

Crossing the Bosphorus: A Pilgrim's Journey.

by

Kristofer J. Carlson

I recently had a brief exchange with a Lutheran professor friend of mine; his premise was that Lutherans leave for the Orthodox church out of some misguided romanticism. He seemed to be arguing that it was the externals that attracted people, that the aesthetics of Orthodoxy bewitched and beguiled their senses whilst simultaneously dulling their minds. While the aesthetics of Orthodoxy are certainly appealing, no one becomes Orthodox for this alone, for Orthodoxy is a demanding way of life. I certainly did not become Orthodox for the art, for the chanting, or for the incense, having been predisposed from my youth against that sort of thing. In my youth, all I wanted was four bare walls and an altar call; anything more smacked of Catholicism.

My wife and I both grew up fundamentalist Christians. My wife was brought up as a Plymouth Brethren, a conservative Protestant sect that first appeared in the 19th century as an offshoot of and reaction against the Anglican Church. The modern Protestant preoccupation with the Rapture, along with the entire Dispensationalist theology, has its roots in this tiny Protestant sect. My background was more varied, as my father moved from church to church, denomination to denomination, all within the same general orbit of fundamentalist Christianity, including an extended stint in the Plymouth Brethren churches.

I was raised to be a good fundamentalist, which meant I was convinced that the Roman Catholics were my theological enemies. (If I ever thought of the Orthodox, I would have considered them as merely Catholics without the Pope, or Catholic lite.) When I was a child, I remember a family once withdrew their membership from our church because a guest preacher quoted St. Augustine. Even then, this seemed to me a bit over the top, but only a little, for our hostility to Catholicism ran deep.

I joined the US Air Force, and began moving from place to place, and traipsing from church to church. Rather than being adherents of one denomination, we looked for a church home that adhered to a fundamentalist confession of faith. We found that we could be at home, both doctrinally and otherwise, in a variety of different denominations. We also found that within a single fundamentalist denomination existed a variety of doctrines and practices; meanwhile some denominations that were supposedly more moderate in theology and practice had their own fundamentalist element. It was all very confusing, and every time we would move, it would take us several months to find a church home.

From time to time we would visit various Charismatic and Pentecostal churches—sometimes to see the latest Christian movie on the rapture, or for a concert by a Contemporary Christian band, or just because a friend invited us to 'come and see'. My upbringing included a hostility towards the charismatic movement, and towards 'speaking in tongues', yet I couldn't deny their fervency and devotion to God matched and even exceeded my own. Yet something about it seemed artificial. The Holy Spirit needed coaxing; the outpouring of the Spirit seemed to need loud, exuberant music, and the pastor's prayers seemed to be a mix of wheedling and sweet-talking. Yet it never happened as described in the scriptures; it was never in the context of evangelism. Instead, it was described as a private prayer language (an expression never used in the bible, even though these people supposedly derived their theology from scripture alone.)

Looking back on it now, it seems the very fact that I would try out different denominations, and was willing to flirt with the Charismatics, is evidence that I was looking for a fuller expression of Christianity,

something more vibrant, more vital, more true. In the late 1980s things deteriorated; for reasons neither of us could really explain, my wife and I grew increasingly uneasy with and in the fundamentalist/evangelical milieu. I was briefly tempted by Eastern Orthodoxy after I began reading “Facing East” by Frederica Mathewes-Green, but I never actually attended a service—for about two-thirds of the way through that book, I came across evidence of the veneration of Mary among the Orthodox, which I dismissed as a contemptible Roman Catholic doctrine, a recrudescence of paganism clothed in Christian garb—for the veneration of Mary, being one of the most visible aspects of Roman Catholicism, must therefore be wrong.

I called my father and began to go through the various churches in town, as he explained their doctrinal differences. When we got to the Lutherans, he informed me that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) stood alone among the mainline denominations, in that it had made a successful stand against theological liberalism. He told me they were conservative in theology, but I wouldn’t like it. He was right; after my first Lutheran worship service, which I judged to be Catholic, I vowed never to return. Nevertheless, the pastor dealt with me gently and we agreed to begin taking classes on Lutheran doctrine.

Shortly after starting the classes, I was deployed overseas. I took with me a copy of the Lutheran Book of Concord, which I read slowly and carefully, composing long letters to the pastor regarding the various doctrinal issues. Imperceptibly, and almost against my will, I became convinced that the Lutheran Confessions were the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God. Upon my return, my wife and I became Lutherans. Yet in many ways, I remained firmly fundamentalist.¹ It took my some time to come to grips with sacramental theology; it took me nearly two decades before I rejected dispensationalism as a grievous theological error; and it took longer still to accept infant baptism.

In becoming Lutheran, I exchanged one theological system for another; one style of worship for another; one vocabulary for another. But I discovered that Lutheranism, not even in the LCMS, is by no means monolithic. It isn’t like a chain restaurant, where the menu is the same from town to town. Within the LCMS it is said that the ‘saltwater Districts’ were more liberal in doctrine and practice than those in the heartland. In my military travels, I certainly found this to be true. And even the so-called ‘confessional’ Lutheran churches had a great variation in their liturgy. In our service book, there were five different liturgies, and each liturgy had two or three columns containing different prayers. If you looked closely enough, it was easy to see that all this variation in worship was an expression of a variation in doctrine. We also had non-liturgical Lutherans, devotees of Contemporary Christian worship, who may basically be thought of as sacramental Baptists or Charismatics. And so I found myself back where I started from, facing the same crises, and still looking for that fuller expression of the faith.

¹ Scott McLemee writes: *“It might be a good moment to clarify the distinction between evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity, which are not the same thing even though the labels are often taken as synonymous. The evangelical Christian has had a transformative inner experience ... and then communicates the message of the gospels to others. The fundamentalist regards the scriptures as literally and timelessly true. The Bible was dictated by God in plain terms requiring no interpretation at all, except in a very few places where He has laid the symbolism on so thick (beasts, crowns, horsemen with names like War and Famine, etc.) that nobody can miss it. Someone can be both evangelical and fundamentalist, of course. Each perspective plunges a believer right into the absolute. But they are ultimately distinct. To put it one way, the evangelical stance is ethical (it defines a way of living) while the fundamentalist claim is not just about interpretation but about access to knowledge (which is certain, unchanging, and immediately available).”* (McLemee 2011)

Following a successful military career, I retired and became the managing director of a small Lutheran seminary. Among my responsibilities was writing position papers and drafting responses to correspondence for the seminary president. This required me to read widely and study deeply, and in addition to the various Lutheran sources, I began to spend time in our library reading the early church fathers. These explorations were endlessly fascinating, and led to a greater understanding and appreciation of historic Christianity. Yet for all my growing respect for the church fathers, I couldn't understand the way they talked about the Virgin Mary.

My Protestant background had convinced me that the Virgin Mary was nothing more than a bit player, a young Jewish girl who made a cameo appearance in the Christmas pageant, then quickly faded into the background. I argued that Mary was an incidental participant in the incarnation, not much more than an incubator for the Christ;² I argued that Mary was perhaps an example of Christian obedience and submission, but no more than that. I could see no evidence in the scriptures to convince me otherwise.

One Sunday during Advent, my pastor mentioned he had no problem believing in the perpetual virginity of Mary, briefly demonstrating that it was theologically consistent with the Old and New Testaments. He also said he had no problem with a variety of other Marian doctrines. He even produced some historical evidence for bodily Assumption of Mary (what the Orthodox call her Dormition), although he said the evidence was too slight to be dogmatic about it. Given my hostility to what I considered a Roman Catholic teaching, I was quite shaken by this. I began looking into the scriptural foundations of Mariology.

The evidence surprised me. The scriptural evidence for Mariology—instead of being slight and easily dismissed—turned out to be quite extensive. My own knowledge was so limited that I did not know enough to ask the most interesting Mariological questions. My Protestant background—with its automatic hostility to Catholicism—had ill equipped me for this sort of investigation. Eventually it became clear that the standard Protestant arguments against Mariology were weak at best, showing strong evidence of the logical fallacy called "Begging the Question" where the proposition to be proven is assumed in the premise. Most Protestant exegetes begin with the premise that Mariology cannot be proven in scripture, and then proceed to demonstrate how correct they are by ignoring or explaining away that which they have already chosen not to see.

I began my investigation wanting to know why Catholics (and Eastern Orthodox, along with nearly every non-Western, non-Protestant branch of Christianity) believe what they believe about Mary. I was sure it had little to do with Sacred Scripture, and nearly everything to do with human traditions enforced by some form of non-scriptural and perhaps anti-scriptural authority. I asked myself how Catholics justify their beliefs, and whether they even pretend to have a biblical basis for their doctrines. At first, I confined myself to reading what various Protestants said about Catholicism and Mariology. It quickly became clear that most Protestant authors did not know why Catholics believed as they did; they

² I am embarrassed to admit this, as it shows how far I had strayed from ancient Christianity. In the second century, Irenaeus argued against this concept in his polemic against the Valentinians. "There are also some who maintain that he also produced Christ as his own proper son, but of an animal nature, and that mention was made of him by the prophets. This Christ passed through Mary just as water flows through a tube." (P. Schaff, ANF01. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus 1884, 532) This passage describes how the body of Jesus was not derived from Mary, which is not what Protestants believe. However, what is of note here is the separation of the person of Jesus from that of His mother, a separation which amounts to a denial of the humanity of Christ.

quoted each other quite extensively and quoted minor or popular Catholic authors, but rarely quoted authoritative Catholic source documents.

Once I read Roman Catholic sources, I quickly discovered many of the Protestant apologists were misquoting and sometimes even distorting their sources. If I was to be intellectually honest, if I was going to learn enough to ask the right questions, I was going to have to leave the Protestant milieu and travel through unfamiliar territory. Eventually I began to read the early church fathers, which was quite startling in itself; most evangelicals—and dispensationalists in particular—do not read the fathers. Dispensationalists have a peculiar interpretation of Revelation chapter's 2-3, which Charles Darby interpreted as a precapitulation of the Church Age. By using this interpretation, Dispensationalists say the early church (represented by the church of Ephesus) had already left its first love; therefore Dispensationalists reject the writings of the church fathers, those who had already departed from the pure faith in Christ, and pure theology. Other fundamentalists believe that the breach or apostasy came with Constantine's legalization of Christianity. Of course this explains why some would disregard the later fathers as Catholic, but does not explain why they would ignore the church fathers previous to Constantine.

My first indication that something was seriously wrong with the various Protestant communions was when I read the *Didache* (aka *The Teaching Of The Lord To The Gentiles By The Twelve Apostles.*) This document very likely preserves the order of the church in Jerusalem; scholars now believe to be a first century document, perhaps as early as A.D. 70, placing it well within the apostolic era. Here was a different expression of Christianity, one completely foreign to me, yet one the apostles did not seem to have a problem with. One thing that struck me is that although the *Didache* contains a great deal of information about how to live and worship as a Christian community, it contains nothing of what I recognized as doctrine. I compared this to the *Apostolic Traditions*, written by Hippolytus in the third century to preserve the church order and practices in use in Alexandria; once again, it contains nothing of what we today would call doctrine. Finally, I came across the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a second or third century work containing fourth and fifth century interpolations, a document preserving the church order of Asia Minor. This work is more extensive than the first two, yet only the sixth book against Heresies contains any doctrine—and apart from a credal portion in Section III entitled *An Exposition of the Preaching of the Apostles*, most of the work consists of a description of various errors or of the prescriptions of the apostles. What we would term the doctrinal portion of this work is surprisingly brief.

I found a similar concern in the epistles of the apostle Paul. The first two thirds are usually concerned with correcting certain matters of theology, while the latter third is concerned with matters of church order, and with prescriptions for holy living. The epistles to the Corinthian Church are even more explicit, mixing prescriptions for church order and discipline, theology, and exhortations to holy living throughout these letters. How we live as Christians mattered to the apostle. We are to live out our faith; we are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). Other New Testament authors say the same. James tells us to resist the devil (Jas 4:7). In his exhortation to holy living, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews write: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb 12:4).

I now had three different church orders from different regions: one from the apostolic era, one from the era prior to Constantine, one from after Constantine, and all saying basically the same thing. What I had was an expression of Christianity that I could not deny, yet could not explain either. These Christians were concerned with how one lived in community with each other and before the world, and with how they were organized and worshiped as church. These two were not separate areas, but were

commingled together in a manner I found confusing. As I was working at Lutheran seminary at the time, I raised these issues with some of the professors. The basic answer I got was that we could not reipristinate, a word that means to restore something to its state of original purity. This was an implicit admission that we no longer believed and worshiped in a manner like the early church. Somehow they were alright with that, but I couldn't make sense of it.

I continued my investigations into the Virgin Mary: I browsed the stacks at the Lutheran seminary; I went to Catholic bookstores and asked for their more academic books on doctrine and Mariology; I began searching the Internet for various scholarly articles from authors of different denominations and communions; and I began listening to Catholic and Orthodox radio broadcasts (on air and over the Internet.) My investigations startled me. Contrary to what I had been taught, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and others based their Mariology on Sacred Scripture; not only that, but their analysis of the relevant scriptural passages was quite profound.³ I discovered that at its core, Marian doctrine permeates the Old Testament, providing color and depth to the New.⁴ I discovered that even amongst Catholics, Marian doctrine does not stand alone, but is profoundly Christological—and that it had been developed to counter Christological error. Like the blessed apostle, I had the sensation that someone had touched my eyes; when the scales fell from my eyes, I felt I was seeing scripture clearly for the first time. This was not comfortable for me then, and remains a painful process.

About this time I first heard of the *Augustana Graeca*, a version of the Lutheran's Augsburg Confession which had been extensively rewritten for an Orthodox audience. The presentation of the *Augustana Graeca* to Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople occasioned the first theological discussion between the Lutherans and the Orthodox. I read these theological discussions with increasing fascination, and it seemed to me that Patriarch Jeremiah II made a compelling case against the confession of faith which I professed, and about which I was now beginning to have serious doubts.

This was a troubling time for me. I came to the realization that I had a minimal standard of proof for things I was convinced of, yet required a higher standard of proof for positions that did not agree with mine. I accepted my doctrinal positions because they were consonant with my existing doctrinal structure; I rejected other positions that did not fit within that structure, because to do otherwise put my entire theological structure into doubt. Therefore, any position that I was unfamiliar with or that did not fit, required some form of external proof; positions that fit into my doctrinal structure were (more or less) accepted solely on that basis. Marian doctrine was one thing that up to this point had not fit into my existing doctrinal structure, and it took a lot to get me to change my mind. Yet based on Sacred Scripture, I have been forced to accept certain Marian doctrines---doctrines that I had long considered exclusively Catholic, and which ultimately called into question my otherwise internally coherent system of belief.

I could not shake the sense that these explorations were guiding me toward a fuller expression of Christianity. It was this exploration of the church fathers, of the ancient church orders, and my Marian doctrine, and the reflexive hostility it engendered, that began to lead me away from the Lutheran communion. The more I learned about the Blessed Virgin, the more difficulties I encountered within my own theological communion. Eventually I found that many Lutheran pastors who claim a *quia*

³ An argument can be made that the Latins go too far, abandoning analysis for speculation, then codifying speculation into infallible dogma. We are a long way from speaking of those excesses, however.

⁴ There are Catholics who disagree with this assessment. Author Sally Cunneen, in attempting to discover the real Mary, makes the following statement: "What is striking in the Gospel stories how seldom Mary is mentioned."

subscription to the Lutheran Confessions actually express a *quatenus* confession when it comes to the Virgin Mary.⁵

When I explained to my fellow Lutherans that the introduction to the Smalcald Articles is an expression of the delimiting principle—that the confessions are delimited over and against error, and that when the confessions fail to address an issue, they are saying they agree with the Catholic Church on that issue, Lutheran pastors would throw *Sola Scriptura* back at me.⁶ They said that if they cannot find it directly expressed in the Scriptures, they will reject the Confessions. Sadly, that is a thoroughly Protestant position, not a Lutheran one. Luther and the earliest confessors had no problem with the Mariology extant at the time of the Reformation; it wasn't until late in the 16th century that Lutheran postils (sermon collections) showed a drift toward what we might now call the Protestant position on Mary.

Eventually I became convinced that the *Sola Scriptura* principle is itself extra-scriptural. The apostle writes that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim 3:15—the church, not the scriptures. Think on that for a moment. Now think on the fact that the primitive church existed for perhaps four decades before the first book of the New Testament was written, and it was not until the *Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle* of St. Athanasius the Great (A.D. 367) when the canon of the New Testament we use today was first expressed. So for over 300 years, neither the church nor the individual Christian could point to an authoritative New Testament; they couldn't say to each other: “Let's see what the Bible says”. Yet the church grew and prospered, despite persecution, and without a fixed canon.

Gradually I began to have doubts about the Lutheran doctrine of forensic justification; that God is bound to judge sin, expends his wrath on the person of the Son of God dying on a cross in our place, and that God then declares us righteous by applying to us the righteousness of God. Connected to this is the idea of the substitutionary atonement, that Jesus Christ died in our place as our substitute. This also contains elements of the satisfaction theory; that the death of Jesus satisfied God's offended honor. What I noticed was that these concepts were conspicuously absent in the writings of the church fathers.

The early church seems to have held more to the *Christus Victor* or the ransom theories of the atonement. The idea of atonement as a satisfaction of God's offended honor was a late development, coming from Anselm of Canterbury's book, *Cur Deus Homo*, written in the 11th century. From the Protestant Reformation came the idea of Penal Substitution, which is derivative of Anselm of Canterbury, and made popular in the 16th century by Luther, Calvin, and the Protestant Reformers. Since forensic justification is such a late development, how then is it catholic? And the doctrine by which the church stands or falls is not catholic, how then are we Lutherans part of the one, holy, apostolic, and catholic church?

Polycarp, disciple of the apostle John, writes the following in his *Epistle to the Philippians*:
...our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] “whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave.” “In whom, though now ye see Him not, ye believe, and

⁵ Lutherans subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions either because (*quia*) they are the true and faithful exposition of the Sacred Scriptures, or merely insofar as (*quatenus*) they are the true and faithful exposition of the Sacred Scriptures. The difference is that *quia* is the expression of the (Lutheran) church, while *quatenus* is the expression of the private conscience.

⁶ BTW, the Scriptures can be shown to express the ever-virginity of the Virgin Mary; that evidence is dismissed, not for valid reasons, but on the basis of a priori assumptions.

believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that "by grace ye are saved, not of works," but by the will of God through Jesus Christ. (Polycarp, Epistle to the Philippians, chap. I)

While this passage does not provide the details of how humanity is to be saved, it is nonetheless significant that Polycarp provides no hint of substitutionary atonement, nor any idea of juridical satisfaction. Polycarp does not see salvation in terms of the Father seeking satisfaction for his offended honor, nor in terms of the Father as judge seeking to fulfill some juridical mandate.

St. Athanasius, writes the following in Chapter 2 of *On the Incarnation*:

The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required. Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all.

While Athanasius uses the concept of an 'exchange', this is clearly neither substitutionary atonement nor penal satisfaction. For Athanasius, justification is not forensic, no matter how Lutherans attempt to spin it.

This focus on forensic justification to the exclusion of other views was exemplified for me when I attended a theological symposia at Concordia Theological Seminary. Dr. Arthur Just presented on the topic of Justification in the book of Galatians. He concluded that in Galatians, Paul spoke of justification more in terms of a recreation than as forensic. As it happens, I was seated next to a fervent defender of Lutheran orthodoxy. The gentleman in question Preus was incensed by Dr. Just's presentation, and I later saw him commenting on it in a vociferous manner to the President of Concordia Theological Seminary. This then became quite a contentious issue among the so-called Confessional Lutherans, many of whom accused Dr. Just of heresy for suggesting that justification could be anything other than forensic. But of course, Dr. Just was correct, as borne out by scripture.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (1 Cor 5:17-21)

It was about this time that I reread the book “Facing East”, which I had tried to read so many years ago. Although I had never finished the book, I had carried it with me through my military wanderings. Now, lacking my reflexive hostility towards the veneration of Mary, I was once again intrigued. Yet my twenty years as a Lutheran had given me a healthy doubt about my ability to discern the truth. I had once been a convinced dispensational fundamentalist; I became a Lutheran with fundamentalist leanings; then I finally dismissed dispensationalism and became thoroughly Lutheran. Now I was thinking of moving on again. Was I just fickle? Could I trust my judgment, my ability to discern the truth? To be honest, my wife shared these doubts, thinking this was perhaps another one of my enthusiasms; she wasn’t wrong to doubt—I’d dragged her through a lot. I finally decided that if my wife wasn’t on board, I would stay where I was. If God wanted us to move on from the Lutheran Church, He would have to convince us both.

If, as I had come to believe, the churches of the Reformation represented a deformation rather than a recovery of the pure faith, I was presented with a problem. Where could I find the original church, the expression of the pure faith? I was tempted by Catholicism; the Western Rite was familiar from my years as a Lutheran, and it seemed that I could make a graceful transition. But there were still some differences between the ancient church orders and what I saw in the doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church. I bought a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a book of more than nine hundred pages, and I found the tone and character of the book to be distinct from that of the early church orders. And I found the arguments of Patriarch Jeremiah II against Lutheran doctrine were equally compelling against the Church of Rome.

Yet what is Orthodoxy, anyway? To quote Winston Churchill, it seemed like a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. I initially couldn’t make sense of it, but neither could I deny its power. Orthodoxy is intellectual without being rationalistic. The Orthodox are comfortable with mystery, with the things which God chooses not to reveal to us, or which He reveals without explanation. In the west, everything has to have an explanation, has to be rigorously defined and endlessly categorized. This is cataphatic or positive theology, and accounts for the western churches seemingly endless need to create systematic theologies. Orthodoxy, by contrast, is an expression of apophatic theology, a theology of negation. The two different approaches are best illustrated by their descriptions of God: the west describes God as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; the Orthodox liturgy describes God as “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing, yet ever the same, you, and your only begotten Son, and your Holy Spirit.” The western and the eastern approach, the apophatic and the cataphatic way, come from two very different places and lead to two very different conclusions—the one to endless speculation, the other to endless contemplation.

Orthodoxy is hierarchal without being authoritarian. A proper Orthodox bishop makes no pretense to secular authority. Moreover, while some bishops may have a certain precedence of honor, no bishop has any more authority than any other. In council, all bishops are equal. Major decisions are made in conciliar fashion, by a council of bishops. The priests serve on behalf of the bishop; the deacons assist the priest by serving at the Eucharistic table. Moreover, councils of bishops are not authoritative unless accepted by the church at large, which historically has refused to accept the acts of certain councils.

Orthodoxy has a strong historicity. I can read the church fathers and find in them an expression of the faith which is identical to that of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, this expression of the faith is not merely doctrinal, but expressed in the way the Orthodox live and worship. Moreover, Orthodoxy is biblical without engaging in bibliolatry. The bible is not a scripture that was spoken by angels (like the Holy Quran), nor was it translated directly from golden plates delivered by an angel (like the Book of

Mormon). The Orthodox understand that the bible has a history, and is a product and expression of that history. Moreover, the bible cannot be understood properly apart from that history, which we call Holy Tradition.

It was not easy to become Orthodox. I was brought to the banks of the Bosphorus, yet turned away and wandered in my own spiritual desert for twenty years before finding my way back. And yet, as I look back on my journey, I have no regrets. I am thankful for my Fundamentalist roots, for it was there that I came to saving faith. And I am thankful for my Lutheran roots, for they corrected my Dispensationalism and hostility to sacramental theology. I am also thankful for my time working at the Lutheran seminary, because doing so got me to read deeply in the church fathers and got me thinking and writing about theology. I'm also thankful that I left off working for the seminary, because without having left that cloistered environment, I might never have taken that fateful first step into the Orthodox Church.

And so, to come full circle, my entry into the Orthodox Church was not because of, but in spite of the aesthetic sensibilities of Orthodox worship. My romantic attachment to Orthodoxy came much later. I came to Orthodoxy head first; I chose Orthodoxy because I discovered an intellectually consistent and theologically coherent faith; I chose Orthodoxy because only there have I found the fullness of the faith. Thanks be to God, which givest us the victory.