

Notes on Orthodox Ecclesiology: Created Grace and the Mystification of Episcopal Power

Matthew Raphael Johnson
Johnstown, PA

*NB: This article is my personal, albeit highly educated and profound, opinion.
It does not necessarily reflect the views of my jurisdiction.*

Go to any Orthodox forum, especially one part of the “True Orthodox” (TOC) or anti-modernist movement. What you will find is anger, rancor and hatred. Why is this? Partly, it's due to the frustrations only the modern world can engender. It's the frustration of powerlessness. It's also because Orthodox people believe you are defined by who your bishop is. Brothers who believe identically in all respects practically kill each other because of their jurisdictional difference. The truth is that the very act of being an active TOC member is proof of the grace of the Holy Spirit. This does not happen – authentically – without God's power.

Read any Orthodox church history of the 20th century. It's all about what bishops do. It's like trying to write a history of the United States using only the acts of the Senate. Vladimir Moss, HOCNA, Joe Suaiden and the other writers of the TOC all speak as if there are no people, only bishops. This gives the impression that the terms “church” and “synod” are synonymous. They are not. The argument presented here is that bishops are not conduits of grace in the Roman Catholic sense. One's “jurisdiction” is not the source of ones' salvation. Grace, which is God's presence on earth, is.

During the Arian crisis, few Orthodox bishops remained in the East. Slowly, the concept of “supplied jurisdiction” emerged. It proclaimed the radical truth that God loves you even if you don't have a bishop; He loves you even if you don't know where to turn when your bishop fails you. It states – being less facetious – that priests abandoned by their erring bishop remain priests under God, not under a bishop. In other words, that the priesthood is not necessarily dependent on the bishop but can function without one, under certain circumstances. Why is this? Its because God is not a monster who enjoys sending as many people to Hell as possible.

St. Athanasius, speaking about the Arian crisis, quips that “The body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism.” St. Basil says: “Orthodox people keep silence, but every blaspheming tongue is let loose. Sacred things are profaned; those of the laity who are sound in faith avoid the places of worship as schools of impiety, and raise their hands in solitude, with groans and tears to the Lord in heaven” (Letter 92). Then, later,

Matters have come to this pass: the people have left their houses of prayer, and assemble in deserts, a pitiable sight; women and children, old men, and men otherwise infirm, wretchedly faring in the open air, amid most profuse rains and snow-storms and winds and frosts of winter; and again in summer under a scorching sun. To this they submit, because they will have no part in the wicked Arian leaven (Letter 242).

Many more statements like this can be cited. These were “bishop-less” assemblies but, according to Basil, were saturated with grace. The cultural and educational world of the fathers

no longer exists today and thus, we find ourselves in a modern “Arian crisis.” Its led to a massive failure in common sense. The obsession with episcopal power has led to an endless conga-line of synods and the consecration of thousands of bishops over a handful of people. This situation is based on poor theology.

The church can function without bishops and has done so in the past. Even sacraments can and have been administered mystically, that is, without obvious visible signs. These are extreme cases and cannot be generalized, but they do exist and will exist more and more in the future.

The laity “fleeing into deserts” is a metaphor meaning that the common parishioners were bishop-less. Grace was present. Women and the elderly were assisting in this process too. It was God's way of maintaining the faith and all the graces needed were provided. No one will burn because they have a bad bishop. We don't need patristic citations to tell us this. This passage summaries it brilliantly,

There will always be found a canonical priest, ordained by a canonical bishop, who will follow the Tradition. Around such priests will gather the small groups of the faithful who will remain until the last days. Each one of these small groups will be a local catholic Church of God. The faithful will find in them the entire fullness of the grace of God. They will have no need of administrative or other ties, for the communion that will exist among them will be the most perfect there can be. It will be communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, communion in the Holy Spirit. The golden links of the unalterable Orthodox Tradition will connect those churches among themselves as well as with the churches of the past, with the Church triumphant of heaven. In these small groups the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church will be preserved intact.¹

The main reason Rome and Orthodoxy are not in communion is the doctrine of “created grace.” This is the true “pan heresy.” There is no Roman Catholicism without it. It states, at the risk of oversimplification, that the hierarchy has “control” over grace and can provide it to whom they will. More formally, the church of Rome states: “The supernatural gift of grace itself freely bestowed and ordained to eternal life; this is created grace, of which we are now treating, whether it is interior or exterior, such as the preaching of the gospel.”² To be fair, the love of God as an essential property is an uncreated form of grace, but that which is directly relevant to the church's work is uncreated.

Papal infallibility, merits or indulgences cannot exist without created grace. It states essentially that the church is identical with the clergy and the people are just passive recipients of their favor. It's a distortion. The source of the distortion makes it understandable, but a distortion it remains.

However, 99 percent of the Orthodox people engaging in polemics today, without realizing it, believe the same. They say stupid things like “bishops rule the church” or that canons are “laws” in the same sense that the traffic code is a set of “laws.” The main problem is that our English has been debased. It is founded on a nominalist, positivist conception of the world that denudes it of all meaning. Trying to grasp the mind of the fathers without jettisoning

1 Kalomiros, Alexander (1967). *Against False Union*. St. Nectarios Press

2 Garrigou-Lagrange, R (2010) *Grace: Commentary on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas, Chapter One*. Veritatis Splendor Publications

this is almost impossible. It makes our task as teachers almost impossible and no one is immune.

In the modern world, there is no truth, only power. The result is that the concept of “law” has been reduced to little more than the domination of the most powerful faction in a society. We obey because the result might be prison. Human beings are seen as merely nerve endings with a given name. We seek pleasure (or what we think will be pleasurable) and avoid pain. Thus, when the pain of punishment is seen to be greater than the pain of following the law, the law is followed.

This is a diminution of reason, anything but “law.” The truth is that a law is something that we all know. It is part of being human. It is the conscience. No one passes laws – properly understood – and no one enforces them. They are built into the human mind. Men are weak, so we need to be reminded and even coerced into being what we are, since being rational and free, the marks of a human being, are extremely difficult to achieve.

St. Basil's vision of the episcopacy is today largely ignored. Our modern conception of hierarchy has no room for service. The role of a bishop was not to “rule,” but to act as an icon of humility and, of course, was elected by the local sobor and not “appointed.” Throughout his letters, he stresses the singular notion that teaching correct doctrine and living it publicly is the sole purpose of a bishop.

He also makes it clear that this office is a communal identity, not a personal one. The bishop is no dictator, but is subject to the body of the faithful carefully analyzing his words and actions and contrasting them with “scripture,” or the holy writings of the church.³ Acting as a living icon is precisely what St. Basil means by defending the truths of the faith: actions are far superior to words in this regard.

St. Irenaeus writes on the unity of the church in Chapter X of his famed, *Against Heresies*. Nowhere does he mention the power of a bishop. In Book IV, chapter XVIII, he explains who can properly offer up the sacrifice of the liturgy. Again, bishops do not appear at all. Purity of doctrine is the sole qualification. In Book V, chapter XX, he deals specifically with the power of a bishop, then doesn't mention it again.

In Book III, Chapter III, he writes,

In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.

Truth is the sole criterion for apostolic succession. Some might quote St. Cyprian's line, “The church is in the bishop and the bishop is in the church.” Theology cannot be done through one liners and slogans. St. Cyprian's quip cannot be literally true, especially when one doesn't know what it is for the church to be “in” someone.

Cyprian is no legalist. He states that

The unity of the Church comes from the divine strength and coheres in celestial sacraments; that is why, whoever does not hold this unity, does not hold God's law, does not hold the faith of the Father and of the Son, does not hold life and salvation.

3 See Basil's “Homily on Psalm XXVIII”

Our debased language assumes a “bishop” is a person. The point is not that bishops “rule” anything, but that he is the symbol of unity. “Symbol,” yet another debased word, is not the opposite of “substance,” but the introduction to it. Doctrinally, the sobor is “in communion” with the people when they agree on doctrine and the Christian life in its fullness and live it together as a unit.

Cyprian also states,

God commands an bishop to be appointed in the presence of all the assembly; that is, He instructs and shows that the ordination of elders ought not to be solemnized except with the knowledge of the people standing near, that in the presence of the people either the crimes of the wicked may be disclosed, or the merits of the good may be declared, and the ordination, which shall have been examined by the vote and judgment of all, may be just and legitimate.⁴

The bishop is a product of the church as a single assembly. He cannot “rule” over it in the modern sense of the term. His authority is both derivative of and exercised with the assembly. He's not an individual. Today, to have “power” is to expand outward. This is the Enlightenment concept of constant movement, domination and control over nature. In the premodern world, “power” was internal, something like being “empowered” towards a goal of purity. It had nothing to do with “ruling” as it does today. “Power” and “Authority” are not synonyms. One can be an “authority” in modern legal doctrine but not have any coercive effect on it. One of the many definitions of the Greek “ἐπιτροπή,” is power, but power done in communion with “a committee.”

Modernists stress institutions as rulers and base the notion of “canonical” on it. Alexander Schmemmann writes,

The organ of unity in the Church is the episcopate. “The Church is in the Bishop.” This means that in each church the personal ministry of the bishop is to preserve the fullness of the Church, i.e., her identity and continuity with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; to be the teacher of the universal traditions; the offerer of the Eucharist which is the sacrament of unity; and the pastor of the people of God on its pilgrimage to the Kingdom.

It is wise to be suspicious of writers that mystify their verbiage. Orthodox intellectuals tend to litter their writings with wispy concepts such as “living in grace,” or “charismatic love as the unity of the church” and other such nonsensical phrases. These terms are never defined and, of course, bear no relation to their modern usage.

Regardless, the quote is misleading. First, the bishop is never “personal,” since the individual did not exist until the 19th century. His “personal” job is to defend the unity of the church. This doesn't make any sense: the bishop is a manifestation of this unity. He cannot separate himself from it. The bishop is not a vessel that somehow “contains” the church. As a man, he's usually a functionary only. Read today's “Paschal Encyclicals” for evidence of this vapidity. Year after year these are published, saying completely nothing.

The quote from the arch-modernist Schmemmann is no different. These quotes are either insanely ambiguous, wrong or loaded with code-language like “universal traditions.” In general,

4 “To the Clergy and People Abiding in Spain,” 4, Epistles of Cyprian 67

what he's saying behind the pompous verbiage is that the local bishop is to become a functionary of Constantinople. This is the link with the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic" church. He uses vague language to hide his real purpose.

He argues this because, at the time this was written, that See was dominated by Phanar bankers, the British government and the Masonic lodges. A quick perusal of any biography of the patriarchs of the late 19th century and the early 20th will rapidly prove this true, with most of these men serving only a few years.

The record of this faux-papacy is an embarrassing one. In 1844, the church of Greece declared its independence from the Turkish state, which included the Ecumenical Patriarch. Germanos IV wasn't even notified. This is the prestige of this office at the time. It wasn't the measure of canonical life, it was a shadow of its former greatness and the Phanar was a fallen, pagan wasteland.

Meletius IV was a high level Mason, according to the Great Lodge of Greece, and was deposed from no fewer than two Patriarchates. Lodge membership brought with it automatic anathema. He and his successor rejected St. Tikhon of Russia and recognized the "Living Church" movement. Germanos V refused to condemn the Turkish massacre of Greeks and Armenians and, for good measure, was so hated that he was driven from office in 1918.

Basil III was also a Lodge brother according to the Great Lodge, and thus cannot be a Christian, let alone a bishop. Constantine VI was bishop of no fewer than seven distinct sees. Benjamin I was not elected, but appointed by the Prefect of Istanbul against the legitimate election of the synod. This is the reason writers like Schmemmann use such pompous verbosity. There was likely no canonical bishop of Constantinople for some time. The point of this paper is to say it doesn't matter.

One can answer this by listing all the syrupy panegyrics paid to bishops in the ancient or medieval worlds. However, it is parallel with the understanding that this office is one of knowledge and holiness. It is a highly conditional respect.

The present, "world Orthodox" definition of "canonical," a term used constantly, is to be in communion with Constantinople as a sort of semi-papacy. Given the destruction and disorder that reigned in much of the early 20th century, this sort of new stress on institutions is understandable. However, that was not the purpose. The stress on institutions was to replace the former stress on doctrine.

In the USSR as well as Turkey, the sudden stress on a "person" of a bishop was to enforce the power of modernism, having long jettisoned the actual content of the canons. Without doctrine, the hierarchy is all that remains. The use of the term "canonical" to mean "recognized by the Phanar" is a humiliating depiction of the destruction of intellectual life in the west.

Yet even in doctrinal controversy, it is largely lay theologians who do most of the work in that regard. Most bishops, as all would agree, are intellectually forgettable. But suggesting that it's the bishop's position in the world – a strictly personal one – to guard the essence of the church falls into the absurdity that the bishop and the church are the same. This is mystification, papering over the poor performance and bureaucratic mentality of the average bishop with flattering orations.

Most canons are totally ignored as a matter of course, most being relative to a specific time that is long past. The canons that are actually "enforced" for clerical discipline are maybe five percent of the total. Most people use the *Rudder* for ammunition in debate, not for education. Canons are manifestations of justice using the weak and ambiguous vehicle of language. There's a reason Christ refused to write anything down.

God is our father. This is not taken seriously by most. Rather, God is often seen as Spinoza's Substance rather than a person. He wants the best for us: this is what it means when he "loves" us. In the current mindset, if your bishop is a heretic, the church is destroyed. My Lord, what a weak God we have! The deification of bishops has led to the belief that God is only present when a bishop is present. They alone bear the keys to divine favor, so we're told.

If the bishop is a heretic, or we think he is, God does not then say "my presence is now taken from everyone, my power is dependent on the existence of bishops." Bishops do not, thank the Heavens, have this power. We know this primarily due to the doctrine of uncreated grace. This is the central doctrine of Orthodoxy. Cyprian states, from the same source as above:

On which account a people obedient to the Lord's precepts, and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from a sinful prelate, and not to associate themselves with the sacrifices of a sacrilegious priest, especially since they themselves have the power either of choosing worthy elders, or of rejecting unworthy ones.

This certainly implies that a "sinful" prelate can be deposed by the church as a whole, the assembly. Metropolitan Tikhon of Omsk, head of the RTOC, wrote:

And although the words continue to speak about love and fidelity to Christ and the mystical body of the Church – belonging to this Body – Christ, he begins to mix in the minds of people with membership in a particular "church party" and of themselves or their group they begin to consider "the only true one" and his opinion the only correct one ... then it becomes permissible to destroy the life of a person under the pretext of "cleansing in the Church," if a person of this organization for some reason is considered "wicked," or something does not agree with their ideas or the ideas of the "founding elder" of the group. In such clerical conditions, monks and laymen are set against each other and begin to hate each other, and then open hostilities burn for the defense their "religious party." Then one group splits off from the other, and seeks to legitimize their position by legal and canonical "arguments." Small parties can connect to larger ones in order to feel "canonical" – they can talk about their outward unity as if it is the true spiritual unity of the Church. But such a union is always temporary, largely political – not in the truth, and not with Christ. When they break up again, all the zeal of their enmity is directed again at their former associates.⁵

This is a rare truth spoken by a bishop. This bishop is fighting the spirit of the age. Unfortunately, this is the life of the TOC today. It seems to be getting worse and the massive increase in bishops lowers their overall quality. Men without the proper training or spiritual life are making essential decisions that affect the spiritual life of thousands.

Grace is light, the presence of God on earth, it is what we mean by "energy." Its logos, manifested as energy, in which all truth partakes. In fact, anything real is true, thus any created thing partakes in grace. Grace is not separate from the rest of reality. Truth is proper perception

5 Tikhon of Omsk. *The Reasons for the Divisions in the Contemporary Church*, part of a longer work, *At the Threshold of the Church of Philadelphia*, 2007.
(All translations are mine and probably contain errors).

and understanding. Energy is the means to get from one place to another.

It cannot be written down in words unless it be understood that words are highly metaphorical. Christ never described heaven for this reason. Humans cannot express it because it is part of the divine realm. We use Symbols to begin the process of our ascent. These are sacraments and rituals. A sacrament is not magic. Rather, it is a physical manifestation of what already exists; God's presence, His grace.

Vladimir Lossky speaks of uncreated grace like this:

For Eastern Tradition the created supernatural has no existence. That which Western theology calls by the name supernatural signifies for the East uncreated – the Divine Energies ineffably distinct from the Essence of God. The difference consists in the fact that the Western conception of grace implies the idea of causality, grace being represented as an effect of the Divine Cause, exactly as in the act of creation; while for Eastern theology there is a natural procession, the Energies shining forth eternally from the Divine Essence. It is in the creation alone that God acts as cause, in producing a new subject called to participate in the Divine fullness; preserving it, saving it, granting Grace to it, and guiding it towards its final goal. In the Energies He is, He exists, He eternally manifests Himself.⁶

By “causality,” the west can quite easily substitute the church, or the papacy, in this role as well. Grace is an act of decision, and is therefore created. If we reject this, we then must believe sacraments are magic tricks only the initiated can perform. God grace would be under the control of these magicians. It is rare such a view is stated as such, it is simply implied.

Nominalism argues that the ritual action is grace and vice versa. The meaning of the word is totally exhausted by the symbol. This is because they are cut off from the heavens. It is the mindset of John Romanides, the arch-heretic, who argued this many times. The rise of the nominalist idea is what caused the “name worship” controversy as a reaction decades before. It is what animated the Old Belief even earlier.

Grace flows normally and naturally from God. It's a part of who He is. In the west, grace is something added to an autonomous, created world. The result of this is that the hierarchy, acting in God's stead, can “direct” grace to whom they will. This almost deifies the clergy, making them magicians.

The Moscow Patriarchate might be expected to exaggerate the power of bishops, since it was, in fact, founded in 1944 with no popular participation whatsoever. This, of course, is only one of its very minor sins, but even its present day analysis of the powers of a bishop are almost entirely administrative. There are a few “delegated powers” that stand out, however: “take care for the preservation of the faith, Christian morals and devotion” is one.

The bishops should also “have the supreme authoritative oversight over the diocesan institutions and monasteries in his diocese.” Finally, “exercise control over the religious, administrative and financial activities of the parishes, monasteries, educational institutions and other diocesan units.” These are very general powers that could cover anything. It turns the bishop into a totalitarian dictator. There is nothing outside his control.

On the other hand, the *Ustav* of the Synod of Metropolitan Damascene of Moscow (Catacomb) states nothing of the kind as it summarizes the powers of a Bishop. The closest thing

6 Mystical Theology, pp. 88-89

to the Patriarch's vague wording is the following:

[The bishop is to] monitor the moral purity of the private life of the clergy and laity of the diocese, and, if necessary, provide them with pastoral assistance, exhortation, warnings, impose penances, grant prohibition, temporary removal from service or dismissal from that service (translation mine).

Otherwise, all the enumerated powers of the bishop are administrative and have to do with the condition of the clergy. The 1944 Patriarchate was a purely top-down body. The Catacomb was a communitarian one where the community was far more significant than the bishop.

The Old Believers, that is, the Orthodox Old-Rite Church of Rogozhskoe in Moscow, have no specific delineated powers for bishops. This is common among all their groups. They have detailed “powers” only for the synod and the metropolitan. In fact, in section IV.3 of the Statutes of this group, the title “Metropolitan” is defined as existing with the synod and not apart from it.

It is significant that the purposes and aims of the church within the Regulations of the Old Rite are identical to the powers of the bishop for the Moscow Patriarchate. It is an explicit statement by the Moscow Patriarchate that the church is exhausted by the synod. In the Old Rite, the ruling powers are not mentioned in the Great Entrance. In the New Rite, they are – all of them from the highest to the lowest. This is very significant.

Massive and pompous synods of Orthodox bishops accepted Arianism, Monophysitism and Roman Catholicism with great enthusiasm. Those fighting them were accused of rejecting the church's governmental structure and condemned for that reason. The greatest of saints fought these synods tooth and nail. As a consequence, we have no choice but to see the governing structure of the church, under present conditions, as relative authorities that are highly conditional.

The bishop does not rule and canons are not “laws.” Our spiritual life is wholly unrelated to the bishop who few of us even know. The church requires a structure. This is not a good thing, it's just a reminder that we're rotten people who constantly need threats to even perform the minimum of good acts. It functions to ensure priests do their job and the finances are well-organized. This is it. It is not an educational institution. Anyone can teach us. They are not Platonic guardians.

The True Orthodox today have thousands of bishops because there are so many jurisdictions. There is nothing “sacred” about this. The quality continues to fall since there are so many “ruling hierarchs.” Most of the time, the laity teach them rather than the reverse. Least of all, the synod is not the “bearer of grace” and, God knows, is not identical to the “church.”

In an extreme formulation of this error, the Cyprinate Orthodox in Romania have written:

Each Orthodox Bishop, as a “sharer in the ways and successor to the thrones” of the Holy Apostles, as Father of the Eucharistic Synaxis, as a Teacher of the Gospel of Truth, as a Servant (Minister) of love in truth, in the image and place of Christ, thus expresses, embodies, and safeguards the perennial Catholicity of the Church, that is, Her unity with Christ and, at the same time, Her unity in Christ with all of the local Churches which have existed, exist, and will exist as the One Body of

Christ.⁷

The author here has taken Byzantine rhetoric very literally. Reading this, the question should be what a bishop isn't. Clearly, they identify the entire church with the bishop. Strangely, the bishop is said to be both the "image" of Christ and a successor to the Apostles. He cannot be both of these. Further, the notion of "image" is dangerously vague. He is not a replacement for Christ, nor is the bishop hereby inerrant, though that conclusion can be drawn from this.

Famously, the Apostolic Constitutions say

The Bishop, he is the minister of the word, the guardian of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in your worship of Him. He is the teacher of piety; and, next after God, he is your Father...; he is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly god, who ought to enjoy honor from you...; for let the Bishop preside over you as one honored with the dignity of God, which he is to exercise over the clergy, and by which he is to govern all the people.

This is an extreme statement that cannot be taken literally. The bishop, referring to an office saturated by grace, not a person, must be a "teacher of piety." The respect this canon offers should be offered to anyone who speaks the truth. If the bishops in question were not teachers of piety, then this canon is of no effect. To be the mediator of God – that is, grace – suggests its not the person of the bishop being addressed. To isolate an individual in the ancient world was rare. It's the bishop as the embodiment of grace that is being mentioned. Almost identical terms are used to describe the Orthodox emperor in classical imperial panegyrics. These are panegyrics, done in a classical style. These are uses of rhetoric to paint a picture.⁸

As the successor to the apostles, the bishop can err. The Apostles' track record in the New Testament make being their successor somewhat unflattering. Being a teacher and lover of truth is nothing interesting, since anyone can do this with the proper preparation and ability. The problematic words are that the bishop "embodies" the "catholicity" of the church. "Embody" is a very vague term. It comes close to deifying the bishop.

Alexander Kalomiros rejects this view of the bishop here:

They understand the catholicity of the Church as a legal cohesion, as an interdependence regulated by some code. For them the Church is an organization with laws and regulations like the organizations of nations. Bishops, like civil servants, are distinguished as superiors and subordinates: patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops. For them, one diocese is not something complete, but a piece of a larger whole: the autocephalous church or the patriarchate. But the autocephalous church, also, feels the need to belong to a higher head. When external factors of politics, history, or geography prevent this, a vague feeling of weak unity and even separation circulates through the autocephalous churches. Such a concept of the Church leads directly to the Papacy. If the catholicity of the Church has this kind of meaning, then Orthodoxy is worthy of tears, because up to

7 The True Orthodox Church and the Heresy of Ecumenism: Dogmatic and Canonical Issues. The True Orthodox Churches of Greece and Romania and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, 2014: I, 9

8 Maguire, Henry (1981) Art and Eloquence in Byzantium. Princeton University Press. This shows hundreds of examples of almost identical rhetoric being given to emperors from saints and canonists.

now she has not been able to discipline herself under a Pope.

This is not the mindset of most in the church today. It is not the mindset of the typical bishop. That Dr. Kalomiros is a layman is significant. He continues:

There are not, therefore, organizational, administrative, or legal bonds among the churches, but bonds of love and grace, the same bonds of love and grace which exist among the faithful of every church, clergy or lay. The relationship between presbyter and bishop is not a relationship of employee and employer, but a charismatic and sacramental relationship. The bishop is the one who gives the presbyter the grace of the priesthood. And the presbyter gives the layman the grace of the Holy Mysteries. The only thing which separates the bishop from the presbyter is the charism of ordination. The bishop excels in nothing else, even if he be the bishop of an important church and bears the title of patriarch or pope. "There is not much separating them [the presbyters] and the bishops. For they too are elevated for the teaching and protection of the Church They [the bishops] surpass them only in the power of ordination, and in this alone they exceed the presbyters."⁹

The American is debased. He can only consider relationships based on quantitative factors: votes, hierarchies, power, money or sexual attraction. There is little else making a "relationship" in the modern mind. If it does not derive from one of the above, it is not a relationship at all. To consider a relationship based on charisma, prophetic grace or love leads to eye-rolling. Part of the problem is that these words are not properly understood in modernity and have been deflated of their true meanings.

Guarding the truth and the unity of the church makes sense, but what is it to "embody" the truths of the Orthodox faith as a man? Worse, this embodiment, in the bishop, is not confined to the here and now, but the bishop embodies the whole history of the church. This statement is a salmagundi of vague rhetoric, Greek flattery and solid doctrine.

The rhetoric above is part of the problem. The office of bishop must be separated from the man. The man is often a useless bureaucrat that, most of the time, is safely ignored. The office is another matter. A more serious conception is offered by Gregory Palamas:

Those who do not belong to the Truth do not belong to the Church of Christ either; and all the more so, if they speak falsely of themselves by calling themselves, or calling each other, holy pastors and hierarchs; [for it has been instilled in us that] Christianity is characterized not by persons, but by the truth and exactitude of Faith

This properly deflates the conception of the individual bishop. The bishop is said to be the "guarantor" of the truth of the faith and sacraments, but this is redundant. He becomes the guarantor so long as he's abiding in the truth, which is precisely that which he is to guarantee. The moral, of course, is that all members of the church are equal in grace. Bishops don't get "more" of it. They certainly display no special insight into it, as most serious theology is done by monastics and laymen anyway. The prophet and the bureaucrat never get along.

9 Chrysostom, Homily. XI on I Timothy

Truth and community are the only two variables that matter. It is that which validates the episcopal office, not the fact that they've been appointed to the chair. These men must learn their place and cease self-glorification. The spiritual father, rarely a bishop, has far more authority than any bishop does. A bishop, in practical terms, differs from a laymen only in that he has far more opportunity to sin.

The famed 1848 response to Pope Pius IX states:

Moreover, neither Patriarchs nor Councils could then have introduced novelties among us, because the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves, who desire their religious worship to be ever unchanged and of the same kind as that of their fathers:

This is an explicit statement of the position taken here. The church is not the bishops. The faith is the property of the whole assembly. There's nothing special about the hierarchy in this respect, and they can error as much as anyone. This is the entire point of the letter to the pope.

A bishop is not a person, it is a conception of justice. It is an office. It is the local synod, elected by the Orthodox people. It is never one man. This is why the tradition is for a bishop to refer to himself as "we." It is not the result of bad grammar. You cannot replace the papacy by multiplying it. It is a reference to God's power only.

Finally, the deification of the bishop is dangerous. Kalomiros again,

In the last days all will claim to be Orthodox Christians, and that Orthodoxy is as they understand it to be. But in spite of all this, those who have a pure heart and a mind enlightened by divine grace will recognize the Orthodox Church despite the apparent divisions and utter lack of external splendor. They will gather around the true priests, and they will become the pillars of the Church. Let the people of the world do whatever they will. Let there be ecumenical conferences; let the churches be united; let Christianity be adulterated; let the Tradition and life be changed; let the religions be united. The Church of Christ will remain unaltered, as Chrysostom says, because if even one of her pillars remains standing, the Church will not fall. "Nothing is stronger than the Church. She is higher than the heavens and broader than the earth. She never grows old; she always flourishes."

Offices will have little power then. The office of bishop means nothing when so many hundreds of frauds hold it. In an age of mass apostasy, what use are canons and synods? Today, we live in a permanent state of emergency, in a society that *defines* itself as apostate atheist.

Any Orthodox person, accepting the ancient faith, is my brother. No one would voluntarily become Orthodox today. It's a difficult life with no earthly reward. Jurisdiction, as a spiritual determinant, is in the mind, not reality. It is an illusion, and can be a demonic one at that. When Orthodox brethren, believing identically, begin hurling the most vile insults at one another over "jurisdiction," a problem exists. That problem is the deification of the synods.

Christ, in his public mission, deliberately imitated the prophets. He founded the Church, but it was far from an institution in our debased sense of "administration." The first act of the Apostolic college was to run and hide "for fear of the Jews." On the cross, it was said that Christ was calling out to Elijah. This shows how close Christ was to the prophets in the public mind at the time. The prophetic element exists in creative tension with the institutional element. The

problem with institutions is that they become a part of the society in which they function and must compromise with it in order to continue. Critiquing this is why the prophets exist. The Old Testament deals with this issue directly.

The Rechabites are the prophetic answer to institutions. They are praised by Jeremiah but are almost entirely unknown today. Why? In the genealogy in 1 Chronicles they are descended from the Kenites of Hamath (1 Ch 2:55). In truth, they derive from Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses.

They are known, to the extent they are known at all, for not drinking alcohol, but this was only a derivative practice. They were those exiles from Egypt who rejected all institutions. They lived in tents rather than in fixed buildings that can be the subject of a census or regulated by the state. They are known as the “Men of God” because the Israelites community respected them, but could not leave their possessions behind them such as to imitate them.

This family is known publicly as the sons of “Igdaliah, the man of God”. The Hebrew designation “the man of God” is an Old Testament way of stating in the culture of the time that this person was so highly thought of by everyone that no one would call into question his descendants’ spiritual standing. Therefore whatever occurred in the presence of the sons of Hanan would not be questioned as they were regarded as a very respectable, unapproachable third party witness of these things.¹⁰

Prophets came from out of nowhere. Except Isaiah, who was an aristocrat, prophets were men of no standing. They used the harshest possible language. Terms like “whore” and “adulterer” were their daily fare. Christ added “den of vipers and thieves” to the vocabulary, and it was directed to the same people. Translate these terms to our modern English. To say the least, it is imprecise, but saturated with love.

Christ was murdered by an institution that required the ruling power in order to function. Relative to Rome, the Rabbinic elite needed to pretend to be citizens, even using Rome's power, while plotting their demise. In a corrupt society, institutions are inherently dishonest.

In Amos 3 we read God saying through the prophet:

On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down the winter house along with the summer-house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished.

The two forms of houses refer both to religious shrines and the homes of the elites. These men are not merely speaking to the men of the age, but to our own struggle. The wealthy have winter ski lodges in New England and summer homes on Cape Cod. We know the latter is the case because not too long after this, we read in Chapter 5:

You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent

¹⁰ Jeremiah 35:1-19: An End Times Role Model. Walk with the Word, Redlands, CA

and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

It might be the case that the middle class Orthodox reader might say “well, this is not about me, I want lower taxes!” As of God is speaking about Republican platform debates. “Tax” need not refer to a formal act of government. It is a reference to a rent, or any money extracted for non-economic reasons. It separates profit from usury.

In the same chapter, we read:

I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god — which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus.

When you deify the hierarchy, you get the idea that sacraments are magic spells. The liturgies reach God only to the extent you suffer with Him. The charge of any rent is a tax. To take Biblical language with self-serving literalness is a sin in itself. Those living on rents, however indirect, without repentance, will suffer. It is one of the most serious sins in Scripture. The parasite is demonic.

Amaziah is a significant figure in Amos' prophesy. He represents the institutions of the Old Testament, the “establishment” of the day. He warns Amos that “Israel cannot bear his words” (Amos 7). In other words, that Amos was being too “judgmental.” Amaziah was the Israelite priest who represented the comfortable. After hearing Amos, he went to Jeroboam, King of Israel, and said, lying “the prophet Amos is conspiring against you.” Today, the comfortable call the True faith “terrorists” or “extremists on the fringe” and seek state action against it.

Amaziah warns Amos against his harsh condemnation of class rule and the even harsher condemnations of mixing with aliens. He essentially calls Amos a “damn racist” and tells him to shut up. Amos responds by saying “your wife will become a prostitute” (Amos 7). Speaking like this today will get the inevitable retort, “that's not very Christian,” as if love meant constant indulgence.

This writer preaches against the mixing with aliens and is condemned in clerical “open letters” written by the ghost of Amaziah. Few of these clerics know who Amaziah was. Today, those of us using such language are condemned by clergy as “Pharisaic” and “judgmental.” Rather, they are Amaziah arrogantly lecturing to Amos, a man that makes him very uncomfortable in his position. His criticism cuts him to the quick, leading to his pompous response. Nothing has changed today.

These prophets are a warning for all peoples today: never trust institutions, as they are easily ensnared in the world's power structure. The Holy Synods have a role, and some are even holy, but the church is ruled by Christ alone through the Holy Spirit. Bishops are subject to the church, and thus do not rule it. One cannot be subject and ruler at the same time and in the same respect. The prophetic element exists to remind us of that. The Old Testament is ignored today deliberately – it contains the moral backbone of the church, one that condemns modernity at

every turn.