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UNITY AND IDENTITY IN EVANGELICALISM AND PROSPECTS FOR BRIDGE BUILDING WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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ABSTRACT. This paper reflects on unity and identity within evangelicalism, briefly tracing the development of the movement within Protestantism before sketching its current situation.

From the very beginning of Protestantism, concepts such as authority, scripture, and church, and their relations to individual believers have been complex. Five hundred years after the Reformation, the unity of the movement has come under increasing strain. Evangelicals have been buffeted by the modernist influence of the Fundamentalist-Liberal controversy in the United States, the advent of postmodernity, and a developing sense of unease within, although their numerical strength and global representation have continued to increase. Current issues facing evangelicalism include authority in the church, relations with political causes, and relevance to our pluralistic modern world; responses to such challenges reflect the internal diversity of the movement. Earlier identity markers of adherence to scripture and doctrinally-based exclusivism have begun to fade as evangelicalism has become more fragmented and with the rise of newer, more Spirit-oriented subgroups.

The paper introduces positive trends emerging in some parts of the evangelical movement due to internal angst, secularisation, and the holistic understanding of faith associated with the Lausanne Movement. Evangelicals now show increased openness to social involvement, learning from other Christian traditions, and cooperation in mission endeavours.

The final section explores the potential for bridge building between evangelicalism and the Orthodox Church, framed by ideas from Gerard Hughes and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Although the paper can only credibly examine the evangelical end of the bridge, it is hoped that the general insights may benefit bridge builders at the Orthodox end also.

Keywords: unity, identity, Christian Church, Evangelicalism, Orthodox Church

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Introduction: Protestantism and evangelicalism

Evangelicalism is a subset of Protestantism, arguably the most visible and quickest growing in the world. To frame my discussion of unity and identity within evangelicalism, I employ David Bebbington's quadrilateral[1], whose corners are: emphasis on the Bible, the importance of conversion, activism as an expression of faith, and the centrality of the cross. The term "evangelical" is becoming problematic, as it is getting harder to explain what the word means, and because some people make associations with blanket support for the State of Israel, right-wing causes, or single-issue politics, particularly in America.

I am British and European, and thus my experience of church and perhaps even my very theology are a little different from what is arguably worldwide mainstream evangelicalism. I now consider myself a voice from somewhere near the margins. Because I wish to reflect not only my own British context but also some other parts of the world with which I am familiar, particularly Southeast Asia, I choose not to follow the increasingly dominant American categorisation of mainstream Protestantism *versus* evangelicalism. There are relatively Reformed and charismatic evangelicals within the Church of England, for example, and the situation is similar in Singapore. I place Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement, the Reformed camp, and middle of the road activist evangelicalism all under the same umbrella.

Unity and identity

The American evangelical Peter Leithart is concerned about the direction of Protestantism in his country. The unity speech in John 17 is important for him, and he draws our attention to the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son and the derivative unity of the church.[2] He complains that the church is divided, even spiritually, although some feel claim that there is unity in essential doctrine, ritual, and pastoral roles among the churches.

In the West, the question about church unity has always been whether it is it doctrinal or spiritual.[3] Also, some look for continuity with the past while others emphasise unity of purpose. Leithart believes there is a superficial kind of unity across the church in the West. Protestants and Catholics both talk about

[1] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[2] Peter Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2016).

[3] Ralph Brown, "The evangelical succession? Evangelical history and denominational identity," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 68, no. 1 (1996): 3-13.

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justification, without agreeing what the word means. Almost all Protestant churches celebrate both baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, complications arise very quickly. How should we carry out baptism, full immersion or sprinkle? Can children be baptised, and if so what might that mean? Who can take the elements of the Eucharist and who can give them? How is Christ present in the Eucharist, symbolically, pneumatically, physically? Within Protestantism, worship ranges from liturgical to very informal. For some, the whole service leads to and points from the sermon. In others, a short sharing or meditation is preferred. Some parts of the church use a lectionary while others have no clear basis for choosing passages. Even evangelicalism manifests a huge range of approaches to preaching. Apart from differences of practice, there is still theological division within the evangelical movement, such as over God's power and intention to redeem the lost, exemplified by the polarity between Calvinists and Arminians. Indeed, Chirilă mentions "the exegetical diversity in contemporary Western theology."[4] Unity is a curious thing!

Protestantism then and now

Protestantism and its evangelical subset have emerged from certain intellectual trends and views of scripture, tradition, and authority. In addition, developments in theology and practice in the church have never been isolated from broader cultural and intellectual influences in society. The historical circumstances of the genesis of Protestantism mean that it was well documented.

In investigating unity and identity in evangelicalism, and how bridges might be built between this movement and the Orthodox Church, it is important to consider briefly its history and current situation. For reasons of time and space, my thumbnail sketch may appear simplistic and reductionist, for which I apologise.

Historical background

Protestantism was a break with the Roman Catholic Church in the West and thus most scholarship on the Reformation focuses on the differences between the Reformers and Rome. Indeed, an essential characteristic of Protestantism, at the beginning and to some extent even now, is its "otherness" vis-a-vis Rome. Thus, looking at Protestantism involves exploring what it is *not* as much as what it is. I use the word "Protestant" as the official term familiar to most people, but it is used less and less.

[4] Ioan Chirilă, "Romanian theology: A theology of dialogue," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 2.

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It is appropriate to begin with Martin Luther's dual struggle over the question of justification and the crisis of authority to which it led. Although these issues were located in the church, the broader context includes the rise of the middle class, increases in literacy, the development of printing, and the emerging consciousness of what would later become the Westphalian nation state.

Bainton reminds us that the early reformers were against indulgences, the veneration of relics, and what he calls the "cult of saints,"[5] seeing these as incompatible with the teaching of the scripture and the concept of justification by faith. In seeking to reform doctrine, Luther felt that he was serving his church and had no desire to break away or found something new.

The second phase of the reformation occurred in Zurich, Geneva, and Canterbury, whose movements were "sisters rather than lineal descendants."[6] This is noteworthy; even early Protestantism manifested diversity branching. Protestants were united in not being Catholic or even being anti-Catholic and came together around the authority of scripture and the nature of justification. However, the movement was displaying Wittgensteinian family resemblance, as shared ideals and beliefs began to evolve under the influence of different personalities, local contexts, and theological preferences. Within the space created by the removal of papal and episcopal oversight, or control, depending on your perspective, the reformers began to reshape various aspects of theology, church governance, and public worship. The liturgy inherited from the Roman Catholic Church was amended and in some cases radically reformed; a central place was given to the sermon.[7] Zwingli forbade lent fasting and the veneration of images and saw no reason why clergy should be celibate.[8] During the English reformation, many beautiful murals were obscured as the insides of church buildings were painted white. Bainton talks about the outbreak of "popular iconoclasm."[9]

For the reformers, authority was vested in the scripture rather than the church, its tradition, or the Pope. It was argued that the "Christian man must examine and judge for himself,", rather than relying on the Pope.[10] In rejecting the authority of the Pope and the church as in institution, the later reformers believed they were returning to an earlier, more biblical form of Christianity.

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[5] Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press 1965), 57-58.
[6] *Ibid*, 77.
[7] *Ibid*, 72.
[8] *Ibid*, 83.
[9] *Ibid*, 84.
[10] *Ibid*, 61.

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The reformers felt that the medieval Roman Catholic Church "made God small and man big"[11] and argued that salvation lies "not in the church but in Christ."[12]

While Calvin and the Swiss reformers saw the dual sovereignty of God in church and society and sought to change the latter for good, the Anabaptists advocated withdrawal from the state and abstention from public life.[13] In addition, being hated by the world was a sign of theological purity and correctness. Already, there was considerable disunity with regard to how the church saw its relationship with the world. Interestingly enough, Guinness describes similar world-fleeing mentalities among the dispensationalists beginning in the 19th century[14]

An insight into British evangelicalism in the 19th century comes from Brown.[15] While some historians see "dogmatic uniformity and continuity," an evangelical rather than apostolic succession based on faithfulness to its original sources, Brown reveals complex relationships, identities, and doctrinal struggles.[16] Some evangelical Anglicans saw Protestant history through the lens of Britain's Empire, a form of manifest destiny. Something similar has been found in American evangelicalism.[17] There has been and still exists a nationalist element in some parts of the movement,[18] sometimes linked with certain views of the second coming.

Significantly, Brown identifies differences of opinion about "the authority of historical orthodoxy and the freedom allowed to private judgement in matters of scriptural interpretation."[19] Although evangelicals claim that the scripture and its authority lie at the centre of the faith, individual interpreters and the church groupings to which they belong exercise authority over the text. Like nature, the community of faith seems to abhor a vacuum.

In the late 19th century the UK Evangelical Alliance concluded that a simple claim to represent Christian truth was not enough and that a

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[11] *Ibid*, 44.
[12] Graham Duncan, "A Protestant Perspective on Vatican II & 50 years: An Engagement with Dissent," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 9.
[13] Roland Bainton, *The Reformation*, 99.
[14] Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals don't Think and what to do about it* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).
[15] Ralph Brown, "The evangelical succession? Evangelical history and denominational identity," *Evangelical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1996): 3-13.
[16] *Ibid*, 3.
[17] George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132.
[18] Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[19] Ralph Brown, *The evangelical succession*, 8.

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confessional test of its members was needed; belief in and dedication to a set of basic truths was insufficient. Very soon, continental European parts of the Evangelical Alliance formed their own national branches. Protestant and evangelical unity and identity are complex and are affected by the *Zeitgeist* of each generation. Indeed, evangelicalism shows the influence of enlightenment modernism[20] at the same time as it claims to resist to it.

What Brown looks at in 19th century British evangelicalism foreshadows the divisions within the American protestant movement at the turn of the 20th century, when increasingly varied and even contradictory theological ideas within evangelicalism there exploded with considerable force at the Fundamentalist-Liberal divide. At the heart of the problem lay interpretation and authority of scripture, attitudes to science and society, and views on the eschaton. Around a century after the climax of this dispute within the church, American evangelicalism is grappling with many of same issues and has added some more. Into today's cauldron have been poured gender, women ministers, sexuality, climate change and environmentalism, and race.

Another source of division within Protestantism and evangelicalism is denominationalism. Distinct groupings embody different views of church government and approaches to the Christian life. Within these different historical trajectories there are distinctions over what might be called secondary theological matters. Within broad Protestantism there are also loose groupings of churches which do not constitute a denomination and many totally independent churches. Overall, we have a continuum ranging from structured and hierarchical groupings such as the Anglicans or Methodists through various forms of Presbyterians and Baptists and on into fully independent local churches. In addition, since the 1950s there has been a proliferation of para-church organisations focused on particular causes, such as cross-cultural mission, ministry to a particular demographic, creation care, and distribution of the Bible.

Denominationalism is Peter Leithart's *bête noire* and he claims that rather than symbolising unity such groupings affirm and even maintain division.[21] He complains that while the Apostles Creed is acceptable to all Christians, Presbyterians must add the Westminster confession and Lutherans must align themselves with the Formula of Concord. For him, denominationalism is tribalism and we cannot identify ourselves by how we are different from others in God's church.

[20] Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Random House, 2005).
[21] Peter Leithart, *The end of Protestantism*, 3.

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The current situation

After around 500 years of Protestant Christianity, the movement now contains a large number of subgroups, many of which would self-identify as evangelical. These include Reformed/Presbyterian churches, Pentecostals/ charismatics, Lutherans, fundamentalists, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists. Almost all would hold to some version of justification by faith, believing that we cannot and need not do anything except believe for our salvation. They would embrace the individual right and responsibility of believers to read and understand the scripture. For many evangelicals, belonging to their denomination or group is important and only a few groups explicitly position themselves as not Roman Catholic. Many within evangelicalism do not consider the history and diversity of the church as relevant.

Beyond this exists great divergence in views on church government, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the role of women, the scope of mission (salvation of individual souls or broader communal and societal redemption), attitude to human endeavour and scholarship, wealth and prosperity, healing, consumption of alcohol, and attitudes to other religions. There are also differences over qualifications for ministers and who may preside over the Lord's Supper. There are ongoing disputes about whether the scripture is inerrant or infallible and the importance of weekly sermons. I recently chatted with a Pentecostal brother who told me that his wife struggled when asked to preach from a scriptural text. I genuinely did not understand the issue, because in the tradition I was trained in, the text is the basis of everything! In the realm of politics, while 80% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in the recent presidential election,[22] most British evangelicals would be seen as left-wing in America.[23]

Protestant and evangelical unity is facilitated by reference to a small, central core of beliefs. Duncan describes Protestantism as "fluid" and centred on "the doctrine of justification by faith."[24] Beyond the core, Pawley argues, Protestantism "does not represent a homogeneous body of doctrine."[25] Once secondary level theological commitments are discussed, the superficial unity is under pressure. Within and between evangelical subgroupings, infelicitous statements by a preacher or theologian can cause him or her to be labelled and pigeon-holed. I am not denying the existence of tribalism in other parts of the church, but my focus is evangelicalism.

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[22] Sarah Bailey, "White evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump, exit polls show." *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2016. Accessed October 8, 2018. *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/09/exit-polls-show-white-evangelicals-voted-overwhelmingly-for-donald-trump/*

[23] Andy Walton, *Is there a 'Religious Right' emerging in Britain?* (London: Theos, 2013).

[24] Graham Duncan, *A Protestant Perspective*, 1.

[25] Bernard Pawley, *Looking at the Vatican Council* (London: SCM, 1962).

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Today's evangelical church is clearly different from the Protestant church during the reformation and even in the early 20th century. The very foundations of the Protestant movement have allowed and even caused it to morph in response to its leaders, the subgroups inside it, social and cultural trends, and theological innovation. Although such responsiveness has a positive side, we may find ourselves agreeing with Hans Küng about "the mistakes of modern Protestantism— sectarian encapsulation, mutual excommunication and the constant splitting off of churches."[26]

Within evangelicalism there are presbyterian, congregational, and episcopalian approaches to church governance and it is noteworthy that all exhibit various degrees of human authority, despite the initial rejection of such in the early reformation period. Contemporary evangelicalism shows increasing involvement of the laity, according to the protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers and the availability of educated, capable church members. The ongoing debate about the ordination of women and the consecration of female bishops is evidence of a strained unity but also an emerging new identity within evangelicalism which claims that gender equality in Christian service is scriptural.

In the increasingly post-Christian West, hard questions are being asked about the meaning and purpose of the church. Postmodernity emphasises belonging and toleration of other people's points of view, and while some lament a perceived attack on absolute truth, others see a liberation from narrow, modernist approaches to scripture and theology. In some parts of the evangelical movement, there is a move to strip Christianity down to an organic, minimalist core, reflected in how we do theology, conduct worship services, and use the scripture. Positively, previously divisive issues are now put to one side or ignored, but this could also bring loss of theological depth and ideological compromise. Some would see the church's constant internal struggles over the homosexual issue as an example.

Within evangelicalism there has been a reaction to excessively cerebral approaches to worship and preaching. For McGrath the denial of the senses and emotions in worship and relating to God are negative effects of the reformation.[27] The recent rise of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is a reaction to left-brain Christianity and the return of the emotions is accompanied by a new openness to the Spirit. Communal aspects of Christianity are now emphasised as never before in the evangelical world, and there has been a renaissance in scholarship on the kingdom of God and the Trinity. However, this new sense of freedom has brought complications; in some sectors of evangelicalism, doctrine and the scripture have given way to pragmatism and emotionalism.

[26] Hans Küng, *Disputed Truth: Memoirs II*. London: Continuum, 2008), 320.
[27] Alister McGrath, *The twilight*, 208.

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It is ironic perhaps that some of these free and independent evangelical subgroupings have seen the rise of new forms of authority and hierarchy and the return of so-called "apostles." Authority can now be derived from and authenticated by a preacher or pastor being a good communicator, having excellent media skills, dressing well, leading worship well, and causing numerical growth in the church. A small number a hugely influential individual Christian leaders has emerged, whose teachings and publications reach a literally global audience, with little or adaptation to the local context. For some, certainly, pastors who are good communicators of a theologically light gospel represent the identity of evangelicalism.

An authority of neither apostolic succession nor Protestant submission to the scripture can only be described as performative. Although Protestantism and evangelicalism emphasise the right of individual Christians to read and understand the Bible, the spirit of the age (impoverished knowledge of the scripture, lack of familiarity with the church's heritage, a large profit-driven Christian publishing industry, a plethora of evangelical websites, and a pragmatic emphasis on "what works") seems to have produced a neo-papal system in which many simply absorb the views of the new apostles. Within evangelicalism, some mega-churches have almost become denominations, undertaking their own theological training and mission endeavours, often with a huge influence, even beyond their home country. These trends seem to be causing strains within the unity of evangelicalism and a shift in identity towards populism and a lowest common denominator, such that some evangelicals might struggle to recognise each other.

These issues within contemporary evangelicalism are the outcome of earlier trends identified and discussed by Guinness in his short but important work, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds.*[28] Among the forces that have shaped American evangelicalism in particular are polarisation, pietism, primitivism, populism, and pragmatism. Since the book was written, society and the church have changed, but polarisation, populism, and pragmatism remain strong, while private faith has replaced pietism. If Guinness is right then at least part of the evangelical identity is superficiality; flattening the church and removing theological and ecclesial accountability may be a two-edged sword.

Evangelicals have been castigated from without and within for being anti-intellectual and indifferent to history. Looking across the vast swathe of evangelicalism, from strongly modernist Reformed groups to the increasingly dominant Pentecostal churches, one is reminded of Neil Postman's indictment

[28] Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds.*

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of modern American society in his now classic *Amusing ourselves to death*;[29] perhaps Postman is the secular analogue of Guinness. What is of concern is that both books are now out of date and the situation has been made worse by the American culture wars, increasing secularisation in the West, and the abuse of the internet. Within modern evangelicalism there is an unfortunate ignorance of the works of God in the lives of the saints, the church, and in mission in history and in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches; too many evangelicals are floating in time and space. Although Reformed evangelicals are known to be intellectually and historically astute, they generally limit their interest to their own, honouring and quoting from Calvin, Bavinck, and Berkhof.

On a more positive note, there is a growing openness to Ignatian spirituality, *lectio divina*, Taize, and the use of the senses. As evangelicalism expresses discontent with itself, it has begun to draw inspiration from the older, less purely cerebral practices of the church. There is also increased cooperation in the mission endeavour between denominations and mission organisations. The comity agreements of the 19th century have given way to creative cooperation between missionaries who may not agree on every element of doctrine but work together to establish believers and churches as needed. Working together in mission may be the result of maturity in the evangelical movement and the effect of external, societal factors at home and abroad.

In his discussion about unity and cooperation among the Reformed churches of Croatia, Jovanović claims that some of the impetus for this was the war in country and heavy-handed government religious policy in the early post-communist period.[30] We talk about spiritual unity and the church's connection with the living God, but here things improved because of outside forces. In addition, and without belittling the progress made, the issue explored was unity among a group of Reformed churches in a medium sized, predominantly Roman Catholic country. An important point is that joint programmes and endeavours between churches in Croatia have not caused loss of identity; close cooperation actually brings out difference, but loving the other does not mean loving oneself less.[31]

In Western Europe and some parts of North America, we are also seeing increasing unity and cooperation within some parts of the Protestant and evangelical camps. This is partly motivated by a crisis of confidence in the church and its position in an increasingly secular society. Consider for example

[29] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

[30] Mladen Jovanović, "The Evangelical perspective on unity and the contribution of the Protestant Evangelical Council to Christian fellowship in Croatia." *Evangelical Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 84.

[31] Mladen Jovanović, *The Evangelical perspective*, 80.

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the *unChristian*[32] project in the United States; some evangelicals have spent a lot of time and effort to see how they are perceived by the broader society. They are concerned about how outsiders perceive the evangelical identity. Falling church attendance and fears that Christianity is becoming irrelevant are beginning to concentrate the mind. A rather divided community may discover unity and shared identity previously unknown when faced with an indifferent or hostile other outside. As the church finds itself increasingly in a liminal space, we see a healthy sense of communitas emerging. That said, the 9Marks website has published a review of *unChristian* which is clearly at odds with many of the ideas in the book;[33] evangelicals do not have to agree, even when they are under pressure and the identity of 9Marks seems quite different from the *unChristian* people.

An especially influential force within evangelical Protestantism is the Lausanne Movement. Interestingly, the movement's website explicitly claims that it is not an organisation but "an organic movement without formal membership structure."[34] Lausanne exists to facilitate unity and identity among evangelicals, with a particular interest in holistic mission and desire to hear the majority world. The history of the movement reflects largely successful attempts to go beyond earlier divisions over the so-called spiritual gospel and social action, although some of these remain. Some time after evangelicalism began waking up from the nightmare of dispensationalism there are still dark corners in which negativity and a perverse fundamentalist hopelessness remain.

Looking at Lausanne in the second decade of the 21st century enables us to see that its founders forged genuine unity and identity by focusing on what they considered the essential elements of the gospel, theologically and missiologically. Perhaps in acknowledgement of the state of affairs in the church and the wider world, the movement does not claim any authority. Rather, it positions itself as a catalyst for unity and a broader view of mission than was mainstream in the past. Its 15-point covenant[35] provides a basis for association and belonging, and seems to avoid the most contentious theological and pastoral issues. The covenant comes across as a developed, missional derivation of Bebbington's quadrilateral rather than a toothless and reductionist formula designed to be acceptable to all. In addition, Lausanne seems to affirm that unity does not have to mean uniformity.

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[32] David Kinnaman & Gabe Lyons, *unChristian. What a new generation really thinks about Christianity…and why it matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

[33] Owen Strachan, review of *unChristian*, by Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, 9Marks (March 3 2010). https://www.9marks.org/review/unchristian/

[34] "About the movement," Lausanne Movement, accessed October 8, 2018, *https://www.lausanne.org/about-the-movement*

[35] "Lausanne covenant," Lausanne Movement, accessed October 8, 2018, *https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant*

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Concerning evangelical statements of faith, the World Evangelical Alliance's[36] is shorter and simpler, and not very different in spirit from that of Lausanne. The US National Association of Evangelicals has something similar,[37] and their presentation of evangelical faith makes reference to Bebbington. The UK Evangelical Alliance basis of faith affirms the same theological tenets but shows greater commitment to a holistic gospel and engagement with society.[38] The American site requires prospective members to affirm the statement of faith while the British one does not.

These umbrella or para-church organisations embrace unity around a fairly basic set of beliefs, tolerating considerable latitude among their members. Authority in a hierarchical sense is not exercised, as individual or organisational members can choose to join them if agree with the statement of faith. Unity and identity are based on a small range of theological commitments. We can see this negatively, as compromise by avoidance of sensitive issues, or positively, if the simple heart of the gospel is recognised and secondary issues discounted. Lausanne is a little different as its statement of faith is actually more detailed than those of the other organisations, but it self-represents as something which people can get involved with rather than join. People can receive the newsletter, join an interest group, work with the leaders, or give financially, of which suggest a more organic affiliation. The identity represented by evangelical organisations and Lausanne seems to be a mixture of adherence to clear but not exhaustive principles and missional activism which aims to benefit the church and broader society.

Bridges to the Orthodox

The history and current status of evangelicalism as described so far are complex and confusing, as much for those within the tradition as for those looking in from outside. We might well wonder how bridges can be built between evangelicalism and the Orthodox tradition. In thinking about building bridges, I concede that I know a lot more about one of the banks than the other, so please forgive me if I misunderstand my brothers and sisters on the other side.

Two things occur to me here. First, bridges are narrow connections between areas of land; we cannot expect agreement on everything or large-

[36] "Statement of faith," World Evangelical Alliance, accessed October 8, 2018, *http://www.worldea.org/whoweare/statementoffaith*

[37] "Statement of Faith," National Association of Evangelicals, accessed October 8, 2018, *https://www.nae.net/statement-of-faith/*

[38] "Basis of faith," Evangelical Alliance, accessed October 8, 2018, *https://www.eauk.org/about-us/basis-of-faith.*

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scale seamless transition from one church tradition to another. In time we may be able to build more bridges and widen some of the existing ones. Second, my reading and discussion with different parts of the Church Universal tell me that people who are older in the faith and better theologically trained generally find it is easier to extend the hand of friendship across boundaries. Maturity and education make us more self-aware and secure in our understanding of our own faith and more willing to engage with people a little different. In addition, if we have spent time with people whose theological positions, church practice, and approach to worship are different from our own, we are usually better able to appreciate the diversity of God's church.

With this in mind I wish to draw on the thought of two Christian thinkers who were neither evangelical nor Orthodox; perhaps building bridges starts from an island in the middle of the river! In his 1806 work *Christmas Eve*,[39] Schleiermacher looks at unity and identity in the Christian community through the analogy of a family gathering. Among those present are different genders, ages, personalities, levels of education, and hobbies; plurality is embodied within the group. As they discuss the incarnation of Christ and the salvation that he brought, there is a variety of approach and content. Some preferred to present their ideas in stories, whereas others wanted reasoned argument. Some placed an emphasis on words while others liked physical movement and music. Their spirituality is a matter of joy and sorrow, happiness and conflict.[40] I am reminded of Lossky's comment that the work of Christ raises the people of God *en masse* while the work of the Spirit celebrates and accentuates our diversity.[41] For Schleiermacher the women represent gradual spiritual growth and maturity, while the male characters portray a sense of crisis and discontinuity. Schleiermacher's portrayals may look rather gendered today, but his point is that no one way to think about God is better than another. All present at the Christmas Eve gathering belonged; they had a right to be there because of their shared family identity and common faith. Hettema and Zorgdrager ask us to consider religious experience as rich and living and believe that we do not have to harmonise and impose uniformity.[42] In Schleiermacher's group, the members are not only accepting but also curious about each other's viewpoints.

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[39] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve. A Dialogue on the Celebration of Christmas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1806).

[40] Theo Hettema & Heleen Zorgdrager, "*Schleiermacher and the Reshaping of Protestantism*" (presentation, 'Reshaping Protestantism', Jubilee Congress of the Theological University Kampen, 1-4 September, 2004): 6.

[41] Vladimir Lossky, *The mystical theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1991).

[42] Theo Hettema & Heleen Zorgdrager, *Schleiermacher and the reshaping*, 7.

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If Schleiermacher brings to our attention the value of embodied experience and pluralism within the community of Christian faith synchronically, then Hughes borrows from a framework which is diachronic.[43] Schleiermacher gives us a snapshot of Christian diversity, whereas Hughes summarises a person's journey of faith.

Hughes draws on the work of van Huegel, which draws parallels between the development of human maturity and maturity of faith. His three faith stages of institutional, critical, and mystical are the analogues of infancy, adolescence, and adulthood.[44] Although this model is developmental and the three phases correspond to human growth and experience, Hughes is careful to point out that for rounded and healthy faith all three phases are required together in harmony and at the service of one's spiritual and intellectual life. The institutional or infant phase is the time to inculcate basic knowledge of the faith and moral teaching. There is a need for certitude and belonging, and thus the use of the senses and music is important. However, if a person stays at this stage, then only basic religious needs are met and his or her faith remains passive and seeks security, unable to deal with challenge or innovation. The next stage is adolescence or the critical period, which is marked by the search for meaning, the urge to question, and the desire to systematise one's religious understanding. Hughes is clear that this is a very important element in the development of faith, but comments that too much emphasis on the critical can result in an over-cerebral approach to faith such that a person's emotions are neglected and theology and philosophy of belief can replace faith in God himself.[45] Alongside this can come an insistence that one's own belief and practice are the only valid ones, resulting in the othering of people who do not agree with us. The third phase is adulthood or the mystical stage, when believers can look at their inner selves, accepting and appreciating their own complexity. Hughes cautions that too much introspection can lead to self-absorption, especially if the institutional and critical facets of faith our missing. He believes that some of the excesses of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement are caused by people being in the mystical phase without the balance of the other two. Consistent with the mystical phase, Hughes describes God as "a mystery,"[46] knowable only partially through our experience, which I hope has some resonance for our Eastern Orthodox friends.

Bringing these two sets of ideas together enables us to encounter and celebrate the pluralism within the Church Universal. Hughes' three phases, all of

[43] Gerard Hughes, *God of surprises* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).
[44] Gerard Hughes, *God of surprises*, 11.
[45] Gerard Hughes, *God of surprises*, 21.
[46] Gerard Hughes, *God of surprises*, 31.

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which he claims are essential to healthy Christian maturity, allow us to embrace the diversity of spiritual encounter and descriptions of Christian experience described by Schleiermacher. The institutional, critical, and mystical facets of faith reflect the need for belonging and engaging the senses, rigorous questioning and use of the mind, and looking and beyond the self. Within this there can be story, propositional logic, analysis, and emotion, yet all of this is of God and focuses on God within the community of faith. Such a view is, after all, inscribed into the Christian faith by the writings of St Paul, particularly as found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. I believe this is the mindset that we need to build bridges between our different Christian traditions.

Let me end on a personal note. Bridge building involves meeting in the middle, both parties coming out from their own side and seeking to compromise and learn from each other. I sense that my experience is leading me in a certain direction along the bridge. Stamoolis talks about the two distinctive "theological frameworks" of Augustine and Chrysostom. The first is "a theology of grace" while the second is "an approach to the Christian life"; the West has understood justification in legal or forensic terms, while in the East the focus is "union with God."[47] Catholic theologian Eammon Duffy's believes that "tradition is not orders from above, or the *status quo*, a code of law, or a body of dogma. It is a wisdom, embodied in a complex tissue of words, symbols, law, teaching, prayer and action, a way of life which has to be practised before it yields its light."[48] All of this speaks volumes to me.

Conclusion

This brief article has explored the complexity of unity and identity within evangelical Protestantism as a developmental process influenced by intellectual and social factors outside the church. Although there is much which is concerning, recent trends show a more encouraging mutual embrace among many evangelicals. Finally, based on the wisdom of two spiritual giants, neither evangelical nor Orthodox, I have explored an ethos which might help in the building of bridges.

[47] James Stamoolis, Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8, no. 2 (1984): 59.

[48] Eammon Duffy, "Tradition and Reaction: Historical Resources For a Contemporary Renewal," in Austen Ivereigh (ed.), *Unfinished journey. The Church 40 years after Vatican II*, Continuum, New York, 2003, pp.49-68.

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