

The Evangelical Orthodox Church and The New Covenant Apostolic Order

by Bill Counts

I strongly commend Bill Counts for his wise analysis of the EOC movement. Its present failings, and the predictable disasters likely to follow from them need to be warned against. I heartily recommend the essay to all readers. —Clark H. Pinnock

(Clark H. Pinnock is professor of Systematic Theology at the McMaster Divinity College. He received his B.A. from Toronto and his Ph.D. from Manchester. He has written Set Forth Your Case, A Defense of Biblical Infallibility, Biblical Revelation: Foundation of Christian Theology, and many other books and articles.)

History and Background

The New Covenant Apostolic Order (NCAO) began in 1973. Its members were in charge of mostly small home-churches in Canada, Alaska, the Midwest, the South, and on the West Coast. In February 1979, the NCAO and the churches it serves officially became a denomination—the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC). The birth of the EOC was accompanied by an effective publicity campaign. Stories appeared in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and other major dailies. According to the *New York Times*' story the EOC has about fifty congregations and 2500 members.¹ But according to some former leaders who have left the movement, actual membership is less than a thousand.

The key leaders of the EOC, all of whom were formerly Campus Crusade for Christ staff members, include Pete Gillquist, an editor with Thomas Nelson Publishers and author of *Love Is Now* (with a foreword by Sherwood Wirt), *The Physical Side of Being Spiritual* (advance publicity includes hearty endorsements from well-known evangelicals J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard), and *Let's Quit Fighting about the Holy Spirit*; Jack Sparks, cofounder and former head of the Christian World Liberation Front, editor of the recently published volume *The Apostolic*

Fathers and author of *The Mind Benders*; Jon Braun, author of *It Ain't Gonna Reign No More* and *Whatever Happened to Hell*; Ken Berven, author of *I Love Being Married to a Grandma* (with a foreword by Billy Graham) and *Blest Be the Tie that Frees*; Dick Ballew; and Gordon Walker. Ray Nethery, an original founder and leader in the group, broke with the order in early 1978 over what he considered its extreme and unbiblical emphases.² Though the EOC is currently small, its leaders are gifted popular communicators capable of making a significant impact. The EOC also sponsors a school, the Academy of Orthodox Theology in Goleta, California, and the Conciliar Press, which publishes *Again* magazine and various pamphlets.

General Theological Orientation

The EOC is theologically close to the Eastern Orthodox churches, such as the Russian and Greek Orthodox, whose theological roots go back to early church councils and to certain early church fathers. According to the *New York Times* story, Jack Sparks and Pete Gillquist have been talking "with officials of the Orthodox Church in America, a denomination with roots in Russian orthodoxy, and left open the possibility of eventually aligning with a larger orthodox group."²

Eastern Orthodox churches reject the papacy but stress the doctrinal formulations of the early church councils. They also draw heavily on early church theologians who lived in the eastern Roman Empire. These theologians were influenced to some extent by the Greek philosophy and mysticism popular in their area of the world. As a result, Eastern Orthodox theology has stressed that believers become united with Christ's glorified human nature through the sacraments and become "deified." Orthodox theology often has a mystical, philosophical, and speculative flavor foreign to most westerners. The Eastern Orthodox church has a strong emphasis on liturgy and mystery combined with a de-emphasis of the individual. The church is almost viewed as God incarnate and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are viewed as a powerful and mysterious means of being united with God.

Bill Counts holds degrees from Princeton University, Southern Methodist University, and Dallas Theological Seminary. He is author of The Incredible Christ, Called to be Free, and (with Bruce Narramore) Freedom from Guilt; he has also served as contributing editor of the Journal of Psychology and Theology. He is currently in the doctor of ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary. Bill spent nine years on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, where he worked closely with the six men who are now leaders of the Evangelical Orthodox Church. He has spent many hours in dialogue with these men discussing the issues raised in this report. Bill resides in the Los Angeles area with his wife and three children, where he is president of the Christian Associates Seminary.

a. Diocesan Bishops in the EOC are:
Dale S. Autrey; Jackson, Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee
C. William Blythe; Central Illinois
Joseph W. Copeland; Yakima Valley, Eastern Washington
Harold Dunaway; Alaska
Melvin E. Gimmaka; Montana and Idaho
Jerold R. Gliege; Saskatchewan, Canada
Robert H. Guio; Diablo Valley and Northern California

Weldon M. Hardenbrook; San Lorenzo Valley and Central California
Kenneth G. Jensen; Indiana, Iowa and Tolono, Illinois
Timothy McCoy; Ukiah, California
C. Ronald Roberson; Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley, California
Frederick Rogers; Gary, Indiana
Wayne Wilson; Huntington Beach, California

In popularized form much of this surfaces in the teaching of the EOC. "It warms me all over to think I'm identified with the human nature of Christ—I'm one with it," Jon Braun states.^b

The human nature of Christ, according to Dick Ballew, is "interpenetrated" with "energies" from Christ's divine nature.³ Through water baptism we come into union with Christ's human nature, and thus along with Christ partake of the energies of his divine nature. Ballew says, "God uses baptism to communicate the grace of union with Christ. . . . Just as God used Noah's ark as a vehicle to save eight persons . . . , He now uses baptism as a vehicle to save people."^c Jon Braun adds that water baptism "is the normal occasion or vehicle that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have ordained to communicate the grace of regeneration into Jesus Christ."⁴ Again magazine states:

Holy Baptism is the proper vehicle through which the sins of one who believes are remitted, and through which the gift of the Holy Spirit is received. Hear the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386): "When going down, therefore, into the water, think not of the bare element [of the water itself], but look for salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost; for without both thou canst not possibly be made perfect."⁵

Pete Gillquist's latest book describes water baptism as "that point at which the transaction of the conversion of our hearts is made" and the "means of grace through which God normally administered the Holy Spirit."⁶

The union entered into by baptism is primarily sustained or "nourished" by the Eucharist. Braun says:

When we sit down at the table of the Lord we, through his blood and body, . . . enter into the very holy presence of God . . . , and we join as it were the Word Jesus Christ in His presentation of His once for all sacrifice to the Father. . . . It is our joining together with Him in His presentation to the Father . . . and when we leave then what do we take with us? . . . when you go to work tomorrow . . . you take with you nourishment from His nature. . . . you leave with His nature.⁷

In another place he adds, referring to the Eucharist, "The people of God need to *change their diet!* The church needs to change the way it eats."⁸ Dick Ballew addresses the same theme:

Spiritually the children of God must on a regular basis eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord (John 6:53). . . . in the Eucharist the church experiences a continual forgiveness and cleansing from sin. If you blow it during the week you have the Eucharist waiting for you on Sunday.^d

View of the Church's Authority

Eastern Orthodox churches, along with Roman Catholics, reject the Reformation principle that Scripture alone is the final authority and, in effect, elevate the church to a position of equal authority. Since God inspired the Scripture and directs the church, both will be in agreement, according to this view. The Protestant reformers, in contrast, see the church under scriptural authority rather

b. John Braun, "talk summary" from message given in Nashville, Tennessee, March 1977. These are exact quotations from a taped message. This and other unpublished material used in this paper are in our possession. They were supplied by former EOC members. When most of the material was written the name Evangelical Orthodox Church was not yet in use.

c. Dick Ballew, "Our Personal Relationship with the Lord:

than on a level equivalent to it. The EOC takes an Eastern Orthodox–Roman Catholic position on this issue.

The EOC teaches that the local church is "an outpost of the kingdom of God on earth and as such is to be governed by our reigning Lord."⁹ But how is the Lord to reign in his church? The EOC view is that the Lord reigns through a governmental system of apostles, bishops, elders, and deacons. The EOC form of church government, according to leaders Jack Sparks and Arnold Bernstein,

is orthodox Christian government in that it, of all forms of government, most closely represents that which existed in the early church. During the first three centuries the church held universally that the bishops or presbyters acted in Jesus' stead, and were invested with authority to found, establish and administer churches. They held final authority in regards to biblical interpretation, authoritative teaching, and discipline in the church.¹⁰

To support this contention, Sparks and Bernstein quote from early church fathers such statements as "we ought to regard the bishop as *we would the Lord Himself,*" and "obey the presbyters and deacons as *God and Christ.*"¹¹ Here Sparks and Bernstein teach that the church has an authority at least equivalent to Scripture, since the church's leaders are the final interpreters of Scripture, and must be *as implicitly obeyed as God himself.*

Dick Ballew develops this line of thinking further:

The Holy Spirit's ministry of speaking to His church was not limited to the time of the twelve apostles. . . .

To determine God's direction you need both the spoken and written word and both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit speaking in the church.¹²

Then he states that those who are in a special position to judge whether God is speaking in the church are its leaders, "an authority that has been appointed to serve and care for the people on the basis of what the Lord is saying through the Spirit."¹³ Pete Gillquist stresses the same thought:

Too long have we merely followed Christian principles or directives God spoke to his people *in years gone by.* [Our italics]

As believers we should *expect* to hear from God. The church responds by judging the word which is spoken, determining if it is true, and exhorting the people to obey what the Lord has said.¹⁴

Notice carefully that Scripture is what God said "in years gone by." He is just as authoritatively speaking to the church today, according to the EOC. Church members are told to "see" and "hear" what God is saying *now.* Of course, they cannot decide this on their own, but the church leaders judge whether it is the voice of God. But once decided upon, God's word to the church becomes as binding as Scripture itself.

In addition the EOC teaches that when Jesus chose the twelve apostles, he meant for their authority to continue after their death in the form of apostolic succession. But according to EOC understanding, this is not a "physical" succession such as that to which the Roman Catholic

Partakers of the Divine Nature" (notes distributed to EOC members), p. 12. The EOC concedes some are saved without baptism, but considers this abnormal.

d. An elder who recently left the EOC, reports that at a February 1979 EOC conference Ballew taught that EOC bishops now have authority to forgive or retain sins, based on John 20:23. Name of elder and date of interview on file.

more, it has led to such an emphasis on the unity of the body that the importance of the individual suffers; and it has so exalted the sacraments that they assume a magical significance. All of this is apparent in EOC teaching. The additional EOC emphasis on divine energies is overly speculative and convoluted, but such emphases are increasingly typical of the EOC leadership. As EOC leaders delve deeper into little-known teachings of ancient church fathers, they tend to become more isolated from the twentieth-century body of Christ and stamp their movement with more of an elitist mentality.

The EOC's tendency toward elitism also manifests itself internally. It appears initially as a reinstatement of the clergy-laity distinction and an adoption by the bishops of distinctive clerical garb, including robes and clerical collars. The leadership is currently giving serious consideration to the possibility of instituting a form of monasticism and introducing the practice of celibacy.³³

The most frightening side of the EOC, however, is its attempt to control members' lives. A disturbing tilt toward extremism is suggested by its demands of loyalty unto death, its attempts to replace the conscience with itself, its vehement denunciations of those who question its leadership, and its willingness to suggest marriage breakups because spouses disagree with the EOC.

The fact is that the EOC's style of religious totalism severely undercuts the biblical concept of personal righteousness. Biblically speaking, righteousness always comes down to an individual choice (act of will) between right and wrong courses of action. In contrast, the demand for total obedience to church leaders (clearly implied in EOC documents) tends to do two things: first, it reduces all righteousness to obeying church leaders; second, it reduces all sin to disobeying them. In such an atmosphere the far-reaching requirements of Scripture tend to shrink in importance, the human opinions of leaders tend to assume divine status, and the individual has little opportunity to grow toward moral and spiritual maturity.

If we look to Scripture, we find quite a different picture. The New Testament suggests nothing like the tight EOC style of hierarchical church government. Church elders were to shepherd, protect, and care for their flocks. But there is no evidence they viewed themselves as having the kind of authority which the EOC invests in its leadership. Paul writes his letters to churches as a whole, only on occasion mentioning the elders or deacons who supposedly are to be regarded in the same way we regard Christ. Paul instructs believers about every area of life—marriage, child-raising, jobs, sex, etc.—but he does not channel his instructions through elders. His letter to the Philippian church is pointedly addressed “To *all* the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, *with* the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1, emphasis added). The average believer was to make his own decisions before God in these areas. Certainly he sought the elders' advice; but they did not decide for him. As long as church members' decisions were within scriptural bounds, the New Testament is utterly silent about elders authoritatively telling church members what occupations to follow, where to live, whom to marry, etc. Shepherds should watch over sheep. But this does not mean that shepherds tell each sheep which patch of ground to occupy, how much water to drink, or otherwise dictate the details of a sheep's existence. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, for example, the Christian widow is “free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” Note she marries whom *she* wishes in the Lord, and no word is said that elders must approve which person this is, as long as he is a Christian.

In Romans 8:14 Paul says “all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.” Paul does not suggest that this leading comes through elders; the believer is directly led by the Spirit in his decisions. Of course, the New Testament church did not encourage unbridled individualism. Like a family, the members stuck close together. Like spiritual parents, the elders shepherded their flocks and offered counsel, advice, and discipline. But they could not authoritatively pronounce a church member's personal decision as being either in or out of God's will unless clear scriptural principles were involved.

Though Paul and the Twelve possessed apostolic authority, we find no persuasive evidence they passed it on to successors. The final apostolic documents in the New Testament—2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and John's writings—highly commend to us the inspired Scriptures, but are silent about any chain of authoritative apostles to whom the church should now look (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Rev. 22:18-19).

The apostolic self-image of EOC leaders, however, contrasts strongly with their view of the contemporary church. They see Christianity as a religion which is debilitated, in decline, and desperately in need of restoration—by the EOC. Pete Gillquist reports that

the Presiding Bishop's Council was together in April in Isla Vista. As the six of us interacted together, we sensed over and over again that God was saying to us, “your churches, your people are to be bridges to span the gap between modern Christianity and the ancient faith and life of the One Holy Church.”³⁴

It is also worth noting that the authority that Paul and the Twelve actually exercised was not of the type claimed by the EOC. Scripture often records the concrete application of apostolic authority, but there are very few cases in which Paul issued edicts, made demands, or applied pressure on the basis of his apostolic office. On the contrary, he seems to have sought opportunities to avoid rule by force or imposition. Speaking to the Corinthian church, he said, “We are not trying to dominate you and your faith—your faith is firm enough—but we can work with you to increase your joy” (2 Cor. 1:24, Phillips). To the Thessalonians, he wrote, “Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ . . . we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children” (1 Thess. 2:6-7). Paul's dealings with individuals embodied the same low-key approach: “Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love” (Philem. 8-9, NIV). This attitude seems to have characterized all of the apostles. Paul reasoned, pleaded, and debated with the rebellious Corinthian Christians rather than telling them that they should jump off a bridge if he told them to. Peter likewise debated with the circumcision party in Jerusalem rather than issuing an authoritative edict which could not be questioned (Acts 11). Apostolic authority in practice was moral and suasive rather than formal and coercive.

The New Testament church created no orders of the medieval type, made no Christian workers pledge to work with each other until death, and exercised very little centralized control. The first-century church resembled a family growing to maturity under the encouragement of spiritual parents, rather than an authoritarian organization ruled by a spiritual elite.

EOC church government is not built on the New Testament. Instead, it picks and chooses from various church fathers in an effort to justify its approach. Though we appreciate such church fathers and gratefully acknow-

cover all consequences for following its directives, consequences in such areas as "jobs, marriages, dating, children, finances, singles, the *control of doctrine and books, and outsiders.*"²⁴

Interviews with former members indicate that the EOC's demands for obedience can have frightening overtones. One former member, a medical doctor, wrote: "My wife was very unsympathetic to the whole thing. . . . I was told that if she would not come along I might have to leave her."²⁵ A former member in another EOC congregation, whose husband decided to leave the EOC after being in it for six years, said she was told by an elder, "I was no longer under my husband's authority, a divorce would not be my fault, and my husband was going to hell. So why should I and the children follow him?"²⁶

A midwestern housewife with marriage problems stated that the EOC leadership ordered her to move with her husband and children halfway across the country to Goleta, California. When she refused, EOC leaders "called me names, said I and my son, —, would be eternally lost, and I would experience physical death as a punishment."²⁷

Another couple with marriage problems spent two weeks in the Goleta church, but reported that they became fearful, partly because of the abusive language of the elders, including the use of four-letter words in the presence of their small child. They left the group by driving out of town late at night, in actual fear of being chased.²⁸

Three former EOC leaders in the Midwest reported that in July 1978 they became alarmed when Jon Braun illustrated the kind of obedience he wanted to characterize the EOC. Braun requested an elder to stand and then said to him, "If I told you to jump off a bridge, would you jump off a bridge?" "I would," the elder answered.²⁹

A demand of such total devotion is bound to produce defections. But because the EOC mentality is that God is currently speaking and acting through its leadership, criticism or opposition is often not considered honest disagreement, but rebellion against Christ. Presumably one way of hindering defections is through another EOC teaching, "betrayal of confidences." In a letter to the EOC elders dated 24 March 1978, Jon Braun says he wants to

make it clear that confidences to an elder are of such a nature that they must generally be "betrayed," that you fail in your duty as an elder if you fail to be a "betrayed," and that guilt is not in the "betrayal" but rather in the failure to "betray." Just in case someone feels what I am suggesting may lack integrity, let me encourage you to read John 7:2-10!

What he means here is that anything told to an elder by a member must usually be reported to all the other elders, and, if necessary, to higher EOC officials. This is possible even if the elder promises the member it will remain a confidence. The questionable basis for this is that Jesus is supposed to have legitimately deceived his own family in John 7.

The "betrayal of confidence" teaching opens the door wide, of course, to spot any critics or would-be defectors in the movement and to quickly admonish or discipline them. This does not mean the teaching is always used for such purposes, but it obviously is open to this kind of abuse.

Despite such precautions, many defections have occurred. But those who leave may suffer extreme castigation from once loyal friends. When Ray Nethery left the EOC, the organization viewed him as deceived by a younger associate and sent a letter signed by president Pete Gillquist and seventeen of its leaders to be read publicly in its churches. The letter describes Nethery's leaving as "sinful,

covenant breaking, and an offence to both God and his people." (This severe attack was leveled against Nethery even though a few months earlier the revised edition of Gillquist's book *Love Is Now* had appeared with a dedication to Ray Nethery which read, "my cherished friend, whose life is a constant manifestation of a love that really cares.") The letter identifies the source of Nethery's problem as his associate who "has demonstrated by his attitudes and actions that he is a wolf . . . self-seeking, prideful, and extremely unteachable," who "has sacrificed the church to his own ends." Then the letter announces that the Lord has given a "prophetic word" to its leaders concerning this young man which says in part:

I am the Lord God. . . . Listen to me now. Cleanse the unrighteousness from your midst. Put on your sword and I will bless you this day. . . . Do not make your relationships idols. Treat them as gifts from me. *They are not to be fondled, but to be used.* If they become unprofitable, put them away in favor of following me.³⁰

The letter concludes:

Acting upon this word we are wielding our swords in obedience to cutt off that which is unclean in our midst. Should Ray [Nethery] continue under the bondage of ———'s influence, further relationships with Ray and those associated with him will be impossible, and we will do whatever is necessary to retrieve and save the endangered sheep.³¹

Others who have left the movement have been called "disloyal," "ingrates," "takers," those with a "hardened heart that is sugar-coated with an air of false holiness."³² Their salvation may be considered in jeopardy. In many cases these are dedicated Christians whose major "sin" is refusal to submit to the EOC's control. In fact, Ray Nethery remains a respected Christian leader, his associate is currently engaged in Christian work with a respected evangelical group, and many others who have left have joined evangelical churches and gone on to lead productive lives. However, the emotional toll of sudden and utter rejection from a group to which you have devoted your whole life is difficult to grasp by those who have never experienced it. One former Goleta member sadly wrote that he went through "a long period of suffering" and that the "vacuum, despair, apathy, and despondency that accompany leaving are unimaginable."^f

Evaluation

The EOC has an initial appeal, especially to the victims of our lonely, cynical, overly individualistic, and existential culture. It caters to idealism. It seems to offer a church experience where people are cared for, watched over, and not left on their own. It emphasizes worship and liturgy. Its leaders and members on the whole are moral, honest, and sincere. But its approach represents an overreaction potentially as damaging as the ailments it seeks to heal.

Its emphasis on union with Christ's human nature, in a way too complex to explain here, overly exalts the church. This view historically has led in the direction that the church is Christ rather than what Christ indwells, thus confusing the creator-creature relationship. Further-

f. Letter from former EOC member to Dr. Ronald Enroth, 18 April 1979. When members leave, the EOC may decide to sever them from all personal relationships with other EOC members. An undated letter excommunicating a midwestern member for "rebellion" states that he should be "cut off from daily relationships" with EOC members.

Church holds, based upon the laying on of hands and a traceable historical lineage. It is rather what could be called a "spiritual" succession, in that those today who follow apostolic teaching and practices are the true successors to the twelve apostles and possess an authority parallel to the first-century apostles. Jack Sparks says that the key leaders in the EOC "certainly do have" apostolic succession.¹⁵ He also adds, "We are of the Apostolic College. Our doctrine is pure and our practice is right, and we are doing what we are told [presumably by God]."¹⁶

The EOC views itself as having parallel authority with Scripture. It sees itself as being authoritatively directed by God, especially through its small core of apostolic leaders who are among the heirs to the authority Jesus invested in the Twelve.

The Application of the Church's Authority: A Different and Disastrous Twist

It is at this point that EOC teaching takes a different, and in our opinion, disastrous twist away from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Reformation-Protestant teachings. For example, in Roman Catholicism additional revelation and official dogmas come through slow, laborious, often bureaucratic processes which still leave the average church member much latitude in behavior. Whereas authoritative guidance may come to the EOC on a weekly or even daily basis about individual details of members' lives. EOC leaders may exercise final authority concerning which legitimate occupation members should pursue, which Christian they should marry, where they should live, and other matters the Scripture is silent on. Since scriptural commands tend to be timeless and broad, while these commands are contemporary and specific, EOC leaders, on a practical level, often replace Scripture as the final authority in a member's life and may demand a submission from members which seems totalitarian. The EOC would deny that its leadership replaces scriptural authority, but evidence from its own documents indicates otherwise. In a paper entitled "How Practical Authority Works," EOC bishop Dale S. Autrey states:

As the church is paralleled with marriage, so I see separation from the church paralleled with divorce. Therefore we allow no one to join our church without the understanding that one never leaves except by one of three ways: (1) Physical death, (2) "You are sent," (3) "You are sent." Death is obvious. "You are sent" refers to God's calling one elsewhere. If he calls, the church will recognize that call and send one out with a blessing. The other "You are sent" is excommunication.¹⁷

A careful reading of Autrey's statement will show that the EOC does not recognize the validity of an individual's decision to leave the group in obedience to his conscience. Unless the church leaders permit him to leave, excommunicate him, or he dies, he is in the EOC for life. In a parallel way, the members of the NCAO (the EOC leadership) have vowed they would be faithful to the order until death. An undated letter from Pete Gillquist to NCAO members concerning the excommunication of one of its number states:

In January, 1978, the order met in Paso Robles, California . . . and the president, Peter Gillquist, called upon each member to commit himself to the order for the rest of his natural life. Each one gladly and joyfully did this with the exception of one who is no longer with the order.

While an explicit lifetime pledge is only required of bishops in the EOC, the laity is expected to acknowledge a level of commitment that is virtually equivalent. In order to make sure that church members understand the devotion they should have to the EOC, Autrey says that

a clear understanding of commitment . . . will eliminate any ground later for a Christian leaving his covering by claiming "I must follow my conscience." *This is not Biblical or justifiable grounds of operation within the Kingdom of God. If excuses like these are not eliminated before commitment, then we must be prepared for rebellion later.*¹⁸

Autrey here states the EOC teaching of surrendering the conscience. You must surrender your conscience and follow the leadership since it will normally represent God speaking. A former EOC elder in Nashville reports members were told that they should follow the leadership even if it was mistaken.¹⁹ Members of the EOC in Nashville were also asked to promise that "knowing that all human leadership is fallible . . . and will at times sin . . . , I nevertheless accept the God-ordained leadership of Apostles (or Apostolic Overseers) and Elders and with the help of God I will obey them."²⁰

Pete Gillquist admonishes those who believe "my conscience is my guide" to surrender themselves and their consciences to "Christ as He rules in His church."²¹ The EOC would vehemently deny that it replaces the conscience, claiming only that the church puts the conscience under Christ's lordship. But since Christ expresses his lordship through the church as controlled by EOC leaders, on a practical level surrendering the conscience to Christ means surrendering it to EOC leadership.^e

The logic of this conclusion is reinforced by the EOC's concept of "seeing" and "hearing" God's direction today. It is the church leaders who distinguish between authentic and spurious claims of guidance from God. The way that they discern these matters revolves around the principle of "agreement." If congregational leaders *agree unanimously* that a prophetic word or other claimed guidance from God is authentic, it will be accepted—and enforced—as such.

In his latest book, Gillquist attempts to give this very human principle some scriptural support:

Since when does one person, *all by himself*, have the authority to be the final judge of God's will? From the beginning, God instructed that by the voice of two or three witnesses shall things be established.²²

What Gillquist does not mention is that the principle as given in Scripture (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16) refers to establishing the guilt of an offender, not the will of God!

In any case, the agreement principle has unquestionably been adopted as the basis of practical authority in the EOC on a day-to-day basis. All of this amounts to quite a blank check for leaders in their ruling over members, and Autrey goes on to show that this is exactly how he understands it. "We must see that we are accountable before God for feeding and maturing our people in *all* aspects of their lives," he writes.²³ He notes that the church must

e. The EOC uses a weekly "court" as a major means of exercising authority over members. Members may either come to court with what they have "seen" or "heard" from God to receive the judgment of the elders on it; or they may be brought to court for discipline. Either way, the elders, not the members, make the final decisions. The supposed basis for the court is 1 Cor. 6:1-6.

ledge our debt to almost two thousand years of Christian tradition, we refuse to give these fathers the same authority we give to Paul; and we refuse to exalt tradition to the level of Scripture.

We therefore appeal in loving concern to the EOC leaders as Christian brothers to turn from their extreme views and practices and subject themselves to Scripture. If they continue in their present direction, we fear that they will waste their considerable talents spinning around in a back eddy instead of keeping to God's mainstream. Though they claim only to be "historic, orthodox Christians," their movement has caused serious divisions among Christians.⁹ We fear the EOC will become increasingly divisive, defensive, and elitist, with tragic disillusionment awaiting its followers.

The EOC has been less than eager to expose the full body of its beliefs to general scrutiny. Much of the group's credibility hinges upon the reputation of its leaders as men of evangelical commitment and achievement. At the same time, the EOC—by its own definition—has moved far beyond evangelical Protestantism in several important areas of doctrine; notably those dealing with apostleship, divine guidance, and the practical realities of authority and discipline in the church. Despite this widening gap, the EOC has continued to seek aid and comfort from churches and individuals within Evangelicalism who are unaware that such a divergence exists.^h In addition, publications by EOC leaders and spokesmen have not dealt candidly with their most sensitive doctrines. For these reasons, we also appeal to the EOC to "come out of the closet" and publicly acknowledge the full range of its teaching and practice. If the EOC leaders are serious about "catholicity" (as opposed to dictated uniformity), they will open themselves to disclosure, challenge, and dialogue. Secrecy and esotericism have no place in the body of Christ.

Recommendations

1. We believe that the EOC currently represents an unhealthy type of Christianity, a type which attempts to answer the extreme individualism of our day with extreme authoritarianism. We therefore recommend that Christians should not join it.

2. We recommend that Christian groups and organizations should generally not invite EOC leaders as speakers, since their extreme views may eventually generate hostility and division among the audience. Evangelical Protestant Christians should also note that the EOC leaders are really ex-Protestants who in the past have sought endorsements from evangelical Protestant leaders and opportunities to speak to evangelical Protestant audiences, while attempting to introduce an Eastern Orthodox style of theology. Those who are open to a more sacramental emphasis should note that the EOC exercise of tight control over the details of members' lives is foreign to Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Episcopal traditions. We seriously wonder if evangelicals who have endorsed EOC leaders' books would be as enthusiastic if they were fully

g. For example, EOC activities have caused serious splits in Christian churches and fellowships in Mansfield and Columbus, Ohio; Grand Junction and Nashville, Tennessee; Berkeley, California; and Sioux City, Iowa.

h. A northern California congregation of the EOC was for several years a beneficiary of the "missions" budget of a prominent, wealthy, evangelical church in a neighboring community. The relationship was terminated only after the EOC's real teachings became known to the sponsoring church as a result of its own investigation. Names of churches and individuals involved are on file.

aware of EOC teachings and practices.

3. We believe that those who are currently in the movement should feel free to make their own decision to leave it. They need not feel guilty over a failure to remain loyal unto death, since any church's expectations of such loyalty are inordinate and unscriptural. They should not fear hints that their salvation is in jeopardy or quail before "prophetic words" that they are wolves, ingrates, etc.ⁱ These are no more than the leadership's misguided and extreme efforts to maintain group loyalty. Many have already left the EOC without suffering disaster. Ultimately, "we must obey God rather than men," and if the Holy Spirit is calling us to leave, we must obey him whether or not we receive permission from the apostles, bishops, and elders of the EOC, who are, after all, only fallible human beings like ourselves. □

i. When one prominent EOC leader left because of theological disagreement with the movement, the EOC told its members and others that he was put out of the EOC for refusal to submit to church discipline over problems in his personal and family life. The EOC has difficulty accepting that anyone could disagree with it from honest conviction and frequently resorts to character attacks on those who oppose it. The fear of such attacks probably keeps a number of members in who would otherwise leave. Once in the EOC, it takes real courage to get out.

Notes

1. George Vecsey, "New Group Combines Evangelism and Orthodoxy," *New York Times*, 11 March 1979, p. 25.
2. Vecsey, "New Group," p. 25.
3. Dick Ballew, "Our Personal Relationship with the Lord: Partakers of the Divine Nature" (notes distributed to EOC members), p. 5.
4. Jon Braun, *It Ain't Gonna Reign No More* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), p. 117.
5. "The New Covenant Apostolic Order," *Again*, October-December 1978, p. 13.
6. Pete Gillquist, *The Physical Side of Being Spiritual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 73, 79. These quotes are from the galley proof and may be altered for publication.
7. Jon Braun, Nashville talk, March 1977.
8. *Ibid.* His italics.
9. "My Commitment to Jesus and His Church" (document distributed to EOC members in Nashville, Tenn.).
10. Jack Sparks and Arnold Bernstein, "A Letter from the Elders to the People of the Church which Includes CWLF," 16 July 1975.
11. *Ibid.* Our italics. The quotes are from Ignatius and Polycarp.
12. Dick Ballew, *The Place Where God Lives* (Mt. Hermon, Calif.: Conciliar Press, n.d.), p. 8.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
14. Pete Gillquist, *Fresh New Insight into Love Is Now*, p. 122. His italics. This is a revision of his earlier book, *Love Is Now*.
15. Jack Sparks, "The Apostolic College" (paper distributed to EOC elders), p. 1.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
17. Dale S. Autrey, "How Practical Authority Works in the Church" (paper sent to EOC elders), p. 2.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 3. Our italics.
19. Name of elder on file.
20. "My Commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church."
21. Gillquist, *The Physical Side*, pp. 54-55. His italics.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
23. Autrey, p. 4. His italics.
24. *Ibid.* Our italics.
25. Personal letter dated 30 January 1979.
26. Former member's name and date of interview on file.
27. Former member's name and date of interview on file.
28. Former members' names and dates of interviews on file.
29. Ex-leaders' names and dates of interviews on file.
30. Letter dated 16 January 1978. Our italics.
31. *Ibid.*
32. These phrases are taken from an undated letter of excommunication signed by Pete Gillquist.
33. Statement made by Pete Gillquist, the EOC's presiding bishop, in conversation. Name of informant and dates of interviews on file.
34. *Again*, April-June 1979, p. 2.