

Eastern Orthodox Bishops – High Priests?

The office of the Bishop is essential to the continuation of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Without the bishops, the Orthodox Church would cease to exist. This paper briefly examines the historical development of this ecclesiastical structure and compares the concept of the Orthodox Bishop with the bishop or overseer as described in the Scriptures.¹

The Rise of Domineering, even Monarchical Bishops

Orthodox bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware explains the necessary and essential office of the Bishop in the Orthodox Church,

“The Orthodox Church is a hierarchical Church. An essential element in its structure is the Apostolic Succession of bishops. ‘The dignity of the bishop is so necessary in the Church,’ wrote Dositheus, ‘that without him neither the Church nor the name Christian could exist or be spoken of at all... He is a living image of God upon earth... and a fountain of all the sacraments of the Catholic Church, through which we obtain salvation.’”²

This quotation graphically reveals the importance to the Orthodox Church of its bishops and how greatly esteemed they are. How did the Orthodox hierarchy, including the office of its bishops, arise? Another quote from Bishop Ware demonstrates the Orthodox Church’s belief:

“The Empire through which these first Christian missionaries traveled was, particularly in its eastern part, an empire of cities. This determined the administrative structure of the primitive church. The basic unit was the community in each city, governed by its own bishop; to assist the bishop there were presbyters or priests, and deacons.”³

Originally there were bishops in villages as well as cities, but as time passed, the city bishops began to dominate the rural bishops.⁴ By the fourth century a provincial system had developed, whereby churches were grouped together into provinces,⁵ and the custom developed of ascribing greater honor to the "metropolitan" or bishop of the capital city

¹ ἐπίσκοπος [episkopos], *an overseer... the superintendent, head or overseer of any Christian church...* (Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 243.)

² Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: New Edition* (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 248-249. Timothy Ware is also known as Bishop Kallistos Ware

³ Ware, p. 13.

⁴ Fr. John S. Romanides, *The Ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch* (The basis for equality of bishops) “...the bishop of the city became much more authoritative than the village bishop who was still the bishop of one community. This, plus the fact that the bishop of the city was very influentially situated, obviously introduced the idea that he was somehow more important than the village bishop. Gradually the village bishop was deprived of some of his most important functions and subjected to the surveillance of the city bishop. "... even though they may have received episcopal ordination (cheirothesian) ... let them dare not ordain neither presbyters nor deacons without the city bishop to whom he and his village is subject." (Canon 10 of Antioch; Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, *Peri Chorepiscopon*, Athens 1935, p. 8-10.) In the Church of North Africa of the late 4th century one could still find small village communities with a bishop and only one presbyter. (Canon 55 of Carthage, H. Alibizatos, *The Holy Canons*, Athens 1949, p. 254.) Progressively, however, St. Ignatius' conception of the bishop in terms of the local Eucharistic life as an end in itself is either mitigated or completely forgotten, and the episcopate conforms to the political structure of the empire.” (http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/frjr_eccles.aspx)

⁵ Aristeides Papadakis, Ph.D., *History Of The Orthodox Church*, Heresies and Ecumenical Councils (<http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7053.asp>)

(metropolis) of each province.⁶ During the fourth and fifth centuries, the Ecumenical Councils gave five bishops special recognition. Four of these bishops were ranked according to their cities' civil importance in the administrative cities of the Roman state.⁷ The city of Jerusalem was added due to its association with the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸ It is believed an Apostle founded the churches in all five of these cities. The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) formally recognized the status of three dioceses: Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Due to the emergence of Constantinople (New Rome⁹) as the new capital of the empire, the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) assigned Constantinople second place after Rome, while Alexandria was assigned third place. Constantinople's status was confirmed at the council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)¹⁰ and Jerusalem was granted fifth place among the great sees.¹¹ These five bishops were called "Patriarchs" and the system, which the Orthodox Church calls the "Pentarchy,"¹² was complete. The whole of the known world was divided up between the five Patriarchs and each administered their own section.¹³

Bishop Ware summarizes the present condition of Orthodoxy:

"The Orthodox Church is thus a family of self-governing Churches. It is held together, not by a centralized organization, not by a single prelate wielding power over the whole body, but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments. Each Patriarch or autocephalous Church, while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine, and between them all there is full sacramental communion."¹⁴

The Orthodox bishop is the fundamental building block of the Eastern Orthodox Church and no Orthodox church can exist without him. An Orthodox bishop, after his election and consecration, functions as Governor, Teacher, and High Priest.¹⁵ As Governor, the bishop rules the flock committed to his charge;¹⁶ as Teacher, he is appointed to teach (though he is not considered to be infallible);¹⁷ and as High Priest, the Orthodox Church believes its bishops to be "the fountain of the sacraments,"¹⁸ such that a priest performing the Eucharist is really acting as the bishop's deputy.¹⁹ Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff summarizes the role of the Orthodox bishop as High Priest in each Orthodox Church.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ware, p. 26.

⁹ "...the privileges of the most holy Church of Constantinople, which is New Rome." (Henry R. Percival, Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series* Volume 14, (Albany: AGES Software, 1997), (The Seven Ecumenical Councils, The Fourth Ecumenical Council the Council of Chalcedon, Canon 28, p. 564.)

¹⁰ "...we also do enact and decree the same things concerning the privileges of the most holy Church of Constantinople, which is New Rome. For the Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of old Rome, because it was the royal city. And the One Hundred and Fifty most religious Bishops, actuated by the same consideration, gave equal privileges (ἴσα πρεσβεία) to the most holy throne of New Rome, justly judging that the city which is honored with the Sovereignty and Senate, and enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome, should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is, and rank next after her..." (Ibid.)

¹¹ Ware, p. 26.

¹² Papadakis

¹³ Ware, p. 26.

¹⁴ Ware, p. 7.

¹⁵ John Meyendorff, *Rubrics on Hierarchical Services* (Hierarchy and Laity in the Orthodox Church) (http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/hierarchical_services_rubrics.htm#_Toc71183827)

¹⁶ Ware, p. 249.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“There is no Apostolic succession outside the Church, but only within the Church, and it specifically points to those [the bishops]²⁰ who, in each Church, are called to preside and be the image of Christ Himself. It is not the Apostolic succession but their presiding among "priestly" people, which makes them High Priests, but they receive that grace for presiding from the laying on of hands by the successors of the Apostles. This particular grace, inasmuch as the Eucharist is the actualization of the Sacrifice of the Only High Priest Jesus Christ, presupposes the High Priestly service, which is distinct from the general Royal Priesthood of the people of God.”²¹

The Orthodox bishop is considered to be a “‘monarch’ in his own diocese;”²² thus the phrase ‘Monarchical Bishops.’ Orthodox bishops ordain a bishop; a bishop, likewise, ordains priests and deacons.²³ On behalf of the wider Orthodox Church, the bishops assemble together in councils and they alone make final decisions.²⁴

The Biblical Organizational Structure in the New Testament

The Orthodox Church separates bishop and Presbyter (priest) into two different oversight roles. Is this distinction to be found in the Scriptures?

In the book of Acts, the Bible describes Paul (the apostle) and Barnabas ordaining elders for the supervision of the churches: “*And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*”²⁵ The book of Acts covers a period from about A.D. 33 to A.D. 65, thus we have a description of how the early local churches in the apostolic era were supervised. The ministerial function of the deacons²⁶ is also considered by many to be found in the book of Acts,²⁷ and is certainly present in the early Apostolic Church.²⁸ The term, elders, is a translation of the Greek word *presbuteros*²⁹ (presbyters), which in this context means those who oversee the local churches. The English word bishop is a translation of the Greek term *episkopos*,³⁰ which also carries the meaning of overseer of a Christian church. *Episkopos* and *presbuteros* are both found in the New Testament,³¹ and denote the same office, as can be seen from the following scriptures, “*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders [presbuteros] in every city, as I had*

²⁰ “The prayer for the installation of bishops given by Hippolytus of Rome in the "Apostolic Tradition" and the witness of Ireneus of Lyons, clearly indicate the combining in the person of the bishop, both the Apostolic succession and the grace of High Priesthood.” (Meyendorff, Note * at the bottom of the paper)

²¹ Meyendorff

²² “A bishop is appointed by God to guide and to rule the flock committed to his charge; he is a ‘monarch’ in his own diocese.” (Ware, p. 249.)

²³ “1. the three sacred orders of Diaconate, Presbyterate, and Episcopate have a sacramental nature; 2. these orders are exclusively conferred by Bishops with unquestionable apostolic succession...” (Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas: <http://www.scoba.us/resources/ordination.asp>)

²⁴ “...yet when the moment comes for the council to make a formal proclamation of the faith, it is the bishops alone who, in virtue of their teaching *charisma*, take the final decision.” (Ware, p. 251.)

²⁵ Acts 14:23

²⁶ *διακονέω* [*diakoneō*], ...to take care of the poor and the sick, who administer the office of a *deacon*... in the Christian churches (Thayer, p. 137.)

²⁷ Acts 6:1-6

²⁸ 1 Timothy 3:8-13

²⁹ *Πρεσβύτερος* [*presbuteros*] *elder*... among Christians, *those who presided over assemblies* (or churches) (Thayer, p. 536.)

³⁰ Thayer, p. 243.

³¹ For example; *Episkopos*: Acts 1:20; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7; *Presbuteros*: Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:1; 1 Peter 5:1.

*appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop [episkopos] must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;*³² “The elders [presbuteros] which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [episkopeo³³] thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”³⁴ Thus, we clearly see in the New Testament that the terms overseer and elder are interchangeable.

The noted historian and Orthodox convert Jaroslav Pelikan comments on the use of the terms episkopos and presbuteros in the book of Acts:

“...the writer of Acts calls these leaders τους πρεσβυτερους [presbuteros] της εκκλησιας (20:17) but a few verses later Paul in his address to them says that the Holy Spirit had made these same men επισκοπους [episkopos] over the church (20:28). In such a passage at any rate, it does seem, as even Roman Catholic scholarship must acknowledge, that “this terminology appears to fluctuate a bit,” and that the title πρεσβυτερος [presbuteros] and the title επισκοπος [episkopos] refer to the same person at the same time, so that it would be anachronistic to read the later distinction back into this text.”³⁵

Likewise, in defining the term bishop, the Antiochian Orthodox Church³⁶ says:

“A bishop is the leader of a local community of Christians. In the New Testament there is no clear distinction between the offices of bishop and elder (presbyter), both of which function as leaders of the community. However, by the mid- to late first century, the Church began to reserve the title bishop for the men of spiritual qualification who were consecrated to follow the Apostles in their office of oversight....”³⁷

The Scriptures do not support the separation of bishops and presbyters into two separate roles, and it is evident that there is recognition of this by certain members of the Orthodox Church.

Bishops and the “Church Fathers”

In the writings of certain early “Church Fathers” the separation of the bishops from the presbytery is evident. For example Ignatius says,

“Since therefore I have, in the persons before mentioned, beheld the whole multitude of you in faith and love, I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the

³² Titus 1:5-7

³³ ἐπίσκοπος (episkopeō) “to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for: spoken of the care of the church which rested upon the presbyters, 1 Pet. v. 2 (Thayer, p. 242.)

³⁴ 1 Peter 5:1-2

³⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible) (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2005), p. 92.

³⁶ “...the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. We are the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Christian Church whose roots trace directly back to first century Antioch...” (<http://www.antiochian.org/about>)

³⁷ <http://orthodoxyouthoutreach.org/orthodox-church-terms-a-g>

assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.”³⁸

This statement of Ignatius is referenced by Orthodox Church teachers³⁹ to confirm the early adoption of the threefold ministry of bishop, priests, and deacons. And this quote from Ignatius does seem to indicate that some of the early post-apostolic Christian churches adopted the Episcopal structure that the Orthodox Church has perpetuated. The epistle is especially important since it was written about the year A.D. 107.⁴⁰ It is evident, however, that the threefold Episcopal structure was not universally adopted or taught by the early Church Fathers, as the following quote from the Church Father Clement will demonstrate,

“The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.”⁴¹

From the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians it can clearly be seen that Clement only accepts a twofold administrative ministry in the New Testament Church: that is, bishops and deacons. The epistle is dated to the period between A.D. 68 to A.D. 97⁴² and thus predates Ignatius’ epistle. Likewise, Polycarp who is also considered to be an early Church Father, who lived in the first and second centuries,⁴³ seems only to have recommended church government of presbyters and deacons; as can be seen from the following quotation from his Epistle to the Philippians,

“Wherefore, it is needful to abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ.”⁴⁴

Finally, the writer of the second century⁴⁵ Didache seems to know nothing of the threefold hierarchical ministry of a bishop over the presbyters⁴⁶:

³⁸ A. Cleveland Coxe, A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Volume 1, (Albany: AGES Software, 1997), (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians: Preserve Harmony, Chapter 6), p. 124.

³⁹ For Example: Meyendorff; Ware, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ware, p. 13.

⁴¹ Coxe *et al.*, First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians: The Order of Ministers in the Church, Chapter 42, p. 40.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴³ “The date of the Epistle cannot be satisfactorily determined. It depends on the conclusion we reach as to some points, very difficult and obscure, connected with the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp which has come down to us. We shall not, probably be far wrong if we fix it about the middle of the second century.” (Coxe *et al.*, Introductory Note, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians: The Duties of Deacons, Youths, and Virgins, p. 68.)

⁴⁴ Coxe *et al.*, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians: The Duties of Deacons, Youths, and Virgins Chapter 5, p. 72.

⁴⁵ “The first five chapters of the Teaching, then, represent a late form of an original catechism into which the Didachist has inserted en bloc and not very neatly some distinctively Christian sayings. They betray a knowledge of Matthew and Luke, and one is clearly derived from the Shepherd of Hermas (Ch. 1:5 = Man. 2:4.–6), which was written about A.D. 100. Another indication of the date of the Didache is to be found in Ch. 16, where a citation from the Letter of Barnabas appears (Ch. 16:2 = Barn. 4:9). There can be little doubt that we are dealing with a second century document...” (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.i.html>)

“Appoint, then, for yourselves, bishop and deacons worthy of the Lord...”⁴⁷

So we see that early Christian writers and Church Fathers differ amongst themselves concerning the threefold Orthodox Church Episcopal. As we can see, opinions of man are uncertain; the Scriptures set before us the true works of God: “*For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.*”⁴⁸

The Apostolic Succession of the Bishops

The concept and tradition of Apostolic Succession is of vital importance to the Orthodox Church. We quote from OrthodoxWiki, an encyclopedia of information for the Orthodox Church,

“It is through the doctrine of Apostolic Succession that the Orthodox Christian Church maintains that it is the spiritual successor to the original body of believers in Christ that was composed of the Apostles. This succession manifests itself through the unbroken succession of its bishops back to the apostles.”⁴⁹

This statement is a concise summary of the Orthodoxy’s claim to Apostolic Succession.⁵⁰ One of the earliest formulations of apostolic succession through a line of bishops is found in *Adversus Haereses*⁵¹ (Against Heresies) written by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, between A.D. 182 and A.D. 188.⁵² Irenaeus wrote,

“The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. ... Eleutherius does now in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us.”⁵³

In this treatise, Irenaeus stated that the Apostles committed the episcopate of the Church at Rome into the hands of Linus. In fact, the line of Episcopal succession in the Church at Rome is confused and uncertain,⁵⁴ therefore it cannot be safely used to prove apostolic succession. Interestingly, Irenaeus also includes presbyters as well as bishops in the Episcopal succession.⁵⁵ Eastern Orthodox teachers⁵⁶ use the writings of Ignatius to

⁴⁶ “Hence a degree of caution is needed in citing the Didache as a witness to first century customs. Yet the main outlines of its arrangements for Church life do seem to reflect the end of the first century before the monoepiscopate had finally triumphed...” (Ibid.)

⁴⁷ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 15:1, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Psalms 33:4

⁴⁹ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Apostolic_succession

⁵⁰ See also: Ware, pp. 27, 248.

⁵¹ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Irenaeus_of_Lyons

⁵² Coxe *et al.*, Introductory Note to Irenaeus Against Heresies, p. 621.

⁵³ Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Volume 5: *The Writings of Irenaeus*, (Irenaeus Against Heresies, Volume 1, Book III) (Adamant Media: Elibron, 2005), Chapter III, 3, pp. 261-262.

⁵⁴ “The lists of early Roman bishops are in hopeless confusion, some making Clement the immediate successor of St. Peter, others placing Linus, and others still Linus and Anacletus, between him and the apostle.” (Coxe *et al.*, Introductory Note to the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, p. 13.)

⁵⁵ “Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the church – those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.” (Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Irenaeus Against Heresies, Volume 1, Book IV, 2, p. 462.)

⁵⁶ See: Romanides, The Clergy; http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/frjr_eccles.aspx; See also “Ware, p. 13.”

demonstrate the primacy of the bishop in the local churches and yet Ignatius too posits that apostolic authority comes through the presbyters as well,

“See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God.”⁵⁷

The Orthodox Church believes that in the early Church a bishop presided in each community.⁵⁸ But this was not necessarily the case, as the following quote from Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses* will demonstrate:

“...we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings....”⁵⁹

It is evident from this quote that certain Christians were assembling in “unauthorized” (in Irenaeus’ opinion) church meetings. Thus, they were not under the oversight of a monarchical bishop. Can a church without the oversight of a monarchical bishop be considered to be unauthorized? The Bible provides the answer: “*And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*”⁶⁰ Whilst Paul the apostle was at Miletus he sent for the elders at Ephesus (presbuteros). This indicates that there was a plurality of oversight in the church at Ephesus. Surely, if there were a monarchical bishop at Ephesus, he would have been sent for, along with the elders. Paul recognized that the elders at Ephesus were the ones to whom the oversight of the church had been committed. There is no example in the Scriptures of the office of a monarchical bishop overseeing a church and the elders in a city.

Who is the ultimate authority that establishes and oversees the local and universal Church? It is the Lord Jesus Christ; as He says, “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,*”⁶¹ and, “*for one is your master even Christ and ye are all brethren.*”⁶²

Who is Our High Priest?

The office of Eastern Orthodox Bishop does not have New Testament approval but arose later on. This presents a problem for the Orthodox Church, which Jaroslav Pelikan enunciates,

“...during the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter, and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the church. The question of the permanent normative authority of that pattern of ordained ministry for the church of subsequent centuries, therefore, cannot be decided by the authority of ‘Scripture alone,’ but depends on the authority that one accords to apostolic tradition in relation to the authority of apostolic Scripture....”⁶³

Pelikan here introduces a division between the authority of apostolic Scripture and “apostolic tradition.” This division inevitably implies that the Scriptures are faulty. In the New Testament Epistles Paul and the other apostles never contradict the other Scriptures, so why

⁵⁷ Coxe *et al.*, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans*, (Let nothing be done without the Bishop), Chapter 8, p. 177.

⁵⁸ For Example: Papadakis; Ware, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Ante-Nicene Christian Library: (Irenaeus Against Heresies, Volume 1, Book III, Chapter III, 3.), pp. 261.

⁶⁰ Acts 20:17

⁶¹ Matthew 18:20

⁶² Matthew 23:8

⁶³ Pelikan, p. 93.

would they have issued unwritten traditions that contradicted the Scriptures? The Eastern Orthodox Church's "apostolic tradition" cannot be considered apostolic, when it contradicts the Bible, but is in fact composed of pieces of later traditions of men. In the following Scripture the Lord Jesus Christ shows that the traditions of men are not authoritative; it is the Scriptures that contain the commandments of God, *"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."*⁶⁴

The Orthodox bishop is not the Christian's high priest.⁶⁵ The Lord Jesus Christ is our High Priest, *"By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."*⁶⁶

The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate and unchangeable Episkopos (Bishop) of the Christian Church, *"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."*⁶⁷

Who is Your High Priest?

The important question at the end of this article is this, "Who is your High Priest?" The priesthood of Christ is glorious, like unto Himself. It is the priesthood in which He has offered to the Father all that He is. It is His final finished work in which the glory of His person will shine forever. As the High Priest, He had done all that was necessary to put away the sins of His people. He has provided for them both the forgiveness for their sins and His own perfect standing before God. *"It is finished,"* He declared. What was finished was the believer's slavery to sin and the true moral guilt that attends his sin! Paid was the price of the believer's redemption! Performed were all the requirements of God's law. In a word, complete satisfaction had been made to God for the believer. In total contrast, the Orthodox Church's monarchical bishops with their sacraments and icons formally and explicitly contradict the Scriptures. Their teaching is all the more to be condemned because it leads millions into despair, and finally damnation. Believe on the Eternal Lord and know the Priest that gives life now, and forever! *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us,*

⁶⁴ Mark 7:7-9

⁶⁵ Meyendorff

⁶⁶ Hebrews 7:22-28

⁶⁷ 1 Peter 2:22-25

*through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God....*⁶⁸ This is the living way. *“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*⁶⁹ This was the price demanded by the All Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment, the true believer on Christ Jesus alone is freed from sin and Satan. *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* It is spiritual death to attempt to come to God through any earthly monarchial bishops who have no place in the New Testament. The way to the Eternal Father is through the Eternal High Priest alone; His death is for us the way to life. To those who believe on Him, He is everlasting life.♦

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⁶⁸ Hebrews 10:19-21

⁶⁹ Mark 10:45