

**Lutherans Going East:
If You're Going to Run Through the Bosphorus Give Heed to CCR**

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According to Wikipedia: “The Bosphorus or Bosphorus is a narrow, natural strait and an internationally significant waterway located in northwestern Turkey. It forms part of the continental boundary between Europe and Asia, and divides Turkey by separating Anatolia from Thrace.” So it means here to metaphorically leave one’s Western, European tradition--in this case the Lutheran church, which has its origin in Luther’s Germany for the Eastern church).

Many Lutheran laymen and pastors are fascinated by Eastern Orthodoxy, and the stories of Lutherans “going East” are abundant. They have a type of conservatism, a venerable stability, a great respect for tradition, and a conservative moral mindset. But the real draw is to leave the incessant, tedious doctrinal divisions of the West for the liturgical-based theology of the Eastern church.

I contend that some high church, conservative-appearing Lutherans are basically Eastern in thinking already (evidenced by the fascination with infant communion and the blind devotion and adoration of optional liturgical forms), so to fully commit is not a huge leap. This new school of confessionally-minded Lutherans eschews doctrinal clarity and precision for liturgical niceties and describes adiaphora (external things things neither commanded, nor forbidden by God in Scripture) in mystical, absolute terms. Actions and tradition take precedent naturally over Scripture’s teaching of grace and justification by the Gospel, to these new-age Lutherans—doing and seeing replaces speaking and hearing

The remedy is Lutheran doctrine: the real substance that Luther taught from the very words of Scripture. Without a foundation, even many LCMS pastors have lost their footing on justification and the purity of the Gospel to delight in Eastern frivolities like icons, incense, and “live the mystery” liturgical sentiments.

Fort Wayne seminary graduates, even some of my own classmates, having not been grounded on the entire body of Lutheran orthodoxy have been especially susceptible to the kinder, gentler heretical “orthodoxy” of Easternism. --ed.

Pastor Paul Harris

Google “Run Through the Jungle” (by Creedence Clearwater Revival), listen to a classic recording, and you’ll read comment after comment about it being about the Vietnam War. I thought so too when it came out. It’s not. John Fogerty said he wrote it about the proliferation of guns in America (songfacts.com). In any event, if you are thinking about running through the Bosphorus to get to the Orthodox Church heed the wisdom of that song, if you have any love for Confessional Lutheranism: “Don’t look back.” If you do, you’ll probably turn around.

My relationship to Orthodoxy starts with my Russian grandmother who was Russian Orthodox and had my mother baptized in that church. Where they were in Michigan, I surmise there was no Orthodox Church, Russian or otherwise, so they joined a high church Lutheran one. Then in 1994 a mentor in the ministry sent me the 1980 book *The Faith We Hold* written by the Archbishop of Finland “to describe Orthodoxy from the inside to those outside (11). Fast forward 25 years. A former member of mine dropped by speaking of the lure of the Orthodox. He asked his confessional Lutheran pastor what he knew about them. He said little. I thought that odd because I remember the 1961 Lutheran-published *The Religious Bodies of America* by Mayer had a decent treatment of it. It had been years since I had read it, so I wasn’t much help either. My former member left me with the fact that wherever Orthodoxy has actually pursued evangelism they have become the dominate faith group quickly and he left me the gold-standard book on Orthodoxy, Alexander Schmemmann’s 1963 book *For the Life of the World*. To the first I said, “The Mormons would say the same thing.” To the second, I said, “Thank You.”

Having reread everything, my advice is when running through the Bosphorus, “Whoa, don’t look back to see.” If you do, you’ll find that our irenic, authentic (I throw this in for millennials.), and world-renowned Augsburg Confession was translated into Greek and sent to the patriarch of Constantinople immediately after publication for an opinion. None was given. In 1575, patriarch Jeremiah II was asked to give an official opinion on the Lutheran confession. “In his reply Jeremiah rejected all the distinctive doctrines of the Augsburg Confession” (Mayer, 9). That would be a hard “no”, i.e. not only no, but h-e-double hockey sticks no.

I was also surprised to read that in the patriarchy of Cyril Lucar (1568-1638) serious movements toward Calvinism were attempted. In the modern era, i.e., 19th century, Anglicans and Episcopalians approached Orthodoxy, but the Russians questioned the validity of the Anglican orders and second marriages for priests while demanding the Anglicans accept the 7 sacraments, triple immersion Baptism, veneration of icons, and prayers for the departed. And as Roman Catholicism has a black mark for not renouncing

German Nazism right away, so Eastern Orthodoxy has one because many of her leaders “made peace with the Bolshevik regime” (Ibid., 10). Read Solzhenitsyn on this score. In his books on the Gulag, the Orthodox take quite a drubbing for their colluding and failure to confess. The Baptists are the heroes of the faith in his accounts.

Eastern Orthodoxy attempts to take a mediating position between Rome and Christians like us. Their principle of authority is not Scripture alone but Scripture and “sacred tradition.” They say they differ from Rome because Rome adds “pious opinions” and papal decrees to sacred tradition. And by Holy Scripture they include the Apocrypha that Rome accepts and Lutherans and Protestants reject. “The Holy Scriptures therefore are not considered the final and complete source of doctrine” (Ibid., 11). Paul anathemizes even an angel from heaven as another source of doctrine; I’m pretty sure traditions no matter how sacred would also be rejected by him. They are by Confessional Lutherans. Here’s our confession: “The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel” (SC, II, 15).

It’s not only their formal principle that differs from Confessional Lutheranism, so does their material principle. It can be summarized attractively in the words of Chrysostom: “Christ became man that we might become divine” (Mayer, 13). They are following teachers of the second and third centuries who viewed Christ’s work as *theopoiesis*, the ultimate deification of man (Ibid.). But a wholly sanctified, saved, resurrected man participating in the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4 and the ancient Proper Preface for Ascension) is still humanity not deity.

Furthermore, this emphasis is Reformed in that Orthodoxy is less about man being saved from sin than it is about being saved for service to God (Mayer, 13). But really this deification truly shows its malevolent side because justification isn’t a forensic act for them. Their theologians define justification as an actual change in man and place the emphasis on continuous sanctification (Ibid., 15). Let me know when you know you have arrived. This question is even more pointed when you consider “Eastern Orthodoxy maintains man’s natural ability to do good and denies his total depravity” (Ibid., 14). That means in Ricky Ricardo terms: you poor miserable sinners “got lots of splaining to do” for your poor progress.

When reading about Orthodoxy you’ll cheer that they reject purgatory (Ibid., 18) only to shudder when their own writings answer the question “What must an Orthodox Christian man believe to obtain eternal life?” with, “The right faith and good works.” *The Confession of Dositheus*, 1672, states that faith active in good works justifies (Ibid., 16). Rome is calling and wants their doctrine of justification back. Likewise, they bind your

conscience to the Lord Himself instituting seven sacraments; lust is not sinful, and the sacrament of Confirmation completes Baptism (Ibid., 17).

As for the Eucharist, there is a storied history of their views. They do all seem to agree on the term *metousiosis* which means “a change of essence.” But they make no attempt to explain the mystery of the change (Ibid., 17). And as to it being a sacrifice, Mayer references the work of an Anglican scholar who says the Orthodox specifically reject that the sacrifice of the cross requires constant repetition, but the sacrifice is indeed repeated in the sacrifice of the Eucharist but not to make propitiation, but to make intercession for man (Ibid., 15). This still, however, has the arrow going from man to God and not only from God to man in the way of all gift, all grace. And Mayer himself says the Orthodox view the Eucharist “as a continuation of the sacrifice on the cross” (17-18).

Agreement with Rome continues in the sacrament of Penance. The essential parts are contrition, confession, and punishment: “and in this respect the Eastern church is in virtual agreement with Rome” (Ibid. 18). But (this I report but don’t understand) then Mayer says that the Eastern church “rejects the Roman view which makes the priest judge with power to impose ‘punishments’ and to grant indulgences” (Ibid.).

Sometimes in reading about Orthodoxy and books by them, I think they are Buddhist Pentecostals. They are very big on liturgy but “the one purpose is to effect the mystical union between the believer and God” (Ibid.). “It is not uncommon that worshippers depart [their services] when their spiritual needs have been met by the emotional reaction” (Ibid., fn. 30). This view can be partially substantiated if you Google “First Visit to an Orthodox Church” (ww1.antiochian.org). You’ll find that coming and going when you please is a feature of their services. I find this curious because there are some Lutherans who take the beginning and ending of services as optional, and feel free to leave after communing. There are others who think the service really begins when they arrive and so come whenever they get around to it during or after the first hymn--usually before the confession, but the 'drop-dead' point is the sermon to be counted, in their minds, as having attended. They habitually come late and/or leave after they have communed; the Thanksgiving being optional to them.

Back to the Orthodox being Buddhist Pentecostals. They speak of constant prayer and of an exercise in breathing called *nepsis*. “In this state they chant incessantly: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy’; and in this way their spirit is set free itself from any attacks of the enemy and to succeed in rising day after day to the love and desire of God. In this condition the nepitc is said to experience incredible joys and triumphs” (Ibid.).

In Rome you can only use unleavened bread for Communion. In Orthodoxy only leavened bread. In Confessional Lutheranism you can use either because, while we know

Jesus used unleavened bread, the word Paul passes down is just “bread.” Both West and East distinguish between worship of God and venerating saints. The Orthodox say, “The Church has never adored any other than the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The saints, as well as all the sacred things through which Divine grace is communicated to man, are venerated, not adored” (*The Faith We Hold*, 28) This argument sounds so convincing. But look up “adore”. It comes from the Latin *venerat* which means “to worship.” In distinction from the Western church, the Eastern maintains statues are the graven images that are idolatrous and forbidden [just like traditional Reformed]. But icons or painted surfaces are sacred representations (*Ibid.*, 19).

Now lets go from basically what a Lutheran in the 1950’s said about the Orthodox to their own words. The book the Orthodox put forth as primer is the aforementioned *The Life of the World*. They themselves identify it as a religion of a very proscribed cultus: “a liturgy which to be properly performed requires not less than twenty-seven heavy liturgical books -...” (21). It’s a religion with the arrow going the wrong way at critical times. We have sacramental and sacrificial elements in our Divine Service too. This is where God gives to us and we give thanks, praise, gifts to Him. The call to ‘lift up your hearts’ and the people’s answer that they do is explained: “The Eucharist is the *anaphora*, the ‘lifting up’ of our offering, and of ourselves. It is the ascension of the Church to heaven” (37). Remember what the ‘50s Lutheran book reported about the 17th century Orthodox rapprochement towards Calvinism? Look up Calvinism’s explanation to the *Sursum Corda*. While you’re at it read about Calvinism’s attachment to the *epiclesis*. Here are the Orthodoxy’s own words: “The Orthodox has always insisted that the *transformation (metahole)* of the eucharistic elements is performed by the *epiclesis* – the invocation of the Holy Spirit – and not by the words of institution ...” (43-4). The affinity is spooky.

Now let’s move to the 1980 book by the Archbishop of Finland endorsed by the author of the first book. In *The Faith We Hold* the Orthodox are upfront on where they stand in regard to *sola scriptura*. “The sources of doctrine as defined in the Orthodox Catechism are the Holy Bible and the Holy Tradition transmitted by the Church.” “The prime importance of Tradition is plainly shown by the fact that it was not until the fifth century that the Church established conclusively which books in circulation should be regarded genuinely inspired by God’s revelation. Thus the Church itself determined the composition of the Bible.” “It is our belief that the Bible by itself, without the Tradition as its living interpreter, is insufficient as a source of truth” (18, 19). The church, Rome, Orthodox, or Lutheran for that matter can’t make something God’s Word that is not. Rome tried that with the Apocrypha which the Orthodox also receive, but that’s not how it was with the original cannon. The Church recognized which books had the

characteristics of apostolicity and were received as God's Word by their original recipients. In the same way, you can't walk outside and declare a pepper plant a tomato plant, but can only recognize what the plant itself is.

Tell me? Doesn't this sound like Baptist theology? "Nevertheless, acceptance and redemption do not imply a general absolution granted to all mankind, but rather an opportunity given to each person individually to ask for mercy and receive forgiveness for his sins. This is in conformity with the gift of free will given to man" (21). Your decision seals the deal of your salvation. In the end, your eternal salvation hangs on a subjective response, but not to worry, you have the free will to make it. I do? Paul, in Romans 7, doesn't do the good he wills but the evil he doesn't, even after his conversion.

I could report how they require fasting before receiving Communion but not going to confession (45). It's un-Lutheran to require either, but one would think confessing sins would have priority over fasting. I could go on to describe their invoking of the saints (76), their having rosaries (87), and their reserving the Eucharistic Gifts during Lent for distribution during the week (61), but by far and away, the most disturbing thing to me is their prayer practices: what they do with prayer and what they claim prayer does for you. It seems to me they have a sense that some of their practices can be dangerous spiritually because they have warnings about them. So, let's dig in. If you're running for the Bosphorus, this is what you're running toward, and if you look back and compare it to what Confessional Lutherans say about prayer, whoa, is there a difference!

Prayer is a means of grace for the orthodox. "We all know the things that go on in our inmost selves, how evil gets a foothold and develops in our minds and hearts. We also feel our powerlessness. We are like a person besieged on all sides by a pack of wolves. What does such a person do? He climbs up the tree that is behind him and is saved. That saving tree is prayer; so the Fathers teach" (69-70). Again, this is spooky. If we just prayed more, we wouldn't have all these problems.

Then there is the Jesus Prayer. If this doesn't tell you that you're in Oz, or at least in the land of spiritual mysticism nothing will. Praying in Jesus' name is the privilege of all Christians. "So it is well for us to use this tradition of prayer called the practice of the Jesus Prayer, that our 'joy may be full,' too. The Words of the Jesus Prayer are: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner. A shorter form is also used: Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon me. The Martyr Bishop Ignatius repeated the name of Jesus unceasingly. In the same way the Jesus Prayer is meant to be uttered continuously. It thus fulfills the Apostle's direct exhortation: 'Pray constantly.' (1 Thess 5:17)" (83-4). Okay, you say. That doesn't sound that troubling. How about this? "According to the Fathers, the most important communion with God is Holy

Communion, and the Jesus Prayer comes next” (91). If you can swallow this, if you are willing to assent that next to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ your praying any prayer is next in line, keep on swimming and prepare to drown in subjectivism.

Now, you’re ready to quit reading. Go ahead. I’ve been quit by the best of them. But tell me the following is not a combination of the ancient and pagan practice of repetitious prayer and the thoroughly modern therapy of behavior modification. And if you’re running for the Bosphorus, don’t look back at Luther’s Morning Prayer and compare it to what follows: “It is really important that as soon as we wake up we should concentrate and tune our minds to remembrance of God’s presence and start to recite in our minds: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner” (87). “However, if we practice prayer regularly, especially the Jesus Prayer, we will learn to concentrate and to control our minds. The same duties and worries will still exist, but now we will know how to take up one at a time and so will be saved from the mental affliction which is nowadays called stress and which is caused by our being weighed down by everything at once” (88-9).

But as I said they seem to see dangers in their prayer practices. First, you’re confronted with this mixed message: “It is a great gift of grace if a sense of God’s presence awakens in us when we are praying or reading the Bible. This sense, also called remembrance of God (This seems to be a big concept in both Bahai and Islam, Google it) should be retained afterwards. As long as it prevails we can easily distinguish right from wrong and are able to experience the truth of the Psalmist’s words: ‘Because He (God) is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.’” Can you reconcile this teaching with what is said two paragraphs later? “Any sensual excitement or ecstasy is a delusion of the tempter posing as an angel of light, even if miracles happen and signs are seen as well” (80). Ah, you think, so there’s the danger. No, that’s not till ten pages later: “In order that the reader may avoid going astray in a mysticism of the imagination or in a mere technique of meditation when he practices the prayer, we list here a number of points for the Christian to keep in mind concerning prayer.” What follows is things for you to do: make your conscience clear in relation to God, neighbor, and possessions. Be humble. Tune your mind to the sense of God’s presence. Repeat the Jesus Prayer (90).

Think after all I’m just being too harsh on my Orthodox brothers? Wrong. They are the ones who say that because I have no proof that my ordination is in the apostolic succession, I don’t have a valid Word and Sacrament ministry. I, on the other hand, recognize they do. Who is the real churchman here? Who really confesses and believes there is one holy and apostolic church? I do. They believe they are that church. “The Orthodox Church does not need to give proof of its historical authenticity; it is simply the direct continuation of the Church of the Apostolic Age” (15). If that settles it for you, better run through the Bosphorus and don’t look back at Smalcald Articles and hear, “We

do not concede to them that they are the Church, and [in truth] they are not [the Church]; nor will we listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: *I believe in one holy [catholic or] Christian Church*. This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith” (III, XII, 1-3).

No, “Run Through the Jungle” was never about Napalm bombing, but this article is about being blown out of the water, the Bosphorus to be precise.