saints [Mormons], etc.) and whose belief is the Great Confession: *“I believe, O Lord, and I confess that You are truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God….”*

In my own experience, I have a dear childhood friend who grew up in the Church of God tradition. He has been active in his church, professes his faith, prays publicly, and has shown his faith over many decades. Since he is content in his church, I would not consider disrupting his life, but instead I would encourage him in his circumstances.

I have other friends who are part of the Christian Church/ Church of Christ denomination. I again encourage them where they are, ask how I can pray for them and then do so in my nightly prayers. And they reciprocate for me.

As part of a college undergraduate assignment, my class was bussed into a suburb of Chicago, IL that was predominantly Roman Catholic. We canvassed the neighborhood and left brochures, encouraging them to attend a local Christian Church. The attitude was that these people were unchurched because they were Catholic. I felt uneasy at the time. Now, I see that was wrong!

The rule I live by is if someone is bothered and unsettled in their church, then I want to ask why and I will likely direct them to a church more suited to their convictions. And I will suggest an Orthodox Church if feasible.

My point is rather than competing or ignoring other churches, we need to build up, to exhort one another in Christ. And for those truly unchurched, we have the opportunity to share our faith.

In summary, this is a call to those who call themselves Orthodox to act accordingly, to recognize the Orthodox faith and affirm it wherever and through whomever it is found, and to show true hospitality to all faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. It is time to practice a living Orthodoxy that is not bound to ethnic requirements or frozen in times past. It is time to reflect and to change by God’s grace and through His grace, in order to be truly orthodox!

*“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

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