

The EOC is overseen by a synod of bishops currently consisting of: Bp. Jerold Gliege, presider (Saskatoon, Canada), Bp. Thomas Andersson (Halmstad, Sweden), Bp. Joshua Beecham (Indianapolis, USA), Bp. Telesphore Ntashimikiro (Bujumbura, Burundi), Bp. Jacinto Kibuuka (Kampala, Uganda), Bp. Nestor Misigaro (Rutana, Burundi) and Bp. Denis Mugabo (Nyanza, Rwanda).

Introduction

The Evangelical Orthodox Church both was and is a denomination concerned with uniting the history and teachings of Eastern Orthodox Christianity with certain doctrinal and cultural aspects of Evangelicalism. The Evangelical Orthodox Church took several forms before it settled on that particular name. Although in 1987 thirteen of its twenty parishes switched religious affiliation to the Eastern Orthodox Church through the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, the remaining seven parishes continued to exist as the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Since that time, some of those original parishes have also switched affiliation and some no longer exist, while others have been added. Currently, the Evangelical Orthodox Church has five churches in North America and one in Sweden, along with over 80 new parishes and missions in the eastern African countries of Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The 1960s and Campus Crusade for Christ

Starting in the late 1960s, certain members of the leadership of the evangelical, parachurch group, Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), became disaffected with the group. They felt their evangelistic efforts, inspired by CCC's motto: "Win the Campus Today, Win the World Tomorrow," were not making the proper impact, given the strength of anti-Christian sentiments they perceived in the counterculture of the 1960s. For these and other reasons, these CCC leaders left the organization starting in 1968 to pursue other ministries. Among them were national field coordinator Jon Braun, Canadian director Ken Berven, Asian director Ray Nethery, African director Gordon Walker, and regional directors Richard Ballew and Peter Gillquist. Dr. Jack Sparks joined the exodus a few years later after attempting to implement radical evangelistic techniques through CCC on the campus at the University of California, Berkeley.

In January of 1967, still-national-field-coordinator, Jon Braun visited the University of California, Santa Barbara to give his famous series of lectures, "Love, Sex, and Marriage." The CCC group on that campus was vibrant and active especially after Braun's efforts there. When Braun and the other leaders left CCC, however, this campus group did as well, along with splits and defections of other groups across the country. The divisions that arose from leaving the national organization reduced the size of the group from about 125 to about 15. This group invited an evangelist, Gene Edwards, to the campus community and the residential community immediately west of campus, Isla Vista for guidance in reconstituting their community because Edward's novel views of church organization. Edwards took the opportunity to begin an evangelistic ministry there which grew into a church of approximately 200 people by 1970-1971. This success drew the attention of Braun and Ballew who moved to Isla Vista along with other family members and friends to be a part of the growing church community. Over time, theological differences between Edwards and these new arrivals split this group as well. After a few months of reassessing their situation, Braun and Ballew brought together many of the people who were still interested in starting a church group. The two men promised these people that they would find "green pastures and still waters" together. In order to do that, they implemented commune-style living conditions in Isla Vista and a system of checking the power of authorities in the church in order to avoid what they termed "legalism" in the Edwards group. These two major changes in the community eventually developed into an authoritarian, hierarchical system as the movement developed its doctrine and ecclesiology, but the radical changes attracted the attention of the other former CCC leadership. Throughout the 1970s, all of the leadership of this new group moved to Isla Vista for significant periods of time to live in this community and make it the headquarters of a national network of churches.

The 1970s and the New Covenant Apostolic Order

This national network of churches began in 1973 when the group selected Richard Ballew, Jon Braun, Ken Berven, Ray Nethery, Jack Sparks, and Gordon Walker as elders who would meet quarterly to discuss problems and to help in overseeing the communities. At the same meeting, a debate among the group's members over the group members' understanding of the community after which they meant to model their congregations, the New Testament church, led them to begin to study what happened to Christianity after the Biblical record ends. The leadership divided the different facets and eras of church history between the six elders with Gillquist appointed as a seventh, administrative elder who would oversee the work of the other six. At the February 1975 leaders' meeting the elders met in a cabin in San Juan Island in Puget Sound to focus on the reports drawn up over the previous months. Sparks introduced the others to historical accounts of liturgy in Christian worship as early as Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (about 150 CE), Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* (about 200 CE), and *The Didache* (about 70 CE). Braun related to the rest of the group an account of the presence of bishops in the church as early as 67 CE in the person of Ignatius of Antioch. Ballew told the group about the conciliar and creedal history of the church. This new information prompted all of them to change their own communities in liturgical, sacramental, hierarchal, conciliar, and creedal ways.

After the reports on the historical record of the early church, the members of the group formed the New Covenant Apostolic Order. This new order was specifically *not* a denomination since the members meant to find the New Testament church and become part of it rather than start something new. The theology of the NCAO developed over time, and members of the group continued to write position papers on their research into church history. In fact, scholarly research was an important part of the NCAO's work throughout its short existence (1975 - 1979). The order began the academy of Orthodox Theology in Isla Vista, and it started a program according to the model of Switzerland's L'Abri center at Grace Haven Farm in Mansfield, Ohio where a few elders' meetings took place and an early house church had begun under the direction of Gordon Walker.

The group made the first contact with Eastern Orthodoxy during this time and through some of its research when one of the doctrinal reports ended up in the hands of a former student of Sparks, John Bartke. Bartke attended Saint Vladimir's Seminary at the time and showed the document to his professor, Alexander Schmemmann, a professor of Orthodox Theology and an Orthodox priest. Schmemmann began the process of getting an Orthodox representative to visit the Isla Vista Academy and parish. In the fall of 1977, Ted Wojcik, a priest from Saint Innocent Orthodox Church in Tarzana, California, arrived unannounced to a class at the Isla Vista Academy while Richard Ballew was teaching. The introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy began a time of major transition in the NCAO. The Eastern Orthodox representatives did not stop with Wojcik, and over time, the leadership of the NCAO began to visit Eastern Orthodox churches with great interest. However, the interest was not shared throughout the NCAO.

Ray Nethery, one of the founders of the movement and the director of Grace Haven at the time, left the group in 1978 with about 500 members. All were wary of the move toward Eastern Orthodoxy and its sacramental theology and hierarchical structure. About 1,500 members remained in the NCAO which retained the Academy of Orthodox Theology as well as Conciliar Press, which had been established in 1977 under the guidance of Ken Berven. The press began publishing the magazine *Again* in the same year in order to spread their view of the church more broadly. Furthermore, the group remained committed to finding the New Testament church that the NCAO saw more and more in its new acquaintance with Eastern Orthodoxy. And in February of 1979, the quarterly leaders meeting of the NCAO formed the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC).

In 1978 - 1979, a new group of churches from central and eastern United States with a Church of Christ background, along with a Canadian church with Mennonite roots, joined the NCAO. Many of these people were initially influenced by Gillquist's book *Love Is Now*, and had independently formed house churches. Because of their like-mindedness with Gillquist and his writings, they sought

affiliation with the NCAO. Kenneth Jensen, William Blythe, and Jerold Gliege were the leaders of these churches, and under the influence of Jensen a house church in Sweden was also moved to start an EOC parish under the direction of Thomas Andersson. When many of the EOC churches made the journey into the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, it was primarily churches from among the latter-joining group that did not follow.

The 1980s and the Reception into Orthodox Christianity

The leaders of the newly formed EOC explained in a press release on March 3, 1979, that the new denomination would seek to restore the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, provide a lasting home for those in their network of churches, and to call Christianity as a whole back to its doctrinal and structural foundations. Over the next six years, the EOC leadership kept in constant communication with Eastern Orthodox clergy to negotiate whether they would join the Eastern Orthodox Church and how this could happen.

Finally after years of deliberation with the Orthodox Church in America, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, twenty members of the EOC leadership organized a trip in June of 1985 to meet the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul) to begin the process of being received or at least being given direction in their spiritual journey. The stated intent and common understanding of this journey was for the EOC to be received intact. The leaders of the EOC believed they were Orthodox and held the ancient faith of the Church. They also believed their episcopacy was in some sense given in the same way as Paul received his apostolate, "not from men but from God." Yet, they desired to be recognized as such and received. The trip was a failure. The delegation was not given a chance to speak with the patriarch. It was during this visit that cracks in the episcopal unity became visible. Most of the younger bishops held to the original understanding of and confidence in the EOC theology and episcopacy. The aforementioned elder bishops revealed a willingness to forgo previously held convictions in order to be received. Fortunately for these elder bishops, upon their return, they learned that the Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV, was visiting North America with the North American Metropolitan, Philip Saliba. A meeting was arranged between the patriarch, the Metropolitan, and the EOC. In that meeting the Metropolitan offered whatever help the EOC needed from his archdiocese, and from February to April of 1987, the majority of the EOC's parishes from Southern California to Franklin, Tennessee, to Eagle River, Alaska joined the Antiochian Archdiocese.

The reception of the EOC into the Antiochian Archdiocese had a significant impact on the archdiocese as well as Eastern Orthodoxy in the United States. First, the production of the Orthodox Study Bible was, in large measure, the work of this group. The New Testament and the Psalms version arrived in 1992, and the full Old and New Testament were released in 2008. According to Gillquist, it was a lucrative product for the publishers (initially Thomas Nelson and then Conciliar Press), and introduced some non-Eastern Orthodox Christians to the Eastern Orthodox faith, and it seemed to have produced a greater appreciation for personal Bible reading among some life-long Eastern Orthodox Christians. Second, after the 1987 reception of the EOC, Gillquist was made the director of the new Antiochian Department of Missions and Evangelism. Through the work of that department, the Antiochian Archdiocese increased its number of parishes between 1987 and 2010 from roughly 100 to 250. Lastly, Jon Braun was given the task of revitalizing the Orthodox Christian Fellowship OCF campus ministries in 1987. He revived the Orthodox College Conference in 1989 and opened 240 OCF chapters on college campuses by 2007.

The Evangelical Orthodox Church Today

The Evangelical Orthodox Church remains in operation today with Jerold Gliege as its Presiding Bishop, who also oversees its Canadian parish in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. In addition to the Canadian parish, the EOC maintains four parishes in Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois, an order of nuns in Indiana, and a church in Sweden. Through contacts and missionary efforts on the African continent, from 2008 to the present, a flood of African parishes have embraced EOC theological and

liturgical practice. And as a result, the EOC has 80 parishes in various stages of development in Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

While the EOC was and intends to remain a bridge for Evangelicals into a fuller understanding and expression of orthodox Christianity and Eastern Christian tradition, it is a viable and vibrant self-governing communion of churches in its own right. Although it embraces many of the traditions common to eastern Christian practice, such as the use of the Divine Liturgies of Saints John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and James the Apostle, the veneration of icons or holy images etc., it does so with Evangelical sensibilities and an evangelical zeal that is part of its heritage. EOC worship is a blend of Orthodox liturgical texts and liturgical music with Evangelical hymns and contemporary songs, as well as a blend of reverent awe with Charismatic expressions of church life. Its ecclesiology and theology and many of its practices decidedly fall along Eastern Orthodox lines, yet it has maintained its self-governing status for the benefit of its mission. Enduring the challenges of several decades, it has continued to be securely committed to its original vision as an Evangelical expression of Orthodoxy, believing that is what God called it to from the beginning.

- Aaron J. Sokoll and Bp. Joshua Beecham

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