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EVANGELICALS AND EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

Tim Grass

It is often thought that the Western Protestants who have had most engagement with Eastern Christianity have been those holding high-church views; certainly that perspective has been dominant in ecumenical dialogue. However, this chapter offers evidence of substantial interaction between Eastern Christianity and another Western tradition, evangelicalism. It will outline and illustrate four main patterns which that engagement has taken, characterized as curiosity, assistance, confrontation, and dialogue and co-operation. They will be treated in order of their appearance in history, but all are apparent today in an engagement which is bewilderingly varied in its manifestations.

The ancient Eastern Christian churches comprise several distinct families. There are the Eastern Orthodox, who accepted the Chalcedonian definition of 451; the Oriental Orthodox, who did not accept Chalcedon but did accept the decrees of the first three ecumenical councils; and the Assyrians or Church of the East (formerly labelled Nestorians), who accepted only the decrees of the first two ecumenical councils. Most evangelical encounter with these churches has occurred in two regions, Orthodox Europe and the Middle East, and north and east Africa. More recently, the two traditions have encountered one another in the West, where (by contrast with the other regions) evangelicalism is usually the more established tradition and Orthodoxy is perceived as a newcomer.

Given that during the period of evangelicalism’s existence most of the Eastern churches have lived under Muslim or Communist rule and so have been inhibited in their external witness, it is unsurprising that the initiative in constructive contacts between the two traditions has almost always been taken by Western evangelicals. Only now, and only in parts of the West, is that changing to any significant degree. This means that the Eastern churches have often seen themselves as being on the defensive against attempts to bring them under foreign domination or to draw away their members, or else as the recipients of external help in areas such as education, Bible translation and publication, social work and diplomatic advocacy. Yet their self-understanding as the church(es) of the Early Fathers and the ecumenical councils has, when given full play in their thinking about inter-Christian relations, made it impossible for them to regard Protestant churches as equal partners.

A complicating factor has been Roman Catholic missionary activity. Since the late medieval period, a key missionary objective had been to bring Eastern churches under Roman jurisdiction, usually allowing them to keep their Eastern liturgy. In several cases, these churches split,
part remaining outside Roman authority, and part – the so-called ‘Uniate’ Churches – entering into communion with Rome. These should not be confused with Western-rite Catholics, and they often see themselves as Orthodox, in spite of their allegiance to Rome, but space precludes their discussion here. This history has sometimes made leaders of Eastern churches wary lest Protestant missionaries should likewise be seeking to bring them under a foreign jurisdiction; it has allowed Protestants and Orthodox to regard each other either as potential allies against Rome (as in the earliest contact) or as potential collaborators with it (where Protestants and Roman Catholics have shared minority status in Orthodox areas, the game may be somewhat different). In addition, during the 1830s and 1840s, evangelical mission stimulated increased Catholic activity in parts of the Middle East. It should not be forgotten, either, that Western evangelicals have often interpreted Orthodoxy in terms of what they know of Catholicism, sometimes even asserting that there was ‘no essential difference’ between the two. A more nuanced approach evident in the first half of the nineteenth century sometimes contrasted Orthodoxy favourably with Roman Catholicism on account of its approval of Bible circulation, an attitude which, missionaries hoped, could be drawn on for internal reform. In both cases, Roman Catholicism (as perceived by evangelicals) set the agenda, making it more difficult for evangelicals to understand Eastern Christianity on its own terms.

### Curiosity

Before any kind of approach to Eastern Christianity could be formulated by Westerners, there had to be a measure of intellectual curiosity. During the immediate post-Reformation era, the Eastern presence in the West and the Western presence in the East tended to be restricted to diplomats and traders, who as expatriates enjoyed special provision for their worship needs. This rarely extended to wider interest in the religious scene of their host country.

There is more evidence of interest in Eastern Christianity on the part of German-speaking Pietism. A. H. Francke (1663–1727) founded an Oriental Institute at Halle for the study of Eastern languages and the translation of pietist writings. John Wesley (1703–1791), whose life was changed by his contacts with pietism, is cited as an example of evangelical interest in Eastern theology; but Wesley appears to have read relatively little of the Greek Fathers, taking the texts he published from a volume of selections edited by a high Anglican, William Wake. Wesley edited these texts, removing most of their distinctive Eastern ideas, to make them fit the theology he wished his preachers to hold. Arguably, any reflection of patristic thought in his writings or his brother Charles’ hymns was drawing on ideas generally current in the contemporary Church of England.

We must look to the early nineteenth century, and the flourishing of Western Protestant mission, for evidence of evangelical interest in Eastern Christianity. This was an age of exploration, when learned societies and others sponsored expeditions to far-flung parts of the world. Discoveries made and contacts established were mediated to the public through published travelogues, a distinctive sub-group of these being what were sometimes entitled ‘Christian

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2 Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society vol. 50 (1849), lxvi.
researches’. These fed burgeoning Western interest in aspects of Eastern culture and language, an interest reflected in the growth of the academic outlook then known as Orientalism. However, overlapping the academic interest, which was often motivated at least partially by missionary concern, was an approach which portrayed the East as degenerate, lax and corrupt, and as contrasting with the brisk commercial and political efficiency and evangelical uprightness of the West. The West, all too often, looked down on the East, or at least saw it as an object of pity, and this extended to Western attitudes towards Eastern Christianity. (There was some justification for this in the state of Eastern churches under Ottoman rule: for example, ecclesiastical offices were often sold to the highest bidders, who recouped the purchase price from those beneath them.) Such attitudes were reinforced where evangelicals belonged to Western nations seeking to make their presence felt politically in the region; resentment, often hidden, was one reaction of local Christians.

Following from these two factors, and slightly later in time, curiosity helped stimulate the growth of evangelical pilgrimage to the Holy Land: this was facilitated by the development of transport links and popular because of its perceived apologetic value, not only in bringing the Bible to life but also in confirming faith at a time when the evidences for Christianity were being questioned. However, this served only to confirm evangelicals in a negative estimate of Eastern Christianity. Protestant sensibilities rejected the ritualized worship, most notably the Holy Fire ceremony at Easter in Jerusalem, and were horrified at the infighting between different jurisdictions. Protestant and Orthodox pilgrims to the Holy Land were looking for two different things: one tradition sought to step inside the world of the Bible that its message might become more real to them, while the other honoured the holy sites as locations where God had manifested himself among human beings. Evangelicals tended to look at nineteenth-century Palestine through Western eyes; they saw it as backward, poor and underdeveloped, due to its rejection of God’s grace. Only when the inhabitants turned to a pure form of Christianity would divine judgment be reversed, and economic and political reform become possible.

We can trace this curiosity about Eastern Christianity down to the present, but with a significant intermission. The twentieth century was a century of two parts. In the first, we have the post-revolutionary flight of many Russian intellectuals to the West; given the theological renaissance in those circles, especially in Paris, it would have been a propitious time for Western evangelicals to develop an interest in Orthodox theology, but the theological weakness and introversion evident in the Fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s meant that they rarely did so. As late as 1980, the Lausanne Movement could state of Protestant missionaries then working in Eastern Europe: ‘there is hardly anyone well enough versed in Orthodox theology to make a meaningful approach possible.’

But during recent decades, evangelical fascination with Eastern Christianity has grown significantly. Evangelical interest in patristic theology has deepened as part of a process of

7 Hummel, Patterns of the Sacred, pp. 35, 37.
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paradigm shift in evangelical self-understanding. Eastern evangelicals, too, have developed significant interest in Orthodox theology: in particular, Romanian scholarship has secured (possibly grudging) respect and facilitated a limited measure of dialogue. More recently, this interest has broadened to include Orthodox missiology, as evangelicals have engaged in sustained missiological reflection. We may also note the ongoing evangelical / Pentecostal / charismatic quest for the authentic New Testament church: the evangelical Anglican convert to Orthodoxy, Fr Michael Harper (1930–2009), for example, regarded Orthodoxy as the logical conclusion of such a quest.9

Furthermore, from the 1960s, there was widespread interest in the plight of Christians under Communism. The sufferings of Eastern Christians, evangelicals and Orthodox alike, were reported by agencies such as Keston College, and some Western evangelicals rejoiced that the Spirit of Christ was at work in believers whose ways of worship (and distinctive doctrines) they would have written off. On the other hand, many found evidence to convince them that institutional Orthodoxy in Communist countries was fatally compromised by its negotiations with the state, confirming some in the belief that Orthodox were not truly Christian (there was similar suspicion of evangelicals deemed to have compromised with the authorities, such as the registered Baptists in Russia).

Finally, from the late 1980s evangelicals became aware of a trickle of departures from their ranks to Orthodoxy.10 The primary significance of these lies in the awareness of Orthodoxy as a religious option which they have generated. Their critique of the weaknesses of para-church evangelicalism has not led to any change in the movement’s ethos, but the ingestion of numbers of converts, many highly educated and evangelistically passionate, seems to have shaped the adaptation of Orthodoxy in the United States to a religiously plural environment.

We should not, however, overstate the level or extent of evangelical interest in Eastern Christianity. British church members have little awareness of Eastern Christianity (apart from perhaps supporting a local evangelical charitable work in an Orthodox country) or the presence of Eastern Christians in the West, although things may be somewhat different in America. There had been little evangelical response to Orthodox immigration, partly because Orthodox were not perceived as a threat, unlike Catholics, since they occupied a different place in nineteenth-century evangelical eschatological systems. Post-1945 immigration has been more significant numerically in Britain, especially with the accession of East European nations to the European Union, but as yet there is little substantive engagement with Orthodox communities; what evangelical ministry there is focuses more on winning people from Orthodoxy rather than constructively engaging with it.

Assistance

Pietist missionary zeal helped to give Western Protestants a concern for the fortunes of the whole Christian world. Pietists looked for positive interaction with Eastern Christianity, enabled by their focus on shared experience of Christ and downplaying of doctrinal issues. Francke and others hoped to come alongside Eastern Christians and contribute to the renewal of Eastern Christianity. Apart from the Halle Institution, Francke founded a Greek seminary in the city to provide training for Orthodox priests. And pietist outreach was not without fruit: in Russia, St

Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724–1783) was influenced by the works of the proto-pietist Johann Arndt (1555–1626), especially his *True Christianity*.

But the real impetus to this approach was provided by post-millennialist eschatology. This gave many evangelicals the hope of an end-time ingathering, and the nascent missionary movement appeared to be taking the first steps towards it. At the end of the eighteenth century, the millennium seemed just around the corner. With the French Revolution and the rise to power of Napoleon, one Antichrist – the papacy – was tottering; the other – Islam – was seen as likely to fall soon afterwards, given the weakness of the contemporary Ottoman Empire. Missionaries could then expect a mighty harvest of souls, notably among Jews, whose ingathering was seen as precipitating a global turn to Christ, and Muslims. In this context the first evangelical missionary societies came into being. The two main Anglophone societies which began work in Orthodox areas were the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS; from 1815), whose workers were drawn mainly from England and Germany, and the Presbyterian and Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM; from 1819).

An initial objective of the ABCFM mission to the Levant was that of reaching Jewish people. They and their land were seen as holding a key place in God’s eschatological purposes. The establishment of the joint British-Prussian Jerusalem bishopric in 1841 demonstrates the strategic spiritual value which that city was deemed to possess, not just in terms of reaching Jews or Eastern Christians but also of reaching Muslims.

The call to take the gospel to Muslims proved to be highly significant in terms of the way it shaped mission strategy. To reach captive souls in Muslim lands, it was thought that the ancient churches of those lands would be the best agents. But (it was argued) they were corrupt, sunk in despair and lassitude as the result of centuries of Muslim domination. Their condition was seen as the result of divine judgment through Islam on account of their fall into error and corruption, an argument with a pedigree almost as old as Islam itself. Before they could reach anybody, therefore, they would need to be renewed. Such renewal, it was believed, must take place along evangelical lines. Unlike Roman Catholicism, the Eastern churches were thought to ‘possess within themselves the principle and the means of reformation’. William Jowett was therefore sent in 1815 to gather information, to explore possibilities for translating and distributing the Scriptures, and to influence the Eastern churches by whatever means possible. At this stage, there were hopes not only that these churches would turn out to be remnants of an early and purer form of Christianity, but also that they might have preserved early biblical manuscripts.

The importance accorded to Bible translation and circulation meant that the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded in 1804) and its local counterparts became central to evangelical engagement with Eastern Christianity. It gave rise to a host of similar societies in various parts of Europe and the Near East. Fundamental to the strategy of these groups was the belief that circulation of vernacular Scriptures would itself lead to spiritual renewal; this was an expression of the Reformation-era conviction that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10: 17). (Orthodox missionary strategy, too, had historically stressed vernacular

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The CMS established a bridgehead in Malta in 1815 which developed as a primary purpose the printing and distribution of Bibles and Scripture portions in various East European and Near Eastern languages. Some co-operation did take place with Churches and with local Bible societies, the best known being that founded in Russia in 1812 but closed down in 1826. Similarly, translation of liturgical texts (also a key component of historic Orthodox mission strategy) was given priority, although it was an outgrowth of a sense of the superiority of evangelicalism to other forms of Christianity, rather than the superiority of Christianity to other forms of religion. Thus, the Book of Common Prayer was translated into various languages.

Several further examples of this type of engagement are worth giving, because of the dominance for some time of this approach. The first is provided by Claudius Buchanan (1766–1815) and the CMS in India. In 1806 Buchanan visited the Syrian Orthodox in the Travancore region, and reported positively on their relative freedom from error. He even advocated a full union between the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England, which would strengthen both parties to resist Roman activity, although he later admitted its impracticability. In 1811 the CMS pictured the Syrian Orthodox as a communion for which sympathy should be felt due to its oppression by Rome:

they have maintained a regular Episcopal Succession from the earliest ages, and in all important points accord with the faith of the Primitive Church; and have not departed into those errors, which have infected the Syrian Roman Catholics. . . . A few learned, prudent, and zealous clergymen would be received, as there is ground to hope, with open arms by this venerable Church. Their labours would tend, under the divine blessing, to revive and confirm the influence of the faith in that oppressed community; and might lead, ultimately, to a union between our Churches.

Here were ‘the Protestants of the East’, a communion present in several countries which could be a source of missionaries to Muslims and pagans. The Syrians were apprehensive that Protestants would try to subjugate their church, as the Catholics had done in 1599, but they were won over and the CMS set about educating children, training clergy, and translating the Bible into Malayalam. In 1818, a synod of the church instructed priests to conform their rites and doctrines to the teaching of the missionaries. However, the moral state of the clergy was low. Their educational level was no better, and from 1825 the church’s leadership grew increasingly hostile. When Bishop Daniel Wilson insisted on its submission, memories were stirred of earlier Roman actions, and his demand was rejected. In 1836, relations were formally severed, and a CMS-supported church was set up, as well as the larger Mar Thoma Church, which wished to undertake reform independently of the missionaries but which was also forced to separate from the parent body.

17 *Missionary Register* vol. 8 (1820), 486; vol. 29 (1841), 333.
19 *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society* vol. 12 (1811–12), 413.
Another example is the early work among Armenians and Nestorians of Turkey and North-West Persia. These churches were also presented in ways which resonated with Protestants – as being free of the perceived iconographic excesses of other Orthodox churches, and as needing to be strengthened and protected against the machinations of Roman missionaries. Moreover, whilst evangelicals disapproved of the non-Chalcedonian Christologies of these churches, their early separation from Rome and Byzantium had providentially preserved them from many other errors which later grew up in those communions. Armenians in particular were regarded as possessed of virtues which appealed to nineteenth-century industrialists and entrepreneurs: they were noble, hard-working, enterprising and present throughout the Middle Eastern world. This, and their church’s relative freedom from impurity in doctrine and rite, marked them out as highly suitable disseminators of the gospel.22 Furthermore, there was already a reform movement under way in the Armenian Apostolic Church, which welcomed the missionaries when they arrived in Constantinople.23

The Nestorians, rediscovered around 1830, were the ecclesiastical equivalent of the coelacanth, ‘a living fossil, which it was necessary to study, to preserve and finally to convert’.24 The ABCFM deemed it worth sending missionaries to them because of ‘their extreme liberality towards other sects, their ideas of open communion, and their entire rejection of auricular confession’.25 Justin Perkins of the ABCFM even suggested that Nestorius himself had been treated so harshly because he was ‘far more evangelical than his opponents’. Their problem was ‘spiritual death, rather than theological error’.26 They were, however, in a situation of political weakness, and their openness to Western mission, whether Protestant or Catholic, was motivated in considerable measure by their need for political support. All the same, when Perkins arrived among them in 1834, his marching orders made it clear that his main objective was to enable their Church to play a part in reaching Asia, as it had done centuries before. Initially it appeared that efforts to stir the ancient Church to new life were being blessed.27 But the failure of the missionaries to come to the aid of the Nestorians when they were attacked in the early 1840s, coupled with increasing opposition to aspects of Nestorian religious practice, along with what were perceived as high Anglican machinations, soured relations. Nevertheless, Perkins continued to oppose the creation of separate congregations, and by contrast with other ABCFM fields it was only after his final departure in 1869 that a separate Assyrian Protestant Church assumed formal existence.28 Missionaries had been able to justify their strategy on the

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27 Perkins, A Residence of Eight Years in Persia, p. 499.
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basis that conversions were occurring and they were being allowed to preach in Nestorian churches.29

In Ethiopia (then known as Abyssinia), the CMS was active from 1829, seeing it as a bridgehead for reaching the heathen of Central Africa. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was commended, in spite of its blemishes, for resisting the attacks of Romanism as well as Islam.30 Here too the missionaries stressed the production and distribution of vernacular Scriptures as the main stimulus to church reform; one result was the formation in Eritrea from the 1860s of a renewal movement which was eventually forced to separate from Orthodoxy and developed into the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus with assistance from Swedish Lutheran missionaries. The missionaries continued to uphold the principle of not proselytizing, as did later Anglican workers. By the 1920s, however, new missions were arriving on the scene which did not share this approach, and evangelical churches would see remarkable growth once missionaries were forced to withdraw in 1936.31

A significant aspect of this approach is education. The nineteenth century’s growing confidence in all things Western, and the resulting cultural imperialism, was evident in the advocacy of Western-style education. This was a key plank of mission strategy in most of the fields under review. Some ABCFM institutions proved highly successful, such as the Syrian Protestant College, which developed into the American University of Beirut, and Robert College in Constantinople, both founded in 1863. Yet we may question whether the efforts devoted to education ever reaped much harvest in terms of converts to Christianity or reawakened Eastern Christians.

We see in this approach that Eastern Churches tended at first to welcome Western evangelicals coming alongside them, not least because the assistance proffered included education and medical care, and often came from powers deemed to have sufficient political and military clout to secure an improvement in the lot of Christians under Ottoman rule. All too often, however, it ran into problems and missionaries were forced to create separate churches for converts. Three main reasons may be given for their action: mission policy formulated from the home base, the need to provide for excommunicated converts, and the focus on providing a spiritual refuge for Muslims who were converted to Christ.

By the 1860s, this approach had begun to wane considerably in popularity. One problem was the conception of the relationship between spiritual renewal and institutional reform: the approach of seeking individual converts who would then be able to reform the ancient churches from within rested on a separation of soteriology from ecclesiology which was foreign to Eastern Christianity.32 Even where the Scriptures circulated freely, that alone did not seem to be leading to any widespread rethinking of doctrine and practice; many missionaries concluded that it was impossible for the message of the gospel to be heard within those systems. Missionaries found themselves searching fruitlessly for individuals within the ancient churches of whose spiritual state they could be reasonably certain.

Another problem area was eschatology. There was a subtle shift in underlying outlook from eschatologically-inspired idealism to a more pragmatic focus on the need to create spiritual

29 Murre-van den Berg, ‘Why Protestant Churches?’, p. 112.
homes for evangelical converts (and perhaps also to have something tangible to show to supporters at home). Expectation of Islam’s eschatological decline was weakening, although the Western perception of it as terminally weak continued in a more secularized form. The eschatology of the new faith missions which proliferated from the 1860s was often pessimistic and pre-millennial, focusing on rescuing as many individuals as possible at the expense of longer-term objectives such as church reform and education. As propagated by the Brethren, who were active in many of the countries under review, this outlook saw ‘Christendom’ in whatever form as apostate and doomed, and urged the faithful to call awakened souls to leave religious ‘Babylon’ (Revelation 18: 4). A third problem was that the Ottoman millet system made it very difficult for a Muslim to convert to Christianity, because it treated religion as intertwined with all aspects of society and daily life. Converts therefore tended to be from the Christian community, which provoked antagonism. In Turkey, for instance, after 1846 those converting to evangelical views and consequently excommunicated by the Armenian Church needed a separate church to be formed for them, but excommunication also entailed exclusion from the Armenian millet and hence brought civil as well as religious disadvantages. British officials therefore lobbied successfully for recognition of Protestantism as a millet in its own right.33 In time, however, antagonism against evangelicals wore off and a measure of contact with the Armenian Church was resumed. Missionaries discouraged converts from seceding, and the original vision was partially fulfilled.34

Some still advocate coming alongside the ancient churches with a view to their being equipped to reach Muslims. A 1996 guide to Eastern Christianity produced for evangelical missionaries asked: ‘If we are concerned that the non-Christians of these lands should hear the Good News of Christ, can we ignore the Ancient Churches? Do we expect God to bypass them all, and use only the witness of the small local evangelical minorities, and of foreigners?’35 Other evangelicals advocate coming alongside spiritually alive Orthodox individuals as the best way of working towards the renewal of the Eastern churches. The Lausanne paper quoted earlier expressed the hope that individuals from both traditions would co-operate in outreach: ‘we live with the expectation of seeing both Evangelicals and born-again Orthodox reaching nominal Christians in those nations with the Gospel’. It regarded what it saw as the born-again minority within Orthodoxy as a key group in reaching others: they needed help to grow and encouragement to witness so that ‘the way may be prepared for a mighty Reformation and spiritual renewal within the Orthodox Church’.36

The accession of two thousand North American evangelicals to the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1987 was arguably an instance of this pattern of engagement. For several decades, a number of Campus Crusade staff workers, led by Peter Gillquist, had been frustrated with the evangelical para-church mentality and had set out on a quest for the New Testament church. As they studied the Bible and the Fathers, they began to set up a new ecclesial structure, which in fact looked much like Orthodoxy. In time, they formed what became the Evangelical Orthodox Church, and the great majority of its membership was later received into canonical Orthodoxy.37 They brought with them their entrepreneurial approach to evangelism and

36 ‘Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among the Orthodox’, §§4c(v), 4e(iii).
37 Herbel, Turning to Tradition, Chs 4–5.
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church-planting – so they were coming alongside by joining an Eastern church, but with markedly Western, even American, notions concerning the lines along which renewal must take place. This gave rise to tensions, partly because whilst Orthodox missiology seeks to develop indigenous churches which are rooted in and sanctify the culture of the people, many Orthodox argued that the culture in question was a secularized Anglo-Saxon Protestant one.38

Divergent opinions have been expressed regarding the effectiveness of this approach. It has been argued that ‘[r]ather than strengthening the Christian presence in the Middle East, as had been their aim, missionaries contributed to the fragmentation, dispersion and even decimation through massacre of the Christian communities’.39 But in the long run, there has been considerable renewal in parts of the Orthodox world, and observers have frequently argued that this has been due in part to Western input. More recent examples of renewal due to Western stimuli include the Lord’s Army, a large renewal movement within Romanian Orthodoxy formed in the 1920s which has been influenced by evangelical thought and practice in several areas (such as the prominence of preaching), and the Coptic Orthodox Sunday School movement, which has played a key role since the 1940s in producing educated laity equipped to serve their church and wider Egyptian society.

Confrontation

Before too long, those who accepted the evangelical message began to experience persecution. Greece was to prove so barren a field that the ABCFM and CMS, along with the London Missionary Society, withdrew during the 1840s, asserting that the resurgence of xenophobic nationalism after independence had been achieved in 1821 made it impossible for foreigners, especially non-orthodox, to secure a hearing. Russian Stundists (who had been influenced by German Mennonite migrants and whose initial development was within Orthodoxy) experienced opposition from the 1870s which was seen as instigated by the Orthodox. A related renewal movement among the St Petersburg aristocracy was suppressed by the state in 1884, as well as being forced to develop outside the Russian Orthodox Church.40 Particularly under the procurator K. P. Pobedonostsev (in power 1871–1905), Orthodoxy worked with the state to repress evangelicalism in all forms. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, E. H. Broadbent (1861–1945), an itinerant Brethren Bible teacher and mission strategist, recorded during 1935:

The departure of the Greek Orthodox Church from the pure Word of God into tradition and superstition, by which it has for centuries held the masses of the people in ignorance – a Church which has always persecuted the people of God, those who have returned to the Scriptures and acted upon them, and which still continues to do this where it has the power, is one of the chief causes of the present infidelity. It is the swing of the pendulum.41

His colleague G. H. Lang (1874–1958) commented regarding 1940s Bulgaria: ‘this is the Greek Orthodox Church in all places and all times when it has power’.42 For Lang, as for many others,

39 Murre-van den Berg, ‘Middle East’, p. 470.
the headship of Christ precluded fellowship with priestly religious systems, and rendered it necessary to urge believers to separate from them.\textsuperscript{43} In every age, believers were a remnant, persecuted by the representatives of a ‘Church’ in which Christianity and Roman paganism were mingled.\textsuperscript{44}

During the 1860s and 1870s, the Evangelical Alliance led the way in lobbying for religious liberty in Spain, Turkey, Russia and elsewhere, often on behalf of fellow evangelicals experiencing religious persecution, but by no means always: in 1861, it made representations on behalf of the ‘Nestorians’ in Persia.\textsuperscript{45} Such activity was liable to bring evangelicalism into confrontation with Orthodoxy, especially in its Russian form, when Russian strategic military interests were in question. It was small wonder that some evangelicals initially welcomed the advent of Communist rule in Russia. All denominations were placed on an equal footing, and a brief window after 1917 allowed Baptists and others an unaccustomed measure of freedom to evangelize. This did not last, and evangelicals and Orthodox alike endured sometimes ferocious persecution and faced impossible decisions regarding co-operation with the authorities. With the collapse of Communist regimes, the religious liberty issue has returned in its pre-Communist form, for example in Belarus, and opposition owes something to Orthodox perception of evangelicals as American-inspired (and funded) sectarians.

Confrontation could also be provoked by Western religious disagreements. For instance, around 1850 the CMS found itself having to counter the charge of proselytism made by high Anglicans who were concerned to establish good diplomatic relations with the Eastern churches and hence to neutralize Roman overtures to them. Its defence was that its mission was to make available the Scriptures and win Easterners for Christ, even at the risk of their leaving the ancient communions.\textsuperscript{46} Implicitly distancing the CMS from high-church thinking, one writer asserted that it was impossible to recognize the Eastern communions as like-minded churches on the basis of the possession of episcopal order, for that would imply that the differences between the two were non-essential; rather, ‘they must be led to see that what they consider Christianity is not Christianity, and that what they regard as truth is not truth’. The missionary’s aim was not to detach people from their church, but to preach the gospel; if that led to people separating, he was not to be held responsible.\textsuperscript{47} Increasingly, the clear expectation was that it would.

The spread of this outlook gave rise to controversy at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh because Catholic and Orthodox countries were initially to be treated as ‘unreached’; after intense debate, ‘Edinburgh 1910 implicitly declared Protestant proselytism of Roman Catholics, and rather less clearly of Orthodox and Oriental Christians, to be no valid part of Christian mission.’\textsuperscript{48} Yet this outlook has persisted, and was ironically repeated a century later at the Lausanne Movement’s congress in Cape Town in 2010, where the expressed assumption that Orthodox counted as unreached peoples precipitated frank personal conversations between the few invited Orthodox observers and evangelical leaders, which resulted in the formation of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative (LOI).

Some of the confrontation has been rooted in an Orthodox perception of evangelicalism as something foreign, an ‘invasive species’ which if unchecked would threaten the life of the

\textsuperscript{43} Lang, \textit{Edmund Hamer Broadbent}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{44} Lang, \textit{Edmund Hamer Broadbent}, pp. 88–9.
\textsuperscript{45} Ian Randall and David Hilborn, \textit{One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance} (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), p. 98.
\textsuperscript{46} Stock, \textit{The History of the Church Missionary Society}, II: 144–5.
Orthodox churches. Add to that the close identification of Orthodox allegiance and national identity, felt in Orthodox Europe and Ethiopia especially, and it is easy to see why evangelicalism could on occasion be seen as a threat to society and to national stability, and not merely to the Orthodox churches.

On the other hand, evangelical insensitivity when church-planting has contributed to confrontation. If coming alongside the ancient Churches was not going to work, and the missionary heart longed to see conversions to evangelical faith in Christ, then it was going to be necessary to provide converts with a spiritual home. It was a relatively small step from this to the conviction that separate congregations were not only necessary in practice, but also desirable in principle, because the ancient Churches were no place for anyone who came to a living Christian faith and wished to worship in a manner deemed scriptural.

A key thinker in the shift to a church-planting strategy by the ABCFM was its secretary, Rufus Anderson (1796–1880). The board had adopted a resolution in 1837 setting down the establishment of native churches as the primary object of its mission, and by the mid-1840s he was arguing that work among Eastern Christians should be approached in the same way as work among the heathen, the objective in each case being the formation of indigenous churches with indigenous ministry. At the end of his career, in 1872, he produced a history of the ABCFM’s work among them, arguing that they were a legitimate object of mission. Those ‘destitute of the knowledge of Christianity’ (he was expounding the second article of the board’s constitution) included Muslims and Jews, but also ‘the Oriental Churches, as they were fifty years ago’. A key criterion for his assessment was the doctrine of justification: ‘Of the doctrine of a justifying faith of the heart – the distinguishing doctrine of the Gospel – the people of the Oriental Churches are believed to have been wholly ignorant, before the arrival of Protestant missionaries among them.’ He now considered that even the Nestorian field, where missionaries had been late in forming separate churches, showed that ‘the dead Church could not be galvanized into spiritual life. There was no way for the truly enlightened but to leave it, and form reunions on the Apostolic basis.’

This church-planting approach was widely adopted. American Presbyterians aimed at the creation of a separate church from the beginning of their work in Egypt in 1854. This contrasted with the CMS, which aimed primarily at fostering the renewal of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Whilst a separate Anglican church came into being in 1921, the missionary Temple Gairdner (1873–1928) refused to seek converts from other Christian traditions (although they made up most of the membership); the Anglican church was seen as a bridge between Orthodox and evangelicals, and as well placed to engage in dialogue with Muslims. Not surprisingly, the Presbyterian work produced a much larger church than the Anglican one.

Church-planting has given rise to vociferous complaints in Eastern Europe about evangelical intrusion on Orthodox ‘canonical territory’. But a church-planting strategy did not necessarily

49 Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 4.
52 Anderson, History, I: viii, 3.
55 Canonical territory is the area seen by a particular Orthodox jurisdiction as lying within its responsibility; since only one Orthodox Church can have jurisdiction in any given area, the presence of other denominations or jurisdictions is seen as unacceptable.
preclude the earlier practice of seeking to come alongside the ancient Churches. Even after the formation of a separate Assyrian Protestant Church, for example, W. A. Shedd of the ABCFM continued to hope for the renewal of the communion from which it had separated:

It is possible also that members of any one of the oriental churches, having a new vision of the gospel of Christ and of the mission of the church, may do the greatest good when separated from the parent body. I do not believe that such separation should be sought, but experience shows that it is inevitable. The reformation of the old churches themselves may be hastened by the presence alongside of bodies of Christians practising a simpler and more active faith.56

And, on occasion, different approaches could emerge from the same set of circumstances. In the 1920s, the Romanian Orthodox Church saw two renewal movements emerge from the same soil, both biblicist, moralist, lay-orientated and stressing personal faith in Christ. The Lord’s Army remained within the church, not without some problems along the way, while the ‘Christians according to the Scriptures’ (registered in 1926), a Brethren-type movement led by the former Orthodox priest Teodor Popescu, was forced to develop outside it.57

The church-planting strategy received a massive but not always well focused boost after the collapse of East European Communism. Many Western missionaries entered the former Communist world with the conviction that they were ‘bringing Jesus to’ it. Where they sought to inform themselves regarding the religious background of the area where they would be working, their knowledge of Eastern European Christianity would have been shaped in part by what they had heard about the compromises it had made with Communism – and the compromisers were sometimes seen as including Eastern evangelicals, as well as Orthodox and Catholics. For such workers, it was axiomatic that they should aim to plant new congregations.

**Dialogue and co-operation**

Although this approach is discussed relatively late in the chapter, sixteenth-century Protestants quickly sought dialogue with Orthodox in order to join forces against Rome and/or the Ottoman Empire. Correspondence between Lutheran theologians from Tübingen and Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople elicited the closest thing to an official Orthodox statement on justification by faith in the patriarch’s letter of 1576 expressing disagreement with Lutheran teaching.58 The controversial views of his successor Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638), the so-called ‘Calvinist patriarch’ who had been educated in the West, precipitated a decisive Orthodox

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rejection of Reformation theology,\textsuperscript{59} and it is unlikely that later encounter built on such contacts, although occasional references were made to them.\textsuperscript{60}

Serious and open evangelical dialogue with ancient Eastern Christianity, in any formal manner, is a phenomenon largely restricted to the last three decades.\textsuperscript{61} Apart from evangelical involvement in bilateral theological dialogues between world communions, as between Anglicans and Orthodox or Baptists and Orthodox, several dialogues have taken place between evangelicals and Orthodox. After the World Council of Churches assembly in 1991, Orthodox and evangelical delegates found they shared similar concerns, and this was a significant factor in the WCC convening a series of consultations and seminars bringing the two traditions together.\textsuperscript{62} In Britain, the Evangelical Alliance sponsored a study group drawn from both traditions.\textsuperscript{63} For a number of years from 1990, the Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism met in the United States, while in recent years the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius sponsored a dialogue in Oxford. One-off consultations have also been held, as at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague in 2001.\textsuperscript{64} However, evangelicals have found it difficult to engage some Orthodox jurisdictions in such dialogues. Moreover, most dialogue has taken place in the West rather than the Orthodox world.

Dialogue objectives have shifted: as attempts to seek theological convergence proved elusive and frustrating, and yet the experience of fellowship remained compelling, a more pragmatic and some would say realistic approach has sought closer collaboration in mission, broadly defined; an example would be the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, which held its first consultation in 2013.\textsuperscript{65} To a considerable extent, this development reflects trends in the wider ecumenical world.

A persistent problem, however, has been the difficulty of moving from conversation to co-operation. Following Edinburgh 1910, there was a measure of co-operation between evangelicals and Eastern Christians, expressed primarily though common participation in para-church movements such as the Student Christian Movement. But relationships withered as evangelicals distanced themselves from organized ecumenism during the mid-twentieth century. Such


\textsuperscript{62} Proclaiming Christ Today: Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation, Alexandria, 10–15 July 1995, edited by Huibert van Beek and Georges Lemopoulos (Geneva / Bialystok: World Council of Churches, 1995);

\textsuperscript{63} Evangelicalism and the Orthodox Church: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE) (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).

\textsuperscript{64} Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the Way to Understanding, edited by Ian M. Randall (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

co-operation as there was owed much to evangelical pragmatism. When Billy Graham visited Ethiopia (1960) and Russia (1984), working with the Orthodox was a natural application of his general principle of working with as broad a range of churches as possible. Graham’s approach was untypical and earned him considerable criticism, but such campaigns have given evangelicals a higher degree of public visibility and acceptability in Orthodox areas.\(^6^6\)

However, the ecumenical movement was the scene for mutual rediscovery from 1991, as noted above. Such dialogue has helped to create a climate in which co-operation has again become thinkable in such fields as translation and publishing (although Bible translation has been a contested area since the nineteenth century, each tradition condemning translations seen as permeated by the beliefs of the other), and welfare projects. Yet it is not cynicism to suggest that the more tenuous the link between a project and the worshipping life of local churches, the easier it is for evangelicals and Eastern Christians to co-operate in it. Whilst some co-operation has undoubtedly taken place under the auspices of global agencies such as Campus Crusade, CMS, Navigators and World Vision, local agencies are also being founded in which members of both traditions work together. Significantly, recent CMS policy has focused on the idea of entering into partnership with Orthodox jurisdictions and parishes through resourcing them in specific areas of their work.\(^6^7\)

**Conclusion**

What factors have determined which of these approaches have been adopted? Doctrinally speaking, we have noticed how different eschatologies have shaped evangelical engagement with Eastern Christianity. Ecclesiology, however, has also played a defining role. Evangelical ecclesiology of various stripes has sometimes adopted an approach to Church history which sees the true Church as cast out and persecuted by the state-sponsored institutions of Christendom. A classic example was Broadbent’s *The Pilgrim Church* (1931), which drew extensively on his own travels. Inevitably such an approach predisposes many against the Eastern Churches – until those, too, are persecuted and so come to share the marks of the true Church, as with the Nestorians in 1870s Turkey or Orthodox in 1960s Russia.

In terms of specific evangelical ecclesiologies, it is clear that Anglicans tended to feel that they had a head start in building relationships with the Eastern churches because of their episcopal order, which it was hoped would provide a model for reformed Orthodox jurisdictions. Indeed, even the ABCFM acknowledged this advantage, episcopacy being seen as paralleling the forms of civil government obtaining in the East; missionaries were reminded that their object was not to introduce a congregationalist or presbyterian polity.\(^6^8\) Nowadays it is clear that belief in the local congregation (as opposed to a diocese or jurisdiction) as the primary ecclesiological unit makes the formation of new ones more likely, because of the ease with which it can be done and because it makes it harder for evangelicals with such an ecclesiology to see the marks of a true Christian congregation in Orthodox parishes around them. Baptist missions, such as those of the Baptists, the Brethren, and the majority of Pentecostals, have often drawn on the congregationalist outlook and have proved more likely to adopt a negative attitude to Eastern Christianity than paedobaptistic ones. Baptist denominations have often found it difficult to

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\(^{68}\) *Missionary Register* vol. 26 (1838), 80; vol. 28 (1840), 80.
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engage positively with Eastern Christianity, not least because they have been unable to accept infant baptism as valid and have therefore (re)baptized converts in an inversion of the practice of some Orthodox jurisdictions.

Differing understandings of soteriology have provided a major obstacle to closer or more constructive relations. Evangelical insistence on salvation received through faith alone has historically often been contrasted with an understanding of Orthodoxy which saw it as teaching something akin to ‘salvation by works’ (often understood in the light of contemporary Roman Catholicism). Considerable scholarly attention has been given to soteriological issues, but dialogue statements have not yet offered a convincing account of how the respective views of two traditions can be regarded as compatible. However, changing understandings of such evangelical doctrines as justification by faith alone (as seen, for example, in the work of N. T. Wright or that of Finnish Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue) may offer new avenues of exploration.

As for external factors affecting the development of relationships, the political climate has alternately facilitated and hindered them, as we have seen. In the early nineteenth century, the Russian Bible Society was founded during the time of the ‘Holy Alliance’, when Tsar Alexander I was notably sympathetic to things Western, including Western mystical spirituality. The Ottoman Empire’s fatal decay facilitated not only Western political intervention in the region but also Western religious intervention. By contrast, recent dialogue between Baptists and the Ecumenical Patriarchate was dealt a mortal blow by NATO bombing of Serbia in 1998; and the complications arising from Western involvement in Iraq and Syria cannot yet be adequately evaluated.

Political power could be used in various ways: to facilitate evangelical mission, as in early nineteenth-century India and late nineteenth-century Egypt, or to secure a greater measure of freedom for Eastern Christian communities, as in Turkey during the middle of the century; on the Orthodox side, it has not infrequently been used to repress evangelical activity. It can be argued that evangelicals, whose outlook was marked by a readiness to innovate, failed to grasp that centuries of political powerlessness under Muslim domination had made any form of development very difficult for churches in those lands; their priority had to be that of faithful maintenance of the tradition (as would later be the case in some Communist countries). For evangelicals, political powerlessness, when Orthodoxy was the religion of the rulers, strongly reinforced their negative attitude towards it.

Four areas call for further investigation. Some regions and missions are better researched than others. Although Eastern Europe contains a much larger number of Orthodox believers, from an Anglophone missions history perspective there is far more relevant research on the Middle East and Africa than on European Orthodoxy, Russia excepted. The lack of English-language discussion of evangelical engagement with Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe is the more significant given evangelicalism’s strength in the region and the growing number of Eastern evangelical scholars engaging with aspects of Orthodox theology. Linked with this, is the relationship between evangelicalism and reform movements within twentieth-century Orthodoxy, notably in Armenia, Romania and Greece. Second, an aspect little mentioned here has been the encounter of Pentecostals and charismatics with Eastern Christianity; to the extent to which

69 For example, from the evangelical side, Edmund J. Rybarczyk, Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on becoming like Christ (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism, edited by James J. Stamoolis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).
such Christians see themselves as different from evangelicals, this engagement has been marked by distinctive features, such as its focus on pneumatology. Third, more thought needs to be given to the relationship between changing evangelical understandings of missiology and attitudes towards Eastern Christianity. Finally, we cannot comprehend fully how evangelicals and Eastern Christians have related to one another outside Europe in Africa and the Middle East without giving full weight to the presence of a third tradition, which on one ancient reading was itself regarded as a Christian heresy – Islam. We therefore need to compare the various ways in which each tradition has engaged with Islam. In turn, this engagement could be compared fruitfully with that between evangelicalism, Orthodoxy and Communism. There is, then, plenty of scope for further research.