

## Epistemic, Historical and Theological Backtrackings of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority in relation to the Ukrainian-Russian Heritage and Modernity<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The life and ministry of every Christian are profoundly shaped by a particular ecclesial tradition. Different interpretations of the extra-canonical teaching of the church tradition have remained a debated topic since Reformation, raising a question of the relative spiritual authority for believers. Adopting the fundamental affirmation of the authority of the universal Christian tradition as that which had been believed ‘everywhere, always, by all’ [*ubique, semper, ab omnibus*], the research investigates a threefold paradigm of ‘universality-antiquity-consensus’ (Pelikan 1971:333) of the Orthodox Church tradition as authority in relation to the Ukrainian-Russian heritage and modernity. Embracing the perspective of Evangelical theology, the study goes beyond a mere phenomenological analysis, identifying theoretical premises, praxeological incongruences and authoritative formulations of the Eastern Orthodox tradition on the epistemological, historical and theological levels.

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### Keywords

Eastern Orthodoxy, Authority of Tradition, Epistemology, Continuity and Discontinuity, Search for Consensus

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## 1. Introduction

The demise of the USSR and sweeping radical changes in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) greatly affected the Orthodox spiritual landscape through the spontaneous development of theological, sacramental, and ecclesiastical forms of authority. Orthodox Church Tradition was rediscovered as one of the principal authority agents and re-employed in the process of spiritual restoration of collective and individual religious identities. This authoritative notion of ecclesial tradition has always been the central normative and symbolic core of the Orthodox faith, presenting for scholars *a sui generis* within the modern theological trajectory in the post-communist society. In the twentieth century, Christianity experienced, ‘somewhat paradoxically, both the thirst for unlimited freedom and authority’ (Negrut 1994:1). As a result, ‘one of the basic problems theologians confront today is knowing how to discern between the holy tradition of the Church – the expression adequate or appropriate to Revelation - and mere human traditions which only express Revelation imperfectly and, very often, which even oppose and obscure it’ (Meyendorff 1960:ix). Overcoming the state-promoted atheism and communism in Eastern Europe, many Christian churches in the Commonwealth of Independent States have discovered that ‘authority lies at the heart of the issues that separate the Eastern Orthodox Church from Roman Catholics and Protestants’ (Nassif 2010:36). Unprecedented freedom of institutional autonomy and freedom of religious expression of other Christian denominations became the main challenge for the Russian Orthodox Church, which has always considered itself ‘the organic and extended body of Christ and the divine mystery of renovation by the power of the Holy Trinity’ (McGuckin 2011:44). The point is perhaps best illustrated by the negative response of the Russian Orthodox Church to western globality since it violated the ancient Byzantine formula of church and state ‘*symphony*’ that had been accepted and enforced in Eastern Christianity. Accordingly, the religious legitimization of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority in the postmodern context aimed to restore the traditional understanding of the national Church as a conservative social force. Exploring given relations between Scripture and Tradition, the main objective of the study was to investigate the complicated issue of authority in various strains of the postmodern notion of orthodoxy and to provide a scholarly critical but theologically sound exposition of the contested concept of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority from the perspective of contemporary Evangelical theology.

## 2. The Search for Epistemological Universality of Orthodox Church Tradition as Authority

The conspicuity of the methodological pluralism in the modern theological epistemology critically recognises that ‘our doctrine of God affects the way we interpret the Scripture, while simultaneously acknowledging that our interpretation of Scripture affects our doctrine of God’ (Vanhoozer 2002:10). In terms of epistemic backtracking of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority, the study sought to provide a cogent, sustainable and biblically nuanced solution to the core epistemological inquiry: how to regard the weight we give to a specific ecclesial tradition on the grounds of its being endorsed not by scriptural (proximal), but by confessional (subsidiary/auxiliary) authority. Furthermore, once the problem of definition and trust of Orthodox (or Protestant) traditions is solved, and its authoritative endorsement is determined, how can we integrate this theological attitude into a strictly confessional epistemic outlook? For confessional evangelicals, like Michael Horton, ‘Orthodoxy is no more successful than Rome in explaining (1) how Scripture justifies extracanonical norms and (2) how such practice obviates the difficulties of interpretative multiplicity’ (Horton 2004:127).

Eastern Orthodox theological epistemology begins with a humble presupposition that humans can barely articulate, with the help of our language, apostolic dogma and kerygma regarding the historical crucified Jesus and the transcendently glorified Christ, whose great *Missio Dei* has been handed down to us in mystery (*εν μυστηριο*). In terminology of Lossky (2004:133) it starts with ‘the faculty of hearing the silence of Jesus’, with divine assistance of the true and holy tradition, which ‘does not consist uniquely in visible and verbal transmission of teaching, rules, institutions and rites’, but, rather, in ‘an invisible and actual communication of grace and of sanctification’ (Florovsky 1937:178).

The concept of traditional Orthodox theological episteme presented by Ouspensky (2004:38) describes a man as ‘a microcosm, a little world. He is the centre of created life; and therefore, being in the image of God, he is the means by which God acts in creation’. For that reason, Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, in *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers* (1994), suggests an epistemological inquiry should be entered into with a proper conversion of mind (*metanoia*) and ‘the eye of the heart’ attitude. Therefore, even though personal gnosis with God is theoretically possible, the Orthodox methodology works in the context of a metaphysical assumption about ‘incomprehensibility’ of God, importing the same apophatic attitude to the epistemic structures

of philosophical theology. It means that ‘the Bible is not used by the Orthodox as a system of belief or as a *summa theologiae* but as the authentic record of the divine revelation which leads to deification’ (Negrut 1994:12).

### **2.1. Synchronic level of authority: divine charisma versus ecclesial office**

Another distinctive conviction of Eastern theological epistemology reflects its pivotal ecclesiological axiom—a strong affirmation and belief that the superior apprehension of the revealed truth (in doctrines, worship, mission and office of authority) rests ultimately with the whole Church. This understanding of the synchronic level of authority is centred on a hierarchical status and hierocratic authority of the Church itself since Eastern Orthodoxy recognises no single person or single office as having final authority in doctrinal matters. It regards its whole body (*ολον το πληρωμα*) as bearers of the true apostolic tradition and as protectors of Orthodoxy. This model of collective wisdom suggests that ‘the hierarchy, which meets at the ecumenical councils, is the voice of the Church; the ecumenicity (the ecumenical character) of these councils, however, and the infallibility of their decisions, are to be tacitly recognised by the whole body of the Church’ (Bratsiotis 1951:22). In his book *The Orthodox Church*, Ware notes that ‘the Orthodox idea of the Church is certainly spiritual and mystical in this sense’, and therefore, ‘Orthodox theology never treats the earthly aspect of the Church in isolation but thinks always of the Church in Christ and the Holy Spirit’ (Ware 1993:239–245). It means that Orthodox presuppositions about the Church start with a special relationship between the Church and God, being manifested primarily in three-mode relations: ‘(1) the image of the Holy Trinity; (2) the Body of Christ; (3) a continued Pentecost’ (Ware 1993:245). Thus, the entire dialectic of the Eastern Orthodox epistemological interpretation presents the Church as a *new milieu* where the content of scripture is being engraved and interpreted through Tradition and illumination of the Holy Spirit (Staniloae 1980:41).

### **2.2. Diachronic Level of Authority: Tradition and traditions**

Another major factor in Eastern Orthodox epistemological attempt to determine what is authoritative for faith and morals employs the notion of tradition as a unique diachronic mode of *episteme* in the expression of the static-dynamic relation between theological *gnosis* and religious *praxis*. For Orthodox believers, tradition is the source of all their doctrines and practices in the Church. Some Orthodox scholars argue that, ‘according to Orthodox theology, the

Church is the guardian (Θεματοφυλαξ) of supernatural revelation – in its historical development, and the store (Ταμείον) (of supernatural revelation) is the Bible on the one hand and the apostolic tradition on the other hand; the Bible constitutes the written, and by tradition the spoken, Word of God, yet both are the authoritative source of Christian teaching’ (Bratsiotis 1951:19–20). As a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the Church, such Tradition must always be open to new interpretations (Fahlbusch and Bromiley 2008:518). However, there has not yet been a successful attempt within Eastern Orthodoxy to investigate and develop a proper theology of biblical inspiration that would provide a reliable differentiation between Tradition and a tradition. In simple terms, ‘the canons of the Orthodox Church... form a huge body of material, and in any age, there are never more than a few people who master it in detail’ (Ellis 1986:67). The very discourse of Orthodox Tradition as authority has been facing a significant interpretive pitfall: ‘how to speak well of tradition's continuity in light of the real development (often a religious euphemism for “change”) that all things historical undergo while respecting the facts of historical research?’ (Thiel 2000:vii). This diachronic inquiry into the process of formation of church tradition reflected in Orthodox theology is similar to the Catholic presupposition that ‘the Church precedes chronologically the writings of the New Testament. They [Catholics] see the fixation of the canon as an act of Apostolic Tradition’ (Creemers 2015:217). In *Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, Meyendorff (2004:83) suggests that ‘biblical science does not possess its own proper integrity and methodology,’ therefore in a long-standing relationship between *gnosis* and *episteme*, ‘tradition becomes the initial and fundamental source of theology’.

### **2.3 Authority of Tradition in Theory and Action: Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy**

The dynamism of the philosophical, theological and historical reconstruction of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority, as a theoretical and practical phenomenon, resides in the dissemination of the same message of the gospel within different historical, geographic and cultural contexts, through the duality of orthodoxy (correct opinion or belief) and orthopraxy (correct practice) within a faith matrix. According to Pomazansky, ‘From the first days of her existence, the Holy Church of Christ has ceaselessly been concerned that her children, her members, should stand firm in the pure truth’ (Pomazansky 2005:2). What is paradigmatically important for the Eastern Orthodox epistemology is not just Scriptural exegesis but the manner in which the highest truth of

revelation (orthodoxy) exercises its authority in the tradition of the Church (orthopraxy). In his *Introduction to Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, Stamolis explores what comprises first theology for Eastern Orthodoxy:

While theology is important to the Orthodox, it is also true that the forms have a deep meaning. The etymology of the word orthodoxy is 'right [ortho] praise [doxia]'. Thus, while Western churches have tended to use the term 'orthodoxy' to mean 'correct doctrine', the Orthodox Church is concerned with getting worship right. The Orthodox Church focuses more on God than on the individual. Timeless truths and practices become the vehicle to communion with the triune God. (Stamolis 2004:15)

Such a praxeological description of Orthodox theological method finds support in a famous statement of Evagrius of Ponticus, disciple of Cappadocians, who 'transformed Christian apophaticism into a theology of prayer' (Lasser 2011:39), declaring that 'If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; if you pray truly, you will be a theologian' (Casiday 2006:185).

#### **2.4 Orthodox Conservative Substance and Protestant Corrective Principle**

The theological interplay between orthodoxy and orthopraxy in Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism can be illustrated by the application of a famous Tillich's paradigm about 'Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle'. In his theological treatise *The Protestant Era* (1948), Tillich was able to recognise a basic ontological fact: 'without striving for doctrinal or practical correctness, faith wanders astray. However, absent the proper orientation of the heart, orthodoxy turns cold and sterile while orthopraxy becomes legalism and empty ritual' (Wilkins and Thorsen 2010:20). Therefore, 'a disproportionate emphasis on one of these elements at the expense of the other usually indicates a disturbed and strained situation on the verge of the conflict' (Von Campenhausen 1969:1). Protestant Principle (or Protestant Corrective) appears as a continuation of Tillich's theology 'on the boundary', delimitating the conditioned and unconditioned:

Protestant principle demands a method of interpreting history in which the critical transcendence of the divine over against conservatism and utopianism is strongly expressed and in which, at the same time, the creative omnipresence of the divine in the course of history is concretely indicated... It continues the Protestant criticism of Catholic historical absolutism; it prevents the acceptance of any kind of utopian belief, progressivistic or revolutionary (Tillich 1948: xvi).

The positive emphasis of *Orthodox Conservative Substance* relates to the fact that through the centuries, 'Eastern Orthodoxy has maintained its tradition in spite of opposition and immeasurable suffering. The Eastern Church has faced many challenges and has suffered considerably, but it continues to survive and bear witness to its rich heritage' (Calian 1992:1). The dichotomization and fragmentation of individual experience, described by Tillich as a critical and creative power, which is the measure of every religious and cultural reality, has been a valid point of criticism on the part of many Orthodox scholars. The positive contribution of *Protestant Corrective Principle* and its typological applicability demonstrates that, in this setting, the Orthodox Tradition is still vulnerable in its dedication to a specific cultural faith matrix while in Tillich's words 'Protestantism neither idealises nor devaluates religion... In this way, the Protestant principle denies to the church a holy sphere as its separate possession, and it denies to culture a secular sphere that can escape the judgment of the boundary-situation' (Tillich 1957:205). In line with the global trend of this *Corrective Principle*, Protestants do not attempt to ground their authority and certainty in some indubitable principle outside of scripture because our God has communicated his perfect will to the whole humanity and Christians should always examine themselves on their spiritual journey to the truth.

### 3. Historical Backtrackings of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority in relation to Ukrainian-Russian Heritage and Modernity

The universal implication of any ecclesial tradition is inevitably connected with the question of its historical development. The Eastern Orthodox Tradition as authority is not a self-explanatory exposition. The research descriptively emphasises that historical preconditions of Eastern Orthodox worldview on the problem of ecclesial authority of tradition reflect the whole complexity of interrelatedness between biblical doctrines (*gnosis*), theological methods (*episteme*), church practices (*praxis*) and a respective logical progression—from the Hellenic history of the Byzantine Church to the modern Eastern Orthodoxy in a global age. The historical research of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority investigates the development of orthodoxy and heresy in Early Christianity, the emergence of unwritten (oral) tradition in post-apostolic era, the origin of autocratic Orthodox Tradition in Muscovite Russia, autocratic amalgamation of the great Russian princes (1452–1613) and the hermeneutical debate: a brief case

study of St Basil's treatise *De Spiritu Sancto (On the Holy Spirit)* in the analysis of George Florovsky.

### 3.1 The Concept of the Ecclesial Authority in the Early Church

Initially, there was no real separation between scripture and tradition in the early Church. The tradition of that period not only was related to the process of transmission of God's message but also was the very content of that message. It was also a time when the apostolic witness held the highest authority for the church. The main function of the primitive church and tradition at this stage was to preserve and transmit the apostolic witness in full 'integrity and totality,' both for 'an authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament and for the message concerning Christ and his teaching' (Hascup 1992:20). Hence apostolic preaching was founded on the Old Testament Scriptures and on the living tradition of Jesus, passed from mouth to mouth, 'the tradition was not something dead, but a vital reality to be discovered from living persons. Yet the corruptions to which oral tradition was subject soon necessitated the writing of Christian books' (Richardson 1970:21–22). The further development of the New Testament canon in the first four centuries AD demonstrates that apostles authorised a proper theology of the primitive church. The qualitative uniqueness of that revelation was that 'the Church itself recognised an essential difference between the tradition before and the tradition after the establishment of the canon' (Cullmann 1966:87).

In response to the Gnostics' claims to have a secret truth handed down to them from the apostles themselves, the early Church developed a dual concept of authority based upon the apostolic witness (canon) and apostolic succession (tradition). By the end of the second century, some fundamental changes were introduced to the Christian concept of authority. The concept of the ecclesial authority of the ministerial office was gradually linked not only to a community but also to a professional hierarchy in the New Testament—the priesthood. The temptation to extend the apostolate beyond the apostle generation put bishops forward on the historical stage as a new authority and 'apostolic heirs', who received their teaching and, to some extent, their office. Irenaeus (AD 130–202) further articulated the relation between the bishops' role as protectors of faith and their authority as Kingdom's key-keepers and the succession of tradition, linking such authority to the teaching office of the Church and the apostolic tradition transmitted and preserved in the anointed succession of the faithful. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), a respectful theologian and a head of the Catechetical school in Alexandria,

also delineated authority in the succession of the apostolic message, while Origen (AD 184–254) found authority in the whole church and especially its teachers, who worked together in accordance with the apostolic witness, preserved in scripture.

The Early Church needed a way to assert its authority and Tertullian's formula '*primum*' is the '*verum*' was effectively employed to justify centralised ecclesial authority. In the light of new evidence regarding the organizational structure, no definite patterns of authority (vertical or horizontal) can be found within a primitive church to delineate official rights and duties of the hierarchy. Various theological attempts to attribute a special primacy over the Twelve to Peter were unconvincing. Initially, the apostolic unity was not a unity of an organised church, but, rather, the unity of their witness (vocation) to Christ. Thus, the transformation of the Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy into a power structure was not the confirmation of authority, but an indication of its perversion. The autocratic (authoritarian) model of authority is foreign to every line of the New Testament in which authority is mentioned. As Christianity began to separate from its Jewish heritage and visible ecclesiastical power structures gradually evolved, all kinds of questions and disputes arose regarding religious authority. At this stage 'the development of authority among the ancient churches was not uniform' (Stagaman 1999:40).

The Hellenic reconfiguration of theological truth in Eastern Orthodoxy began to treat the new body of Orthodox traditions as a *de facto authority* equal to other primitive Christian writings. Appeals began to be made more often to tradition than to scripture. As a result, 'extra-biblical doctrines were canonised, and a body of opinion that found no support in scripture began to be asserted as infallibly true' (MacArthur 1995:157). Thus, Church tradition very soon manifested itself as a supreme regulative norm '*regula fidei*' or (*norma normata primaria*), directly instituted by Christ himself through apostles with a status of sacred legacy, where 'authority and doctrinal orthodoxy became intertwined; catholicity pointed to universality' (Blanchfield 1988:21). In this way, theology itself contributed to the centralization of authority, 'as bishops monitored publications for orthodoxy and developed uniform creed' (Warwick 1974:113). The excessive language of classical Greek philosophy impacted many Protestant scholars who agreed 'with those liberal and neo-orthodox theologians who believed that classical theology's use of Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle, had distorted Christian faith' (Griffin and Hough 1991:230–231). Meyendorff notes that the theological

speculation of Church Fathers ‘often went wrong when it was used as an end in itself and not as a creative tool to answer the questions posed to the church by the surrounding world’ (Meyendorff 2004:91).

The growing Church realised its need in a further institutionalised organization, therefore, inherited power patterns ‘inevitable took social and political models from the surrounding world in which to incarnate their authority from God and Christ’ (Boff 1985:40). Through the centuries, particularly after Constantine, when centralised ecclesial authorities became tightly intertwined with the imperial power of the state, Christianity encountered and attempted to resolve the same theological issue: how to identify and approve the existing models of authority in present ecclesiastical structures, which directly claim their divine origin. Blanchfield argues in this regard, that, ‘for centuries, popes and kings struggled for supremacy, temporal and spiritual. The ecclesial authority of the Middle Ages, using the model of the feudal system, was far removed from *the diakonia* of Jesus. Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism cemented its power toward absolutization’ (Blanchfield 1988:262). In addition to that, the ever-present danger of the historical development of ecclesial tradition as authority is that ‘fidelity to the Fathers’ can easily ‘degenerate into bondage to formulas’ (Lossky 1981:144).

### **3.2 The Origin of Autocratic Orthodox Tradition in Muscovite Russia**

The emergence of Orthodox Patriarchate in Moscow occurred during the time when the Constantinople patriarchate was in a vulnerable state of utter disorder, being on the verge of an institutional breakdown and inevitable resubmission to the sultan. After a period of prominent territorial growth and power consolidation in the XV–XVI centuries, Muscovite rulers emulated the Byzantine imperial model, according to which the Orthodox Church was inseparably tied and placed under the stewardship of secular authorities. The autocracy of the Muscovite sovereigns in their struggle for the establishment of state hegemony (*edinoderzhavie*) facilitated exclusivist tendencies in the Eastern Orthodox theological approach, which resulted in the Third Rome agenda. This single example demonstrates how easily Orthodox rulers and ecclesiastical authorities could delegitimise numerous constraints of their Orthodox Tradition for the sake of a new historical-eschatological entity called the ‘Third Rome’ Christian Empire. The creation of the Patriarchate of Moscow involved many canonical irregularities and obstacles, including coercive negotiations and bargaining, open intimidation and even an eleven

-month oppressive detention of Constantinople Patriarch Jeremiah II, who was held in Moscow much longer than he desired, against his will. From an Orthodox conciliar point of view, the entire procedure of a patriarchate installation in Moscow was uncanonical, since the patriarchate was created without the convocation of a pan-Orthodox synod of three other patriarchates (Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem), there was no real election among the candidates, and the very sacramental integrity of the patriarch ordination in Moscow had been violated. Therefore, 'the elevation of the metropolitan of Moscow was not an act of patriarchal authority, but one of patriarchal submission' (Gudziak 1992:300). At the very moment of its emergence, the Russian Orthodox Church violated not only its ancient traditions but also a more fundamental relation between history and eschata, losing its ontological space and collapsing under the authoritarian power of the state.

#### 4. Authority of Orthodox Church Tradition in Postmodern Context: The Problem of Theological Synthesis and Conciliar Consensus

The present study recognises the problem of consensus in Eastern Orthodoxy with regard to the authority of tradition as an 'ongoing concern' (Casiday 2012: xviii) and 'the long-term perspective' (Letham 2007:291), that is, ongoing search for correct theological paradigm and patristic advancement. The contemporary contours of Orthodox theology of tradition emerged from a complex framework of theoretical trajectories embedded in differentiated patterns of social exclusion and sometimes expressed in oppositional thought structures. The authoritative and centralised character of modern Orthodox Tradition was the product of a gradual historical development over more than a millennium (Allison 2011; Andreopoulos 2011; Benz 2009; Berger 2005; Hobsbawm 1983; Makrides 2012; Prisel 1998). In this perspective, the Orthodox consensus regarding ecclesial Tradition as authority can be considered as a dynamic and iterative discussion process of ecclesiological reality that brings the participants' opinions as close as possible to the appropriate epistemological and theological solution. It is suggested that some of the undermentioned consensus trends, being necessary ingredients for the correct understanding of the Orthodox approach to the issue of Tradition as authority, still reflect a significant need for theological development and further theoretical articulation. The modern appropriation of Orthodox consensus regarding theology as *per se* refers to the intellectual

tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christian churches, which primarily, though not exclusively, includes those Christian communities with historical ties to the Byzantine tradition. There are at least two basic theological trajectories in the Byzantine Tradition: the first one concerns well-known Christological controversies that occasioned the convening of the seven ecumenical councils, and the second trajectory is normally defined as understanding God in terms of what God is not (Papanikolaou 2011:358–359).

Fundamental to the Orthodox consensus was an affirmation of the authority of tradition as that which had been believed ‘everywhere, always, by all’ (the formulation of St Vincent of Lérins, AD 434). However, in focusing a particular attention on the communal character of the early transmission of ‘Jesus’ Tradition’, the Orthodox Church over-emphasises the control factor that was exercised by the primitive Christian community. For narratives about Jesus never began with Jesus; at best they began with eyewitnesses. Dunn argues that ‘the idea that we can get back to an objective historical reality, which we can wholly separate and disentangle from the disciples’ memories and then use as a check and control over the way the tradition was developed during the oral and earliest written transmission, is simply unrealistic’ (Dunn 2003:131). The Papias’s emphasis on the ‘living voices’ in his *Exposition of the Logia* (AD 109) assumes that the value of oral traditions depends on their derivation from still-living witnesses who are still themselves repeating their testimony. Therefore, ‘the need to account for the source became urgent as soon as no ancient author felt distanced by time to [*sic*] the events of interest’ (Byrskog 2000:252).

In this light, the problem of theological incongruence between two entities ‘Scripture’ and ‘Tradition’ remains insoluble as long as it is not expanded to understanding that ‘we are in process of moving too far from the time of the apostles to be able to watch over the purity of tradition, without a superior written authority’ (Cullmann 1953:44). Tilley has made a comprehensive study to demonstrate that certain beliefs and practices deemed ‘traditional’ by the church hierarchy are not found in the previous ages of the church in their present form or have no precedent at all: ‘If that which is passed on as a tradition has to be passed on “unchanged and uncorrupted” over long periods of time, then there are no concrete traditions that will pass the test’ (Tilley 2000:27). In relation to a possible consensus with Protestants and finding the ‘lowest common denominator’ between Orthodoxy and evangelicalism, Nassif assumes that consensus regarding ‘the core principles’ of that which constitutes Protestant evangelical identity

is possible, however, from the Orthodox perspective, evangelicalism is seen 'as deficient in the outworking of those commonly-held evangelical principles, particularly in the church's vision of the relation between Scripture and tradition, the sacraments, iconography, spirituality' (Nassif 2004:108).

## 5. Conclusion

The preceding analysis of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority can, with a high degree of plausibility, claim that such scripture-versus-tradition conflict is still vital and present amongst Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical Christians in Russia and Ukraine. The threefold deconstruction undertaken in this thesis (universality, antiquity, and consensus) presents a different spectrum of responses thematised and considered within a contemporary notion of Orthodox Tradition. Theoretical hypotheses of the research may be applicable and generalizable to any church structure or para-Christian organization in which dogmatic statements, mutual vision, team service and spiritual empowerment of followers shape respective group norms and serve as guiding principles for religious practices or innovations. Based on the research analysis, the conclusions are shaped and organised by three broad sets of considerations:

Firstly, the study of the theological epistemology of tradition is interdisciplinary and inter-confessional in nature. There is no pure Protestant or Orthodox 'theory of knowledge.' The correlation point for theological epistemology is that 'historically Christianity claimed to be and was received as *revealed truth*, not truth discovered via human insight or ingenuity' (Sproul 1997:11). In terms of authority, this revelation of God in Christ does not require human agents for support or a specific cultural environment for its approval. It points and maintains itself in sublime majesty of *Sola Scriptura*. Its authority is normative as well as causative, 'It fights for its own victory. It conquers human hearts for itself. It makes itself irresistible' (Van Den Belt 2008:269). The veracity of Eastern Orthodox theology is rather believed by the Orthodox existentially, as they interact within the framework of one and only 'living tradition' which is assumed to be the highest ground for authority in the Orthodox Church, including Unwritten (Oral) Tradition, Scripture, Writings of the Church Fathers, Great Councils, Canonical law, liturgy, etc. In the Eastern Christian view, theology, as we use the term today, is an 'intellectual contour of the revealed truth, a "noetic" testimony to it' (Florovsky 1979:17–18), resulting from man's communion with God through faith. In this way, Orthodox theology is the product of

the ascetic, mystical, liturgical and spiritual life of the Church (Hopko 1982:7–8) in which Orthodox Tradition is ‘the gateway to the theology of revelation’ (McGuckin 2011:90). According to the general postulate of contemporary theological epistemology, no Church’s teaching or tradition can monopolise Christian theology and present itself as ‘The Theology’. The historic Orthodox Tradition belongs to the Christian Church as a whole, not just to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Eastern Orthodox Church (Avis 2006: xiv). The noetic faculty itself is primarily supernatural (Logos as He is) and the second is natural (creative reasoning). This corresponds to a clear distinction between the Uncreated and the created, between God and creation. The acceptance of these limits as an obligatory component in the knowledge of God may help a theorizing mind to avoid all that over-simplification, absolutism and one-sided dogmatism by which both philosophy and theology have always been infected.

Secondly, a historical exploration of Orthodox Church Tradition as authority does not take a sufficient account of the legitimate antiquity of Orthodox tradition (*Predanie-Paradosis* concept) regarding its norm-generating and faith-keeping authority. The Orthodox emphasis on the historical continuity is rooted today not in the eternal authority of the gospel and its teaching, but, rather, in the authoritative logic of dominance, a self-protective ethnonationalism of sacred ‘canonical territories’ and in the narrow concept of geopolitical advance of the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) ideology. As a result of these inclinations, Eastern Orthodoxy confronted the neo-liberal globality and individualism, aiming to restore a traditional monopoly of the Orthodox Church Tradition as a conservative social force capable of preserving the sacred content of the Orthodox faith and practices. Remaining largely a peripheral denomination with respect to the main body of Christendom, the Orthodox Church has, through the centuries, been satisfied with a very limited theology of tradition and mentality of community insiders where the clerics could not speak of their gifts nor of anointing, but, rather, with Church Fathers creeds and Councils formulations. The contemporary Orthodox Church Tradition is often identified with rigid ecclesiastical structures and nationalistic agenda, being the very opposite of eclectically all-embracing vision of the first-century Apostolic Church. Although accepting a limited pluralism under new post-Soviet laws, the Moscow Patriarchate still requires a substantial imperial uniformity in which the culture of a respectful dialogue is not a priority.

Lastly, Orthodox Church Tradition, as a theological category, is undeniably diverse. The theoretical discourse of the potential

consensus within Orthodox Church Tradition demonstrates that at the heart of all discussions regarding authority of tradition described in the research lies a dichotomous nature of ongoing conflicts: scripture versus tradition, structure versus liminality, office versus charisma, institutions versus pilgrim people of faith, hegemonism versus a culture of dialogue, oppression versus persuasion, and so on. The presumption of truth within theological premises of Orthodox Church Tradition does not render the authoritative domain of the aforementioned tradition immune to questioning. A new dialectic of consensus requires a new paradigm shift from an oppressive to an enabling concept of authority based on the gospel foundation. If religious leaders of ancient Israel in the Old Testament exercised their spiritual authority in the name of Yahweh, who was the ultimate source of all power, Jesus Christ, contrary to popular assumptions of his days, spoke strongly to his disciples concerning a new pattern of authority, which intended to be a mutual loving service, rather than oppressive submission: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant' (Matthew 20:25–26 NIV). He offered his followers not a hierarchical position, but a towel: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45 NIV).

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