

**The Orthodox Mind**  
**by Priest John Whiteford**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| I. Introduction .....                       | 1  |
| II. Protestant Ethos.....                   | 3  |
| A. Humanism/ Individualism/ Secularism..... | 4  |
| B. Modernism.....                           | 5  |
| C. Arrogance/ Hubris/ Prelest .....         | 6  |
| D. Reductionism / Empiricism.....           | 6  |
| III. The Orthodox Mind .....                | 10 |
| A. Corporate / Theocentric .....            | 10 |
| B. Antiquity / Unchanging.....              | 11 |
| C. Humility, Repentance.....                | 11 |
| D. Maximalism / Full Worldview.....         | 11 |
| IV. The Journey .....                       | 12 |
| A. The Pitfalls .....                       | 12 |
| B. The Weapons of our warfare.....          | 14 |
| 1. The Mysteries.....                       | 14 |
| 2. The Services and Service .....           | 14 |
| 3. Prayer and Fasting.....                  | 14 |
| 4. The Fathers.....                         | 15 |
| 5. The lives of the Saints.....             | 15 |
| 6. Cradle Orthodox.....                     | 15 |
| Conclusion: .....                           | 15 |

---

## **I. Introduction**

Imagine for a moment what this conference would be like and what we would be talking about if this were an Evangelical Missions conference rather than Orthodox. Aside from the obvious outward difference -- the cleaner cut image, business suits... maybe we would have had a rock band lead us in the latest top 40 worship hits -- but beyond that, the topics we would be discussing would be almost entirely different.

We would not be focusing on spiritual formation, and probably not much on worship -- though certainly not on historic Christian worship. It's unlikely that fasting, or spiritual discipline would come up as topics -- more likely we would be talking about what we needed to do to accommodate our churches and worship to society, so as to make it more appealing and sellable. If it sounds to you like I'm being unfair, then you probably have not read much in the way of Protestant Church growth material.

Now suppose that an Evangelical were to leave a conference such as this and walk in on this one. Aside from being unfamiliar with the outward differences, such a person would not properly understand most of what has gone on here. It would not be out of stubbornness on his part -- it would be because in a sense, we do not speak the same language. His entire frame of reference is alien to the Orthodox worldview. Certainly there are many points of contact between Protestantism and Orthodoxy -- we use many of the same terms, we both use the Scriptures, speak of Jesus Christ, and of the Trinity -- but these points of contact, in some ways, make it more difficult for a Protestant to understand and accept Orthodoxy -- and perhaps to an even greater degree, are a huge stumbling block in the pathway towards developing a truly Orthodox mind.

When I was in High School, I was quite a Martial Arts enthusiast. The style I studied was a form of Chinese Kung Fu. Now in my Martial Arts school we had a number of converts from Tae Kwon Doism, who had seen the light and sought refuge in the Ancient tradition of Kung Fu. What was interesting though, is a non-martial arts pagan could walk in off the street and they would have an easier time learning to do the forms and stances correctly.

The problem was that many of the stances and forms, as well as punches and kicks were very similar -- but just different enough to make it very difficult to learn to do it the Kung Fu way. But when it came time to put these techniques into practice -- when we sparred -- this problem became even more apparent. With time, many of these converts learned to do the stances and forms correctly (though the Tae Kwon Do influence could still be seen at times) but when they would spar -- many of them would spar as if they had never studied Kung Fu at all.

The instructor would often stop the action, and tell such people, "Look, Tae Kwon Do is fine, if you want to learn Tae Kwon Do, but you're here to learn Kung Fu -- if you want to learn Kung Fu, you going to have to put what you know about Tae Kwon Do aside and use the techniques that you've learned here."

The reason these people reverted back to Tae Kwon Do while sparing is simple -- when you're sparring, you've got to think and act fast, and Tae Kwon Do was what came natural to them -- in fact it was preventing them from arriving at the point at which Kung Fu would become natural, and so until they could come to the point at which they would lay aside their Tae Kwon Do techniques -- little progress in Kung Fu could possibly be made.

Similarly, in the Orthodox Church today there are many converts from Protestantism. They have seen in Orthodoxy that which they found lacking in their former Protestant experience, but very often they speak and act in very Protestant ways still.

Does this mean that a convert from Protestantism can never really become authentically Orthodox? I sure hope not. What it does mean however, is that we have a more difficult road ahead of us than would a convert from paganism.

Former Protestants have the advantage of being more familiar with the Scriptures, and knowing much of Orthodox terminology, but often they do not move beyond their Protestant understanding of these things to an Orthodox one, or else they revert back to it at times in a pinch.

The convert from paganism, doesn't think he has already understood something that he has not -- and so is more easily instructed.

What converts must realize is that they must become white belts in the Orthodox Church -- regardless of whether or not they had been 5th degree black belts in Protestantism.

People often wonder why it is that the Russian Missionaries in Alaska were able to evangelize the Indians there very quickly and convert entire tribes, and yet here in Protestant America, converts have only in the last few decades become numerous, and even still they mostly all come only after a good and long fight.

The reason is very simple. When the Aleuts heard the Orthodox Gospel from the Russian missionaries, they did not wrongly think that they already knew what these missionaries were talking about, and so they got it right the first time, and so never had to contend with heterodox misinterpretations of the Faith. Protestants, on the other hand, have in a sense been inoculated against the truth by having first been injected with a dead form of the Christian Faith. They thus have an immunity which is only overcome with difficulty. A Protestant is almost never going to be able to accept Orthodoxy immediately

upon his first exposure to it -- only after a long and painful period of dealing with the issues that separate them from Orthodoxy can they usually come to terms with it.

But this only takes us to the point of conversion -- the point at which a Protestant is prepared to accept Orthodoxy as the True Faith. What needs to be understood, but which too often is not, is that that is only the beginning. The whole conversion process is a subject unto itself, but what I would like to focus on today is what happens next, after one comes to accept Orthodoxy as the True Faith, is made a Catechumen, and what continues even after baptism.

To become convinced that Orthodoxy was the true Faith is a revolutionary change in and of itself for a Protestant -- but becoming Orthodox in mind and spirit is in many ways even more of a revolution, and it certainly is a much more involved process. Even those raised in the Church have to develop an Orthodox mind -- if you doubt that, then just consider for a moment those whom you've met that were raised Orthodox, but who do not have an Orthodox mind. Many people who have been Orthodox all their lives have more of a Protestant mind than they do an Orthodox one -- and some have more of a pagan mind than anything. So no one in the Church is exempt from this struggle.

Essentially what this transformation requires is a worldview shift --and that is true for pagan converts as well -- the difference being that because the Orthodox worldview is so radically distinct from a pagan worldview, it is clear what changes must be made and there is little room for confusion. With Protestants, there is much room for confusion -- they are in many ways so close, but as a result, so far away.

What do I mean by worldview?

A worldview is a set of mental paradigms with which we evaluate our experiences.

Our worldview determines our expectations of reality, and our expectations largely determine our perception of reality. If we are faced with something that does not fit into our paradigm, then we are likely to be blind to it, or to try to make it fit artificially in our worldview.

For example, in some cultures they only distinguish between two or three colors, bright and dark let's say -- so to such a person, blue and black are both just dark, the distinction is missed. Or for an example that is more close to home: what our cultures predominant worldview would call an emotionally disturbed person, another (such as that of the Bible) might call demonized. The expectations of these worldviews will either open or blind a person to certain possibilities.

An animist would be blinded to the role that germs play in sickness, or that a head wound or brain damage might play in mental illness -- an animist would see everything in terms of spiritual forces.

A modern Empiricist, on the other hand, would be completely blind to the very possibility that spiritual forces could even play a part in such things as sickness or mental illness.

Our worldview is the way that we think. It is the way that we look at things, process information, it is the paradigms that with sort things through. Especially for converts but for anyone who lives in a Protestant culture such as this, we must clearly understand what the Protestant worldview is and how it differs from the Orthodox Worldview.

## **II. Protestant Ethos.**

Now some might dispute the need for studying the Protestant way of thinking -- perhaps it might be OK for the purpose of winning converts, but why should those already Orthodox be bothered? The reason is simple: we live in a society that is thoroughly Protestant. Furthermore, the Protestant ethos is to be found even among many who have been Orthodox all their lives.

There is a Chinese proverb which says: " Know the enemy and know yourself, and in a thousand battles you will not see defeat" [These words were written over 2,000 years ago by the great Chinese military strategist, Sun Zi in his book which is usually called in English "The Art of War."]

The first duty of every Orthodox Christian is to "know yourself", in other words, to know the Orthodox Faith, as well as to be aware of our own strengths and weakness and to so walk in humility -- which is not a false humility, but is actually a very realistic appraisal of ourselves in comparison with the examples of the saints and in the light of God's standards of Holiness and Righteousness.

In addition to knowing ourselves, we must know the enemy -- the scriptures teach us in many places that we are to be vigilant and fully aware of Satan's devices.

To get a handle on the prevailing Protestant / Secular worldview, I would like to focus on four major characteristics that identify it and distinguish it from an Orthodox frame of reference.

### ***A. Humanism/ Individualism/ Secularism***

The first characteristic of the Protestant Worldview is that it is Humanistic.

Now for conservative Protestants this statement will come as quite a shock, and no doubt they would hotly dispute it -- but the statement is an historic truth as well as an observable fact. Protestantism was birthed out of and became the religious expression of the humanism of the Renaissance, and as Frank Schaeffer has put it: it has been the engine of the Secularization of Western Culture. Humanism is characterized by its idealization of individual autonomy and its promulgation of secularization. Church authority was rejected in favor of the subjective judgment of the individual. The idea of a Christian nation was replaced with the concept of separation of Church and state -- and for those who would argue that this was a later development, while it is true that Luther and Calvin saw no need for the separation of Church and State (because they were in power) the earliest Anabaptists championed this from the beginning.

What is amazing is how conservative Protestants have viewed humanism and secularization as a foreign invader that is completely at odds with their faith -- when in fact it is the fruit of their own intellectual wombs.

For example, every Western Christmas, you can hear Protestants loudly bemoaning the fact that Christ has been taken out of Christmas and replaced with Santa Claus -- but where did that come from? It was the English Puritans who opposed the idea of a religious calendar, and who opposed Christmas and all other holidays as "pagan" and so sought to replace those holidays with secular observances. It was these Puritans who invented Father Frost, and replaced the idea of going to Church on Christmas to celebrate Christ's birth with the family fun, games, gifts, and food observance that characterizes the common Protestant observance of Christmas. So in their quest to get rid of the "pagan" Christian calendar of feasts, it was in fact the Protestants who developed the truly pagan secular calendar that our culture has come to know and love.

The Protestant tendency toward individualism is also seen manifested in the Charismatic movement and in other pietistic circles in the form of emotionalism and an elevation of emotionalism. In contemporary denominational Protestantism, the worship services is not so much a service to God, but a service that meets the needs of the people. People look for the church that will best serve them, rather than a Church in which they can best serve God. If you take a look at the modern Protestant "Mega Churches" you'll find bowling alleys, swimming pools, Karate classes, singles groups that will help you find a date, youth groups that will entertain your kids -- what more could Madison Avenue have to offer?

The focus on entertainment can be seen in the layout of most modern Evangelical Churches -- they are set up like theaters. You can take your pick of a Church that offers Country Western Worship, Pop, Rock and Roll, or classical if you like. It's as easy as choosing a radio station. How alien this is to the Biblical view of worship in terms of Sacrifice, and service to God. You'll not find any of the Psalms talking about how the writer was entertained at the temple, or a focus on how his needs were met.

One need not look too hard in the Bible to see how foreign the concepts of Secularism, Humanism, and Individualism are to the minds of the Biblical writers.

There was no separation of Church and state in the OT. In fact the kings of Israel and Judah were judged by their defense of the Faith against pagan and heretical religious expressions. Repeatedly we read in the Scriptures, "such and such king did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, he pulled down the high places which the Lord had forbidden..." etc.

The worldview of the Bible is not man centered, but is clearly Theocentric. Individualism would have been a completely foreign concept -- a fact that even Protestant Biblical scholars do not hesitate to concede. In fact they point out that the Israelites had a concept of a corporate personality. Certainly they believed in individual responsibility, but it is clear that the Israelites viewed themselves as parts of their family unit, their clan, their tribe, and their nation -- and they recognized that God dealt with them not only as individuals but as groups.

## ***B. Modernism.***

The second chief characteristic of Protestantism is Modernism.

From the very beginning Protestantism has been marked by a complete contempt for ancient Christianity and Tradition. It must be conceded that Protestantism was not without justification in protesting the form of tradition that it was confronting -- because far from being faithful to Ancient Christianity, Papism was itself an innovation. But rather than return to the authentic Christianity of Orthodoxy, Protestantism sought to remedy the situation by ostensibly returning to the ancient purity of the Scriptures, but in reality it was simply replacing the arbitrariness of a single pope with democratic papism -- in which each individual was his own infallible pope -- receiving direct revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Protestants claimed that they held Scripture to be the only authority, and rejected the interpretations of the Fathers whenever they contradicted the Scriptures -- but in reality they were really placing their interpretations of the Scriptures above that of the Fathers, and in essence saying that when the Fathers contradict their individual interpretations -- their interpretations are to be taken as more authoritative.

In its fight against Romanism, Protestantism sought to discredit all the ancient wisdom of the Church. The previous period was termed pejoratively as "the dark ages." "New" became synonymous with "good"; "Newer" with better; and "New and Improved" as better still. "Change" is used almost like a magic amulet, that justifies whatever it is associated with. The ancient Christian view was that novelty and innovation were absolute proofs of error, but in Protestantism this was turned on its head to the point that innovation is to them proof of truth. While Protestants attacked (often with justification) the Roman Tradition for its post apostolic additions -- they developed new Traditions at a rate that would make any Papist's head spin.

At heart, Modernism is not really at war with the past nearly so much as it is at war with God.

Modernism is simply the lever with which Humanists and Secularists have sought to unseat God from His throne and place man in His stead.

The Secular Humanism that conservative Protestants view as their mortal enemy is simply a more highly developed form of Protestantism. The pietist Protestantism of the past has now outlived its usefulness for the Secularization process, and so has been discarded by the more advanced Protestant Secularists.

The Reformers rejected Tradition, and said that they only needed the Bible and their own reason as their guide. Later Protestants turned their knives on the Bible itself, whittling away at it until they now have only their own reason and sentimentality as their guide. More Primitive religious Protestants, having been spurned by Modernity has ever since been trying to catch up with the spirit of the age by becoming "relevant". To become "relevant" they have sought to further accommodate their religion to appeal to the broader culture. Today, even among conservative Evangelicals, it is Madison Avenue that determines their worship -- not any Scriptural mandates. There has been a continuous parade of fads that have swept this country as Protestants have tried to keep things entertaining and "new".

### ***C. Arrogance/ Hubris/ Prelest***

Closely associated with both Anthropocentric individualism and secularism, as well as Modernism, comes arrogance, hubris, and spiritual delusion (or prelest). This is most clearly seen when one examines Protestant Biblical scholarship.

When I was a student at Southern Nazarene University preparing to become a Protestant Minister, when I was taught how to study the Bible, we were not taught to consult sacred Tradition or the writings of the Fathers -- not even those fathers that knew the Apostles personally. We were told that the Church fathers were all allegorists, and that they really didn't have a clue as to what the Bible was really saying.

In fact, it became apparent to me that not even the Apostles followed Protestant principles of exegesis when interpreting the OT -- and indeed my liberal professors did not hesitate to point out when the Apostles had misinterpreted the OT. When I asked one of my professors if he thought that he understood the Bible better than the Apostles -- he without hesitation answered "Yes!"

More conservative Protestant scholars would explain this discrepancy between Apostolic exegesis and Protestant Exegesis by saying that the Apostles were inspired to find spiritual meaning in the OT that was beyond its actual meaning to the OT writers -- but that we must not interpret the OT like that because we are not so inspired.

The bottom line however, is that Protestant exegesis is clearly unbiblical, and those who advocate it must acknowledge, like my more honest professor did, that they do indeed think that they know the Bible better than those who wrote it.

More liberal Protestant scholars, such as Rudolph Bultmann claimed to know more about who Jesus was than Jesus himself knew. They claim to be able to distinguish what Jesus really said, from what he did not. In essence, 2,000 years after the fact -- they claim that only now has the Bible really been understood. The Early Church, the Fathers of the Ecumenical councils, etc. etc., they have all been fooled and deluded -- it took these clever modern Biblical scholars to unmask the Truth.

### ***D. Reductionism / Empiricism***

The fourth and final characteristic of Protestantism that I want to highlight is its reductionism, and its rationalistic and Empiricists assumptions.

Protestantism is reductionist in a number of ways. It has always sought to get back to the "primitive" NT Church, to discard any aspect of the faith that cannot be proven to have been in place in the NT.

Protestants use the truncated OT canon of the Jews -- in fact if Luther had his way, he would have truncated the NT as well discarding James especially, along with a few other books that he didn't like.

Protestants have also sought to define the Christian Faith in terms of "essentials" -- i.e. what is the bare minimum that one must believe or do to be a Christian.

In essence, Protestants have always been marked by rationalism, and western rationalists have always sought to boil reality down to that which could serve as the firmest foundation upon which to build a sound rationalistic structure.

For example Descarte, using methodological doubt, found that he could doubt everything in the universe except his own existence --thus the famous line: I think, therefore I am. Upon this one sure basis -- his own existence -- he then proceeded to build his philosophical system.

The Reformers were at first content to view the Bible as the irreducible basis for their rationalism to be built upon, but later Protestants, like Descarte, using methodological doubt and the criterion of suspicion, began to examine the Bible to see what could be certainly known in it. Eventually, using their critical tools, there foundation of Sola Scriptura poured out of their hand like a handful of dust. Taken from its context within Holy Tradition, the Bible was a Castle built on thin air -- it didn't take long for it to come crashing down.

Modernists, in their arrogance have presumed to critically analyze the assumptions of all previous writers and philosophers -- but they have failed to critically assess their own underlying assumptions.

When I was a ministerial student, I was given the assignment of writing on the relationship between Empiricism and Biblical studies -- this turned out to be one of the most revelational studies I had ever conducted. The first amazing discovery I made was that there was almost nothing written on the subject. It became very clear that Empiricist and Positivist thought was a basic underlying assumption in Protestant Biblical studies, but I found nothing that directly examined the relationship between the two. Another discovery, which came as quite a shock to me at the time, was that the extreme rationalism and modernism that I personally rejected when I encountered it in the field of Biblical studies, was actually very much kin to the Humanistic assumptions that had always been present in Protestantism. What I came to realize was that the liberals were simply more consistently Protestant than I was as a conservative trying to hand on to some absolute truths.

Empiricism is based upon the assumption that the ultimate basis of knowledge is experience, or sense perception. Empiricism, as the term is most commonly used, does not refer to a specific philosophy, but rather to the most fundamental assumptions of the Modern Western worldview. Empiricism seeks to know what can be known with "certainty" and can be "verified" "scientifically."

The biggest assumption of the empirical worldview is that one can have a scientific method that operates without assumptions. That sounds ridiculous, but remember a worldview is a set of assumptions that we are usually unaware of. A further extension of the assumption that all knowledge is derived from experience is that reality is determined by what we can observe with our senses and can empirically test. The result of this belief [!] is that one must deny the possibility that one could know anything transcendent or supernatural--thus the reality of the transcendent and supernatural is denied. Empiricists do not produce evidence that falsifies transcendent reality, or miracles; rather their presuppositions, from the very outset, deny the possibility of such things.

Most conservative Protestants would object that they do not think this way at all. They believe in the Bible, and believe in the miracles of the Bible. Of course, if you are a Christian, then you could never accept all the conclusions of empiricism, but most Western Christians have adopted many of its assumptions -- to varying degrees. For example, a Christian could not have a worldview which denied

the transcendent, but many hold a radical dualism in which the transcendent and the empirical realms are radically separate, seldom come into contact, and when they do, only on very limited scale.

A pure Empiricist sees only the empirical level as knowable or real.

A Christian cannot deny the transcendent level, because to be a Christian one must believe in God; but a Christian who operates with empirical assumptions is blinded to the middle level. It is primarily on the level of the supernatural that the transcendent and the empirical come into contact; but a Christian empiricist cannot have the transcendent messing up the empirical realm, and so he sees God as having little to do with everyday life in the real world. This worldview is largely responsible for the compartmentalization of religion in the life of so many Western Christians.

An Animist, on the other hand, is culturally blind to empirical reality.

If someone is sick, then it is an evil spirit at work. Everything is connected with the supernatural. By the same token, a Christian empiricist immediately credits the sickness to natural causes, and so is blind to any supernatural factors at work. An Orthodox worldview, on the other hand, takes both factors into account -- all sickness is not spirit related, but neither is all sickness caused by natural factors alone.

Despite the obvious problems of using Empirical assumptions in the presumably theological field of Biblical studies, Protestants have embraced methodologies grounded in Empiricist thinking without examining the inconsistency of doing so because they were in search of some air of scientific objectivity in what would be otherwise a subjective and individualistic endeavor -- which clearly lacked any claim to consistency.

The great fallacy in the this so called "scientific" approach to the Scriptures lies in the fallacious application of empirical assumptions to the study of history, Scripture, and theology. Empirical methods work reasonably well when they are correctly applied to natural sciences, but when they are applied where they cannot possibly work, such as in history (which cannot be repeated or experimented upon) they cannot produce either consistent or accurate results.

Scientists have yet to invent a telescope capable of peering into the spirit world, and yet many Protestant scholars assert that in the light of science the idea of the existence of demons or of the Devil has been disproved -- where is the scientific study that has proven this? Were the Devil to appear before an Empiricist with pitch fork in hand and clad in bright red underwear, it would be explained neatly in some manner that would easily comport to his worldview, for although such Empiricists pride themselves on their openness to the truth, they are blinded by their assumptions to such an extent that they cannot see anything that does not fit their version of reality.

If the methods of empiricism were consistently applied it would discredit all knowledge (including itself), but empiricism is permitted to be inconsistent by those who hold to it because "its ruthless mutilation of human experience lends it such a high reputation for scientific severity, that its prestige overrides the defectiveness of its own foundations." [Rev. Robert T. Osborn, "Faith as Personal Knowledge," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (February 1975): 101-126.]

Conservative Protestants have happily been much less consistent in their rationalistic approach, and thus have preserved among themselves a reverence for the Scriptures and a belief in their inspiration -- never-the-less their approach (even among the most dogged Fundamentalists) is still essentially rooted in the same spirit of rationalism as the Liberals.

A prime example of this is to be found among Dispensational Fundamentalists, who hold to an elaborate theory which posits that at various stages in history God has dealt with man according to different "dispensations," such as the "Adamic dispensation," the "Noaic dispensation," the "Mosaic

dispensation," the "Davidic dispensation," and so on it goes. Thus far, one can see that there is a degree of truth in this theory, but beyond these Old Testament dispensations they teach that currently we are under a different dispensation than were the Christians of the first Century, and so though miracles continued through the New Testament period, they now longer occur today.

Now this is very interesting, because (in addition to lacking any Scriptural basis) this theory allows Fundamentalists to affirm the miracles of the Bible, while at the same time allowing them to be Empiricists in their every day life. Thus, though the discussion of this approach may at first glance seem to be only of academic interest and far removed from the reality of dealing with the average Protestant, in fact even the average piously conservative Protestant laymen is not unaffected by this sort of rationalism.

The connections between the extreme conclusions that modern liberal Protestant scholars have come to, and the more conservative or Fundamentalist Protestants will not seem clear to many -- least of all to conservative Fundamentalists! Though these conservatives see themselves as being in almost complete opposition to Protestant liberalism, they none the less use essentially the same kinds of methods in their study of the Scriptures as do the liberals, and along with these methodologies come their underlying philosophical assumptions which the conservatives have unwittingly bought into.

Thus the difference between the liberals and the conservatives is not in reality a difference of basic assumptions, but rather a difference in how far they have taken them to their logical conclusions. Like the Gadarene swine, together they are rushing headlong toward the edge of a precipice -- though the liberals may have already gone over the edge, the conservatives are heading in the same direction, they just haven't gone as far. The Protestant denominations that today are ordaining homosexuals as ministers were just as conservative a hundred years ago, and the more conservative denominations are following the same path.

If Protestant exegesis were truly scientific, as it presents itself, its results would show consistency. If its methods were merely unbiased "technologies" (as many view them) then it would not matter who used them, they would work the same for everyone; but what do we find when we examine current status of Protestant biblical studies? In the estimation of the "experts" themselves, Protestant biblical scholarship is in a crisis. In fact this crisis is perhaps best illustrated by the admission of a recognized Protestant Old Testament scholar, Gerhard Hasel [in his survey of the history and current status of the discipline of Old Testament theology, *Old Testament Theology: Issues in the Current Debate*], that during the 1970's five new Old Testament theologies had been produced "but not one agrees in approach and method with any of the others." In fact it is amazing, considering the self proclaimed high standard of scholarship in Protestant biblical studies, that you can take your pick of limitless conclusions on almost any issue and find good scholarship to back it up. In other words, you can just about come to any conclusion that suits you on a particular issue, and you can find a Ph.D. who will advocate it. This is certainly not science in the same sense as mathematics or chemistry! What we are dealing with is a field of learning that presents itself as objective science, but which in fact is a pseudo- science, concealing a variety of competing philosophical and theological perspectives. It is pseudo-science because until scientist develop instruments capable of examining and understanding God, objective scientific theology or biblical interpretation is an impossibility. This is not to say that there is nothing that is genuinely scholarly or useful within it; but this is to say that camouflaged with these legitimate aspects of historical and linguistic learning, and hidden by the fog machines and mirrors of pseudo-science, we discover in reality that Protestant methods of biblical interpretation are both the product and the servant of Protestant theological and philosophical assumptions -- and like hoses they simply spew forth whatever is pumped into them.

With subjectivity that surpasses the most speculative Freudian psychoanalysts, Protestant scholars selectively choose the facts and evidence that suits their agenda and then proceed (with their conclusions essentially predetermined by their basic assumptions) to ply their methods to the Holy

Scriptures; all the while thinking themselves dispassionate scientists. And since modern universities do not give out Ph.D.'s to those who merely pass on the unadulterated Truth, these scholars seek to out do each other by coming up with new outlandish theories. This is the very essence of heresy: novelty, arrogant personal opinion, and self deception.

Rather than discrediting ancient Patristic Christianity or Tradition, Protestantism has become the most vivid vindication of Tradition that the Church could have hoped for. Protestantism itself now stands thoroughly discredited. Twenty Three Thousand denominations after the Reformation, Protestants are becoming aware of the spiritual bankruptcy that constitutes denominational Christianity. I think that this is one of the biggest reasons for the influx of Protestants into the Church.

### **III. The Orthodox Mind**

Coming to the point where a Protestant realizes the spiritual bankruptcy of the Western Worldview may bring them to the doors of the Church, but simply rejecting Protestantism is not enough. For that matter, being convinced that Orthodoxy is the true Faith is good enough to have you made a Catechumen, but much more is needed. One must enter into the Spirit of Orthodoxy. Even when one reaches the point at which they are ready to receive Holy Baptism, this process must continue -- Baptism is the beginning of your life in the Church, it is a spiritual birth, but only a stillborn baby will not continue to grow spiritual. For a convert, must not only struggle against demons and against the flesh to accomplish this, but one must still contend with the modes of thought that he operated in prior to conversion.

Before we deal with how one goes about acquiring an Orthodox mind, however, let me briefly describe what an Orthodox mind is, especially as distinct from the Protestant mindset we have been discussing.

#### ***A. Corporate / Theocentric***

Rather than the Humanism and Individualism of Protestantism -- Orthodoxy is Theocentric, and corporate in its focus.

The focus of Orthodox worship is not on the personality of the priest, nor is it focused on meeting the needs of individuals, or on contrived emotional experiences -- the focus is on God. Unlike Protestant churches, in which the church rises or falls on the personality of the minister -- one need not even like the priest personally, and he can still worship in that parish, because we are there to worship God, not to hear a good and stirring sermon. It certainly a nice touch to have a priest with a good personality and who can give a good sermon -- but that is icing on the cake, not the cake itself.

The Church is not the sum total of individuals who are Christians, it is a community. Christ came to build His Church, not to establish a school of thought, or to save individuals apart from a community. This does not negate individual responsibility -- the Orthodox Church firmly believes that you can go to hell all by yourself, if you want to, without any help from anyone else -- but if you want to be saved, the Scripture is clear... you need the Church.

An Orthodox Christian is also held accountable by the Church. Christ spoke of Church discipline, and said that if someone would not "hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican" (Matt 18:17).

Christ also gave the Apostle the power to forgive sins in John 20:23 when He said: Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven unto them, and whose sins you retain, they are retained. It is amazing how Protestants, who say that they take the Bible literally, blow this verse off -- and when pressed, will flatly deny the plain meaning of this verse.

But far from being the horrible thing that Protestants think confession is -- it is both Biblical, and a great gift. Because we must humble ourselves, we gain victory over pride, and because we are held accountable we are given a powerful tool to help us advance in the Christian life.

One of the biggest criticisms Protestant make of confession is they claim that we can go out and sin all we want, and then have it all forgiven at confession -- that therefore confession is a license to sin. Obviously no one who has ever gone to confession would think this -- because although we should be shamed just by the fact that God knows we have sinned, in fact in our flesh we are more shamed when other men know our sins. When you go to confession to the same priest week after week -- we have added to our fear of God (which is something that we must develop) a witness who will call us to task for it. When temptation comes, the fact that we know we will be shamed to confess this sin next weekend is adds further strength to our resistance.

### ***B. Antiquity / Unchanging***

Rather than the Modernists continual desire to be relevant, and their valuing of innovation. In the Orthodox Church, we view innovation as the mark of heresy. St. Jude says that the Faith was once delivered unto the saints -- we can expect no new revelation until the second coming.

We are taught that it is our duty to live and pass on the Orthodox Faith in its purity -- just as we have received it without changing it either by adding to it, or taking from it. We Orthodox have no need to be relevant to the Modernist spirit -- because we have seen heresies come and go. Long after Modernism has been completely discredited and is a faint memory -- the Orthodox Faith will still be standing. Rather than trying to hitch our wagon to the latest fad (such as environmentalism) we hold fast to the Traditions we have received from the Apostles, just as we have received them.

### ***C. Humility, Repentance.***

Because Orthodoxy is not individualistic, rather than the arrogance that goes with that individualism, in Orthodoxy we are taught to humbly listen to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. We are taught not to think ourselves more holy or clever than the Fathers of the Church who have clearly shown themselves to be doers of the Word, and men of holiness -- and so when we read the Bible, we read it in accordance with the testimony of the Church rather than in the vanity of our individualistic minds.

As I said earlier, this is not a false humility, but is simply a realistic assessment of things. When there are 23,000 denominations that all claim to believe the Bible, but which cannot agree on what it is that the Bible says -- it is humility that is realistic, and arrogance that is fanciful. Obviously they cannot all be right, and so humility with regard to one's own interpretations of the Scriptures is the only reasonable approach to the subject.

This is not to say that all Orthodox Christians are truly humble, or that all Protestants are arrogant themselves and lack humility. I have known many Protestants who were themselves very humble, and I know that I myself am often very prideful. But having operated in both ways of thought, I can say experientially that the Orthodox approach to theology and spirituality is the path of humility and repentance.

### ***D. Maximalism / Full Worldview.***

Rather than the minimalism of Protestantism, which asks questions like "What are the essentials? What is the minimum requirements to be a Christian?" The Orthodox ask what is the most I can do as a Christian?

The Orthodox Faith is a lifestyle, rather than a weekend hobby. We affirm the Inspiration of the Scriptures as firmly as any Protestant, but we also affirm the Apostolic Tradition that St. Paul told us included both written Scripture and oral Tradition -- both of which we are to hold fast to. Christianity is not reduced to a book, we have received our worship, as well as our theology from the Apostles.

Rather than the Empiricism of Western Rationalism, that makes Christ and the Apostles out to be primitive thinking men who were foolish enough to believe in such phenomena as Demonization and miracles, the Orthodox Church affirms Christ as maker of all things visible and invisible -- both of the empirical and of the supernatural. We pray for healing and call on physicians -- because God is not limited to either to natural or to supernatural means to accomplish his purposes. God can heal through the wisdom and skill of a doctor, and through the anointing of oil from St. John Maximovitch's tomb.

In the Orthodox Church, we affirm that there are demons that influence people and that people are responsible for their own actions. Our worldview can allow that a man could be driven insane by demons, and that a man could be insane because of a physical disease. We see no contradiction between the Empirical and the Supernatural -- and so we are not blind to either reality. Miracles are in fact such an accepted fact of life in the Church, that we do not go ga ga just because a miracle takes place -- because we realize that it is not just God that works miracles, but demons as well. Our society in general has been so closed to the supernatural, that when they are confronted with an undeniable supernatural happening -- they automatically assume it to be divine, and so many have fallen into demonic deception in our times.

## **IV. The Journey**

### ***A. The Pitfalls***

I can briefly describe an Orthodox Worldview in a few minutes, but I can offer no easy solutions when it comes to actually acquiring one. Developing an Orthodox mind is hard work, and takes time. But before I get into the means that God has provided for this, let me briefly mention some of the pit falls and snares that stand in our path. You can always be assured that the demons will oppose any spiritual effort -- in fact if you are not battling with demons, then you are most likely not making any spiritual progress.

One of the biggest snares which Satan has laid for us in our day is Modernist Orthodoxy. This is especially a problem for converts from Protestantism, because the Modernist Orthodox mentality is Protestant in origin, and so the convert is likely to be attracted at first to aspects of it because he will find himself at home there -- it will strike a cord of familiarity. Surprisingly, the origin of Modernist Orthodoxy is not primarily from converts who have brought such thinking into the Church, but rather it is cradle Orthodox who have been allured by the false promises of Modernity and have tried to make Orthodoxy relevant too.

Like the Protestants who in their arrogance have thought themselves more knowledgeable than the Apostles themselves, there are Modernist Orthodox who think themselves more Patristic than the Fathers, and who think that they are more faithful to the Liturgics of the Church than the Typicon -- that only now, with their arrival, has the real meaning of the services been unearthed. In typically Protestant fashion, they think themselves able to reconstruct the services so as to improve them.

They think themselves able to discern which Traditions of the Church and which canons are worth adhering to and which can be discarded. In fact, you will find modern "Orthodox Bible Scholars" who have wholesale swallowed all the assumptions of Protestantism Exegetical Methodologies, and who have written Commentaries and introductions to the Scriptures -- which are thoroughly Protestant, only not as good as most Protestant scholars would write.

These modernists have adopted some of the worst of the liberal theories about the origin of the Bible, such as the JEDP theory [a theory of the authorship of the Pentateuch which claims that four distinct sources can be identified as the basis thereof. This theory has been brought into serious question by other Protestant scholars such as Ivan Egnell] and then proceed to interpret the Pentateuch in terms of the individual sources in isolation and in disregard of the actual canonical shape of the text. Even good Protestant Scholarship has rejected this [even among Protestant scholars who accept some of the ideas of one form of the JEDP theory, the better ones, such as Brevard Childs, acknowledge that it is not the theology of the "J" source or of the "D" source, but the theology of J, E, D, and P that we have to deal with -- in the form that we have received as Canon].

These scholars also all but completely ignore what the Fathers of the Church have said about the Scriptures -- what could be more Protestant, or more antithetical to Orthodoxy. These modernists, flaunting this tradition, or that canon, protest that none of these are the essence of the Faith but it is true of them which is written, "He who despises small things will fall little by little."

Another related pitfall that converts must beware of, is Convertism Orthodoxy.

By this I mean that Orthodoxy which one usually will find in an all or almost all convert parish. This kind of Orthodoxy is not consciously Modernist -- in fact most people in such parishes sincerely desire authentic Orthodoxy, but because they are in jurisdictions which have been infected with Modernism, they have often been given stones instead of bread. I by no means want to broad brush here -- not all convert parishes are this way, and in fact among jurisdictions that have been infected with modernism, it has mostly been converts who have begun to resist these tendencies.

The cause of Convertism is a neglect of the subject at hand -- it is the result of a failure to recognize the need to develop an Orthodox mind, and to consciously seek to rid oneself of Protestant modes of thought. Converts who have fallen into this pitfall are generally teachable, though not all, and when they see authentic Orthodoxy they are attracted too it.

The third and final major pitfall for converts is extremist cultish Orthodoxy.

Heresies have a tendency to come in pairs -- for example Nestorians / Monophysites. Modernism and Ecumenism are the primary errors with which the Church is currently struggling, but its opposite extreme is to be found among extremist Cult-like Orthodox Groups that are usually centered around a cult personality, and often claim that only they are Orthodox. Some forms of this extremism are very easily identified because they are found in schismatic groups -- other forms of extremism are to be found even within our midst. This is a pharisaical Orthodoxy, that in reaction to the modernists disregard for tradition, has become so fixated on certain externals to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law -- such as love and mercy.

Christ said of the Pharisees that they would be sure to count out their seeds to ensure that they paid the tithe, but that they neglected mercy, love, faith; they laid heavy burdens on others, but they would not lift a finger to lift them themselves -- this does not mean that adherence to the outward aspects of the Tradition are unimportant -- Christ said they should not neglect either the internal or the external matters of the law.

Some converts who came into the Church in a jurisdiction in which modernism was prevalent, are very susceptible to going to the opposite extreme and winding up in the opposite error. What must be made clear is that Orthodoxy is the narrow road -- neither to the right, nor to the left can we deviate -- straight ahead we must go, along the well worn path of Holy Tradition.

## ***B. The Weapons of our warfare.***

God has provided us the means of transformation, and the renewal of the mind. In the Church and in the Holy Tradition we have been given numerous means of grace -- channels that God has put in place that if we avail ourselves to them we will be given grace in abundance.

### **1. The Mysteries**

Chief among these means of Grace are the Mysteries.

We have been given Holy Baptism to unite us to Christ and to His Body. We have been given Chrismation, by means of which we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Eucharist -- the antidote of immortality -- through which we partake of Christ Himself and through which we become His Body. Penance -- through which we are granted remission of sins, and are given the grace to overcome those sins. Holy Matrimony -- which creates the foundation of the local Church -- the Family. Holy Unction - - for the healing of soul and body. And The Priesthood -- through which the Apostolic ministry is preserved and all other mysteries are made available.

If we neglect the Sacraments or take them lightly, then it should be no wonder that we are carnal and so far removed from the Holy Spirit.

### **2. The Services and Service**

God has also provided us with the Divine Services -- which lift our mind up to God, and through which we are taught by the Holy Spirit. The services are the training ground of the Martyrs, both those who shed their blood and those who witness by pouring out their lives for God. The services empower us for divine service -- the two cannot be separated. We cannot do evil and come and worship God -- to neglect either is to make the other an act of hypocrisy.

### **3. Prayer and Fasting**

Probably two of the most neglected tools for developing an Orthodox mind are prayer and fasting.

Neither of which can be separated either. God does not need our prayers, nor does he need our fasting - - it is we that need to pray, not to change God but to change ourselves. It is we that need to fast -- not because God is impressed, but because we learn to overcome the flesh by fasting. Resisting our natural desires becomes a habit, a skill. When faced with greater temptation we have learned how to resist the Devil. To neglect fasting, is to neglect Spiritual struggle. If you never fast, you'll have no trouble battling demons -- you'll be occupied territory to them, and they'll spend their energy on someone who is actually trying to be a Christian.

The strongest statement on fasting I have ever heard came from St. Seraphim of Sarov -- who when asked by a girl how she should go about choosing a husband, told her to choose a man who fasts because "if a man does not fast, he is not a Christian, no matter what he may call himself.

Prayer and Fasting are like physical training for a soldier. They are spiritual push ups and pull ups. The word Asceticism itself means exercise, and asceticism is the spiritual exercise that will make us spiritually strong. To neglect this exercise to be a spiritual coach potato. Don't expect to get anywhere without them.

## 4. The Fathers

The Writings of the Fathers are sure guides to Theology and the Spiritual life. Modern writers can be of use, some more than others, but do not neglect the writings of the Fathers. Do not be content with reading about the Fathers -- read the Fathers themselves.

## 5. The lives of the Saints

Converts often will waste most of their time reading modern writers -- often modernist writers, and will totally ignore the lives of the saints. In the lives of the saints we are shown what an Orthodox Christian should be. When we read their examples and how they overcame trials and tortures we are given the patterns to follow. During the persecution of the Church in Russia -- the pious were not at a loss as to how to deal with a government that gave them the choice of Christ or life -- they knew well the response of a Christian, and gladly gave up their lives.

## 6. Cradle Orthodox

One blessing that many converts see as more of a scourge than a blessing is to be surrounded by people who have been Orthodox all their lives. Converts are indeed zealous, and they are often turned off by those who have been raised in the Church but who lack their enthusiasm. There is a great temptation to judge such people, but what a convert must learn to do is to ignore those who are impious, and to learn from those who are pious. Ideally some of the zeal of the convert will rub off on the person who has always been Orthodox, and the wisdom and experience of the cradle Orthodox will temper and properly direct the convert.

## Conclusion:

As I said, it is much easier to describe an Orthodox mind, then it is to acquire one. There is no easy short cut. It's hard work. Recognizing the problem though is a major step in the right direction. Realizing what we are doing, and catching ourselves when we fall back into a Protestant mode of thought is a major move towards overcoming those snares and moving beyond them.

I hope something you have found something useful in this discussion, and that we will and strive to "be not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds..." (Romans 12:2).

From a talk given at the Southwest Missions Conference, Dallas, July 1995, by Priest John Whiteford, [frjohnwhiteford@yahoo.com](mailto:frjohnwhiteford@yahoo.com), [St Jonah Orthodox Church](#), Spring Texas

---

**[St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](#)**

**This article is at:**

<http://www.orthodox.net/articles/orthodox-mind.html>

<http://www.orthodox.net/articles/orthodox-mind.pdf>

<http://www.orthodox.net/articles/orthodox-mind.doc>

New Journal entries, homilies, etc. are on our BLOG: <http://www.orthodox.net/redeemingthetime>

Articles Archive: <http://www.orthodox.net/articles>

Journal Archive: <http://www.orthodox.net/journal>

Blog posts & local parish news are posted to our email list. Go to here:

<http://groups.google.com/group/saint-nicholas-orthodox-church> to join.

Redeeming the Time BLOG: <http://www.orthodox.net/redeemingthetime>

Use this for any edifying reason, but please give credit, and include the URL and author of the article. This content belongs to the author (Priest John Whiteford, [frjohnwhiteford@yahoo.com](mailto:frjohnwhiteford@yahoo.com)). We would love to hear from you with comments! ([seraphim@orthodox.net](mailto:seraphim@orthodox.net))