

A Roadmap for American Churches and People of Faith: W.W.J.D. (What Would Jesus Do?)



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CHAPTER 15. The Roadmap To Oneness In Christ.

The Failure Of Christian Leadership To Advance Oneness in Christ (“OIC”).

Before I can discuss the unity of Christ’s Church in my Roadmap, it is imperative to start by focusing on the ultimate objective of life, namely theosis and Oneness in Christ. Jesus Christ offered this, and St. Paul implored the Galatians (and, by extension, you and me) to accept this unifying offer. To achieve this lofty end, we must ignore the trivial ethnicity, status, gender, and other dividing distinctions and instead focus on **Oneness In Christ (“OIC”)**. In this way, we fulfill Moses’s explanation in Genesis that the origins of being one with each other and one with all humanity whom They created.

OIC is the foundation of the challenge now that Christ’s Church in modernity stands fractured, divided, arguing with each other, and moving farther away from OIC, demonstrating a leadership failure. Yes, I again repeat that every church problem is a leadership problem. Holy Scripture answers how to achieve OIC.

After examining the current OIC leadership chasm, a very high-level exegetical inner texture analysis provides a way back to the Light and Christ’s Great Commission “*to make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28-19). Using as my motivation the 1917 Balfour Declaration (providing a roadmap for a 31-year journey to create the country of Israel) (Gold, 2017; Vereté, 1970) and President Kennedy’s 1962 “moon shot” declaration (that the U.S. would land on the moon within the decade) (Kennedy, 1962) I will propose a possible Roadmap that might help achieve the unimaginable.

I respectfully submit that Christian leaders (including me) have failed to fulfill a fundamental promise of God and Christ that we are all one. Moses first explained this reality in the creation story, which Christ amplified in His final prayers with the Apostles, and St. Paul repeated to the Galatians and others. Yet, as we explore Christ’s Church in America today, **we are many in division and weakness rather than one in unity and strength**. Those who claim to be Christian leaders must confess our failure and cure this departure from the “**Oneness In Christ**” (OIC) given to us by our Creator and Savior.

Spoiler Alert: As you will read below: “I do not accept as righteous the continued emphasis on religious differences and the desire to prove that one faith is ‘more right’ and ‘more authentically Christian’ than another, thus demanding conformity to all your beliefs and customs.” I choose the path of “**respectful affiliation rather than absolute subjugation**” because I believe this is what Christ meant in his commandment of love, his prayer for Oneness, and how the Apostles formed and practiced Christ’s Church from the beginning (as evidenced by the Council of Jerusalem).

Let me be clear. **I do not feel the need to be right with all men, but I very much want to be right with God and Christ!** Indeed, in the section below entitled “**The House of God,**” I will introduce a metaphor to hopefully help you reimagine the way you think about your Christian faith and the different divided Denominations and Jurisdictions through the lens of OIC that is based on what I call “**Foundational Christian Truths.**” Please do not read ahead and allow me to build the case first.

The OIC Promise.

St. Paul made OIC clear by saying, “*You are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28) (the “**OIC Promise**”). This OIC Promise is reiterated in Christian baptismal services because St. Paul explicitly stated: “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). Putting something on makes a statement about you; however, having something in you defines you.

Jesus Christ placed divinity in each of us. St. John poignantly describes the Lord’s prayer for us “*...that they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us... that they may be one just as We are one*” (John 17:21-22). St. Paul affirmed this reality after being blinded by the Light of the Lord to see clearly: “*I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). Imagine what it means for God and Christ to be in you and all of us together as one. Living and teaching this is the duty of Christian leaders, the failure of which you should lament.

OIC is not a leadership challenge new to modernity. The Apostles faced it repeatedly in the nascent Christian Church. In the 49 AD Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), they wrestled with and resolved the circumcision and other controversies threatening to divide Christ’s Church through a conciliar process of consensus. This led to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (Paroschi, 2018). Centuries later, issues such as the Nicene Creed were resolved at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and further clarified in 381 AD at the First Council of Constantinople (Marianes, 2023). Unified Christians eventually agreed we were: “*Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν*” (“One, holy, catholic, and apostolic church”). The added emphasis on the word one underscores our early Christian leader’s consensus confirmation of OIC. So, where, when, and how did we get off track?

The OIC Leadership Failure Confession And Challenge.

Admitting failure is difficult, especially for leaders (Gollwitzer et al., 1982). Accusing others of failure is popular because research proves accusers with some culpabilities are evaluated more favorably when they point out the shortcomings of others (i.e., accusation effect) (Rucker & Pratkanis, 2001). I refuse the projection benefit of this accusation effect and instead claim full responsibility for my sin of OIC omission.

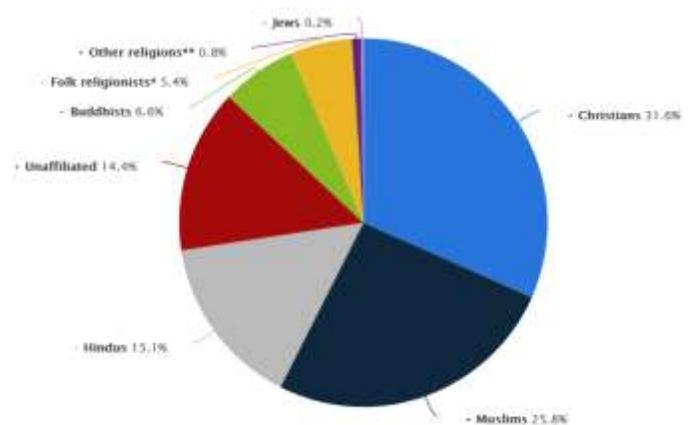
If you are a Christian, what do you say when asked to which Church you belong? Is it the faith tradition in which you were baptized, a later one you embraced, or the Church most convenient for your current lifestyle? Or do you claim OIC as a member of Jesus Christ's Church? Are you leading people to OIC or instead to your current Church, parish, jurisdiction, faith, congregation, religious group, or tradition (i.e., Denomination)?

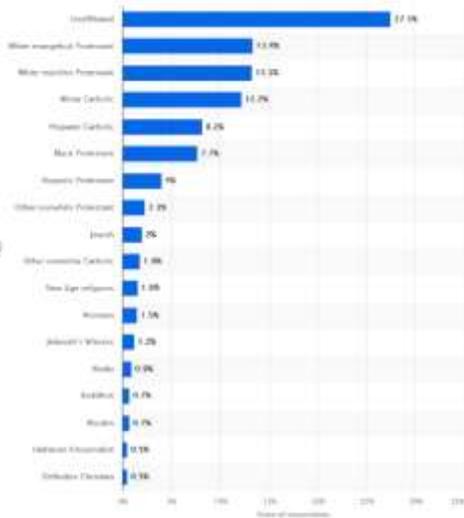
There is nothing wrong with celebrating whatever heritage/traditions you inherited from birth or embraced later in life. If you are courageous enough to read on, your challenge is to reflect on whether what you do and say promotes the righteous theological tradition of OIC or something less. For those now thinking your Denomination is OIC (to the exclusion of others), please note your confirmation biases and consider if you are genuinely practicing OIC. As much criticism as I expect to receive (including from some in my Denomination), these three OIC Roadmap Chapters 15, 16, and 17 advance my thesis that **Christian leaders must become OIC Disciples ("OICD") rather than merely Denominational Disciples ("DD")**.

The OIC Leadership Failure Data.

Lexicographers reduce the negativity associated with DD by defining a Denomination as "a religious group that has slightly (emphasis added) different beliefs from other groups that share the same religion" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). By introducing the undefinable term "slightly," the absence of OIC is admitted. One cannot be "slightly" different but "one."

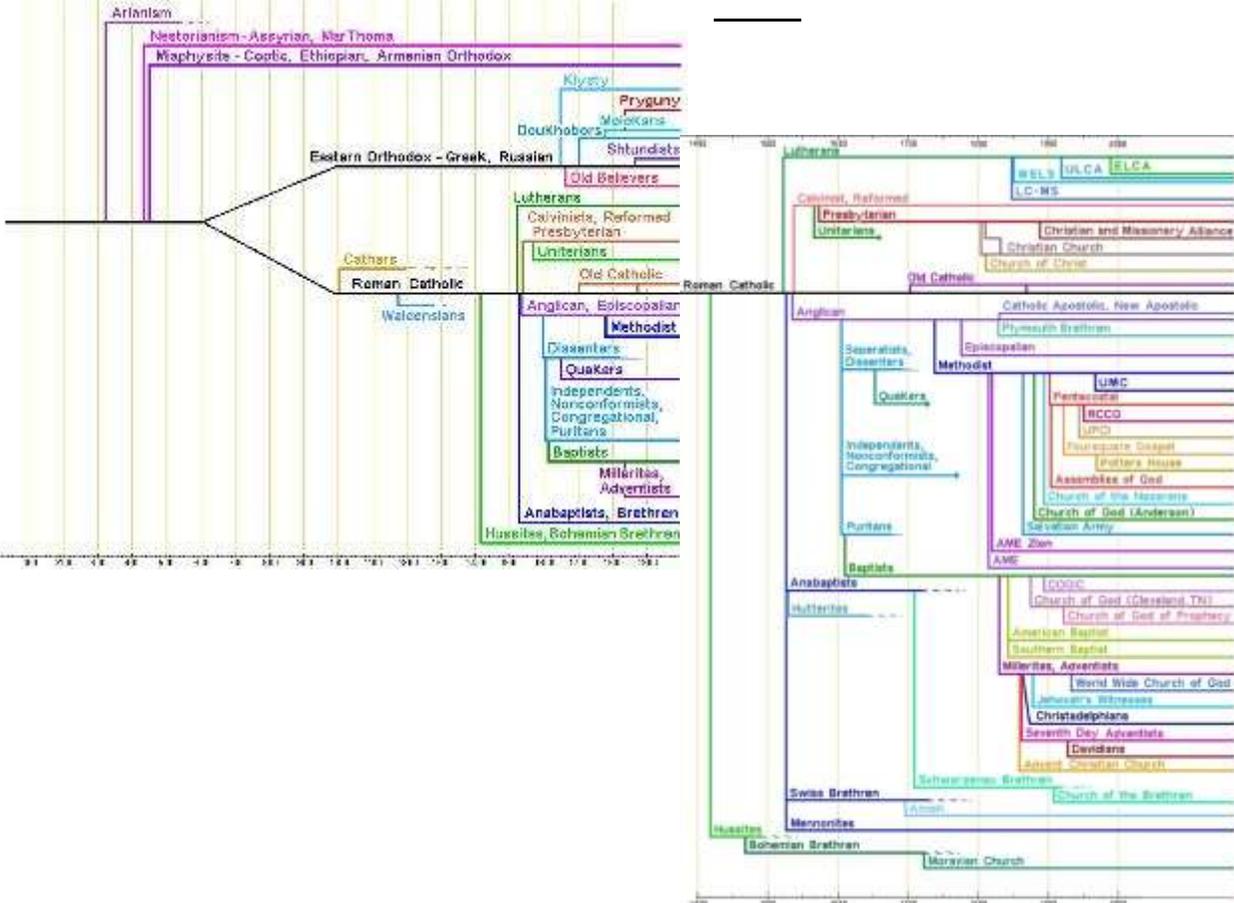
Following W. Edwards Deming, who insisted, "In God we trust, all others must bring data" (Oxford Essential Quotations, 2018), in 2010, Christians comprised 31.4% of the global population, which is projected to remain unchanged through 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Christianity is not growing, is not becoming more focused on OIC, and is unsuccessful in making "*disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). The chart to the right depicts global religious beliefs as of 2022 (Galan, 2025). Indeed, the massive division of global Christianity is proven by the existence of over 30,000 Denominations (Noll, 2002), growing to 45,000 Denominations (Coffey, 2022).





The absence of OIC and OICD is not merely a global phenomenon. The chart to the left manifests the massive division that exists in the 2022 Christian church in America (Korhonen, 2025). This clear consensus of massive division is reconfirmed by countless mainstream empirical researchers, including Olson (2008), Zubkov (2010), Lindner (2012), Pew Research Center (2015b), Public Religion Research Institute (2023), List of Christian Denominations (2024), among many others. Indeed, Damick (2017) and Wax (2020) summarize the major tenants and differences of the vast numbers of divided Christian Denominations in the U.S.

The following (incomplete) diagram graphically depicts the dissent from one Christian Church to a divided Denominational explosion (Rollison, 2023).



| | % of U.S. Adult Population | | % of U.S. Adult Population | | % of U.S. Adult Population |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Evangelical Protestant Churches | 26.2 | Mainline Protestant Churches | 18.1 | Jehovah's Witness | 0.7 |
| Baptist in the Evangelical Tradition | 16.9 | Baptist in the Mainline Tradition | 1.8 | Orthodox | 0.8 |
| Southern Baptist Convention | 6.7 | American Baptist Churches in USA | 1.2 | Greek Orthodox | +0.3 |
| Independent Baptist in the Evangelical Tradition | 2.9 | Other Baptist denomination in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Russian Orthodox | +0.2 |
| Baptist Missionary Association | +0.3 | Baptist in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | 0.8 | Other Orthodox church | +0.2 |
| Free Will Baptists | +0.2 | Methodist in the Mainline Tradition | 5.4 | Orthodox, not further specified | +0.2 |
| General Association of Regular Baptists | +0.2 | United Methodist Church | 3.1 | Other Christian | 0.3 |
| Other Baptist denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Other Methodist denomination in the Mainline Tradition | +0.3 | Metaphysical | +0.2 |
| Baptist in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | 6.9 | Methodist in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | 0.4 | Spiritualist | +0.2 |
| Methodist in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Nondenominational in the Mainline Tradition | 0.9 | Unity, Unity Church, Christ Church Unity | +0.2 |
| Nondenominational in the Evangelical Tradition | 2.4 | Interdenominational in the Mainline Tradition | 0.2 | Other Metaphysical | +0.2 |
| Nondenominational evangelical | 1.2 | Other nondenominational group in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Other | +0.2 |
| Nondenominational charismatic | 0.5 | Nondenominational in the Mainline Trad., not further specified | 0.6 | Jewish | 1.7 |
| Nondenominational fundamentalist | 0.3 | Lutheran in the Mainline Tradition | 2.6 | Reform | 0.7 |
| Nondenominational Christian | +0.3 | Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) | 3.8 | Conservative | 0.6 |
| Interdenominational in the Evangelical Tradition | 0.5 | Other Lutheran denomination in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Orthodox | +0.2 |
| Community Church in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Lutheran in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | 0.8 | Other Jewish groups | +0.2 |
| Other nondenominational group in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Presbyterian in the Mainline Tradition | 1.8 | Jewish, not further specified | +0.2 |
| Nondenominational in the Evang. Trad., not further specified | 5.8 | Presbyterian Church USA | 1.1 | Buddhist | 0.7 |
| Lutheran in the Evangelical Tradition | 1.8 | Other Presbyterian denomination in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Theravada (Vipassana) Buddhism | +0.2 |
| Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod | 1.4 | Presbyterian in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | 0.7 | Mahayana (Zen) Buddhism | +0.2 |
| Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Synod | +0.2 | Anglican/Episcopal in the Mainline Tradition | 1.4 | Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism | +0.2 |
| Other Lutheran denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Episcopal Church in the USA | 1.0 | Other Buddhist groups | +0.2 |
| Lutheran in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Anglican Church (Church of England) | 0.3 | Buddhist, not further specified | 0.3 |
| Presbyterian in the Evangelical Tradition | 0.9 | Other Anglican/Episcopal denomination in the Mainline Trad. | +0.2 | Muslim* | 0.6 |
| Presbyterian Church in America | 0.4 | Anglican/Episcopal in the Mainline Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | Same | 0.2 |
| Other Presbyterian denominations in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Restorationist in the Mainline Tradition | 0.4 | Shia | +0.2 |
| Presbyterian in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Restorationist in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Other Muslim groups | +0.2 |
| Pentecostal in the Evangelical Tradition | 3.4 | Congregationalist in the Mainline Tradition | 0.7 | Muslim, not further specified | +0.2 |
| Assemblies of God | 1.4 | United Church of Christ | 0.8 | Hindu | 0.4 |
| Church of God (Cleveland/Tennessee) | 0.4 | Congregationalist in the Mainline Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | Vaishnava Hinduism | +0.2 |
| Four Square Gospel | +0.2 | Reformed in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Shakti Hinduism | +0.2 |
| Pentecostal Church of God | +0.2 | Reformed in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Other Hindu groups | +0.2 |
| Pentecostal Holiness Church | +0.2 | Anglican/Episcopal in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Hindu, not further specified | +0.2 |
| Nondenominational, Independent Pentecostal | +0.2 | Other Reformed denomination in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Other World Religions | +0.2 |
| Church of God of the Apostolic Faith | +0.2 | Reformed in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Other Faiths | 1.2 |
| Apostolic Pentecostal in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Assemblies in the Mainline Tradition | +0.2 | Unitarians and other liberal faiths | 0.7 |
| Other Pentecostal denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Assemblies in the Mainline Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Unitarian (Universalist) | 0.2 |
| Pentecostal in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | 0.7 | Other/Protestant nonspecific in the Mainline Tradition | 2.1 | Liberal faiths | +0.2 |
| Anglican/Episcopal in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Historically Black Churches | 0.9 | Spiritual but not religious | +0.2 |
| Restorationist in the Evangelical Tradition | 1.7 | Baptist in the Historically Black Tradition | 4.4 | Eclectic, "a bit of everything" own beliefs | +0.2 |
| Church of Christ | 1.5 | National Baptist Convention | 1.8 | Other liberal faith groups | +0.2 |
| Christian Churches and Churches of Christ | +0.2 | Progressive Baptist Convention | 0.3 | New Age | 0.4 |
| Restorationist in the Evangelical Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | Independent Baptist in the Historically Black Tradition | 0.5 | Wicca (Wiccan) | +0.2 |
| Congregationalist in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Missionary Baptist | 0.2 | Pagan | +0.2 |
| Conservative Congregational Christian | +0.2 | Other Baptist denomination in the Historically Black Tradition | +0.2 | Other New Age groups | +0.2 |
| Other Congregationalist denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Baptist in the Historically Black Tradition, not further specified | 1.7 | Native American Religions | +0.2 |
| Congregationalist in the Evangelical Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | Methodist in the Historically Black Tradition | 0.6 | Unaffiliated | 16.1 |
| Holiness in the Evangelical Tradition | 1.9 | African Methodist Episcopal | 0.4 | Atheist | 1.6 |
| Church of the Nazarene | 0.3 | African Methodist Episcopal Zion | +0.2 | Agnostic | 1.4 |
| Free Methodist Church | 0.3 | Christian Methodist Episcopal Church | +0.2 | Nothing in particular | 11.1 |
| Wesleyan Church | +0.2 | Other Methodist denomination in the Historically Black Trad. | +0.2 | Don't Know | 0.8 |
| Christian and Missionary Alliance | +0.2 | Methodist in the Historically Black Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | | |
| Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) | +0.2 | Nondenominational in the Historically Black Tradition | +0.2 | | |
| Other Holiness denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Pentecostal in the Historically Black Tradition | 0.9 | | |
| Holiness in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Church of God in Christ | 0.6 | | |
| Reformed in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Apostolic Pentecostal in the Historically Black Tradition | +0.2 | | |
| Christian Reformed Church | +0.2 | United Pentecostal Church International | +0.2 | | |
| Other Reformed denomination in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Other Pentecostal denomination in the Historically Black Trad. | +0.2 | | |
| Reformed in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Pentecostal in the Historically Black Trad., not further specified | +0.2 | | |
| Adventist in the Evangelical Tradition | 0.5 | Holiness in the Historically Black Tradition | +0.2 | | |
| Seventh Day Adventist | 0.4 | Protestant nonspecific in the Historically Black Tradition | 0.5 | | |
| Other Adventist group in the Evangelical Tradition | +0.2 | Catholic | 23.9 | | |
| Adventist in the Evangelical Tradition, not further specified | +0.2 | Mormon | 1.7 | | |
| Platist in the Evangelical Tradition | 0.3 | Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints | 1.6 | | |
| Other Evangelical/Fundamentalist | +0.2 | Community of Christ | +0.2 | | |
| Protestant nonspecific in the Evangelical Tradition | 1.9 | Mormon, not further specified | +0.2 | | |

(Source: Pew Research Center, 2008)

When analyzing various Protestant, Roman Catholic Orthodox, and other Denominations, the lack of OIC becomes palpable, and the emphasis on DD is evident. The data all point to the absence of OIC, highlighting the many U.S. Christian subdivisions that prove we are not the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed).

Time Is Even More Critical In The American Orthosphere.

The problematic Christian OIC data is, in many cases, worse in the American Orthosphere. For example, empirical research shows that:

(a) 47% of the adults raised in the Orthodox Church in America have left it (Pew Research Center, 2015);

(b) 39% of American “Millennials” (born between 1981 and 1996) are “NONEs” and repudiate the Church of their upbringing and now claim NO religious affiliation (Barna Group, 2019; Lipka, 2015);

(c) 64% of youth with a Christian background in 2019 dropped out of Church at some point during their 20's (up from 59% in 2011) (Barna Group, 2019).;

(d) only 26% of Orthodox adherents regularly attend church services (which is only 21% in my Greek Orthodox Church) (Krindatch, 2010);

(e) my statistically significant surveys of **Parishioners In Pews** (“PIPs”) throughout the American Orthosphere report that approximately 70% to 80% of the time, their minds are wandering during the Orthodox Divine Liturgy (other than during the Sermily when the priest is looking at them);

(f) Based on the Stewardship Calling Financial Stewardship Analysis of over 275 American Orthosphere parishes, 99% of Orthodox churches are dependent on ethnic food festivals, property rentals, and other third-party income to survive because, on average, Orthodox Christians only give 0.5% to 0.8% of their income to their churches rather than a 10% tithe;

(g) As the American Orthosphere census data outline demonstrates, there has been an approximately 16.7% decline in the number of reported Orthodox faithful (including all cradle Orthodox and converts) in the decade ending 2020 (Krindatch, 2020).

I could present more empirical and statistical evidence of the crisis facing the American Orthosphere Jurisdictions or other Christian Denominations and parishes; however, the trends, declines, and challenges are accelerating rapidly with each passing year. Is this a “good account” for you to preside over churches that are significantly declining in numbers of faithful, relevance, impact, and services primarily due to the inefficiencies of being divided?

All theological sources, directions of our Bishops, and current operational situation point toward the need for a meaningful change. Not a change in the timeless theology of Christianity that has been present since our Lord founded His Church. However, we need a fundamental shift in the Vision of how we operate and a roadmap to help address the above challenges by providing sound data and research, best practices, and synergistic and combined resources and solutions. I pray this Roadmap offers such support.

Abbreviated High-Level Socio-Rhetorical Inner Texture Exegetical Analysis.

Given the dissent from one unified Church founded by Christ to the divided, fragmented, and constantly further-subdividing 200+ Denominations in the U.S. and 45,000+ Denominations globally, the data exhibit a failure of Christian leadership in maintaining OIC. This leadership failure is explained by Case's and Maner's (2014) experiments confirming division results from the poor leadership of those seeking to maintain their power and authority.

This divisive leadership stands in stark contrast to the unifying OIC Servant Leadership offered by Christ (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977; Patterson, 2003). Exploring the God-inspired Holy Scripture provides an insightful transition to a solution. Understanding Holy Scripture's complexity is possible through the Holy Spirit's presence (Kennedy, 1999). The socio-rhetorical processes of Robbins (1996) and Henson et al. (2020) provide templates to appreciate Holy Scripture "textures better."

OIC is possible because Christ modeled Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, and Transformational Leadership (Dixon, 2021; Northouse, 2022). This analysis will focus on St. Paul's Transformational Leadership (TL) in Galatians 3:27-28, with support from John 17:21-22 and Genesis 1:26 (collectively, the "OIC Promise") by applying Henson et al.'s (2020) socio-rhetorical Inner Texture six-category approach. Conducting a proper inner texture analysis of such short pericopes is inadequate. Thus, while not a complete exegetical analysis, an abbreviated summary of a few highlights illustrates the point I wish to make.

1. Textual Units

Instead of traditional paragraphs and punctuation, ancient writers used themes and narrational units to shift focus and understanding (Henson et al., 2020, p. 84). The OIC Promise theme moves readers from the creational understanding of humans as children of God (Genesis 1:26) to the imagery of their connection through baptism in an intimate and personal way (Allen et al., 2008, p. 1593).

2. Repetitive Patterns

Because of few educational texts/tools, ancient writers taught through repetition (Henson et al., 2020, p. 86-88). The OIC Promise texts repeat Oneness from Genesis 1:26 with God's identification as Creator/Father by using the plural "Us" to teach the Holy Trinity's (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) unified omnipresence from the beginning that connects everyone as a family (Allen et al., 2008, p. 5). St. John repeats the description explaining how God is in Christ, and He is in His followers (John 17:21). The repetition continues through St. Paul's promise that through baptism, we put "on" Christ and the OIC is complete (Galatians 3:27).

3. Progressive Patterns

The progressive pattern of inner textures uses the techniques of chiasm, encapsulation, development, and connection (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). Focusing on chiasm with a resolution in the middle (Henson et al., 2020, p. 89), the OIC Promise offers a critical, perhaps shocking revelation in the middle. The Galatians are challenged, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female*" (Galatians 3:28). This pericope has been quoted/misquoted as modernity continues its predictable pursuit of division vs. OIC. However, St. Paul clearly states our external differences have no place in Christ's Church, where "All are one in nature, and so all are equal in dignity" (Allen et al., 2008, p. 1593).

4. Open-Middle-Closing Patterns

This pattern focuses on a plot with a beginning, middle crisis, and final solution/denouement (Henson et al., 2020, p. 92). The OIC Promise begins by identifying

everyone as “*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26), followed by the challenge of differences in ethnicity (Jew vs. Greek), freedom (slave vs. free), and gender (male vs. female) (Galatians 3:28).

Baptism is the solution through which everyone can “*put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27) that leads to the final salvific restoration/connection to the Torah (Old Testament) “*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (Galatians 3:29). This promise of connection between God and His creation is celebrated in Orthodox and other Christian church baptisms (Allen et al, 2008, p. 1593).

5. Argumentative Patterns

This element exposes the author’s thesis, rationale, and examples leading to a conclusion (Henson et al., 2020, p. 93; Robbins, 1996). St. Paul begins the Oneness with God (Galatians 3:26) to use the journey through baptism to bring us OIC (Galatians 3:27), tearing down the external trappings of our different status/national origins/genders (Galatians 3:28) to unite everyone as one just as we began our journey when the Holy Trinity created us (Genesis 1:26; Galatians 3:29).

6. Sensory-Aesthetic Patterns

This final element uses sensory/self-expressive feelings to expose the author’s intent (Henson et al., 2020, p. 94; Robbins, 1996). St. Paul connects OIC with “*Abraham’s seed*” (Galatians 3:29). St. John’s recitation of Christ’s prayer invokes the aesthetics of three examples of two becoming one (God in Christ, Christ in us, and all of us in God) (John 17:21). This unmistakable sensory element of our creation (Genesis 1:26) outlines the OIC Promise objective explaining our life’s journey brings us full circle to our Father/Creator who exists in us (Allen et al, 2008, p. 1459).

The OIC Leadership Failure Premise.

This above highly abbreviated partial OIC Promise inner texture exegetical analysis leads us to briefly examine why our leadership failures allow **Oneness In Christ Discipleship (OICD)** to be replaced by **Denominational Discipleship (DD)**. Insightfully, Hauerwas (1980) concluded Christians must first acknowledge the divisions and differences in our churches mirrored in our currently divided world (p. 59).

Thus, like all “12-step programs,” our Lord desires us to take the first leadership step to overcome our division by acknowledging and admitting we are missing OIC. Many treatises have chronicled the countless divisions in Christ’s Church. Others try to justify why their Denomination is more authentic or righteous. Perhaps they might acknowledge their DD advocacy is the antithesis of the OIC the Lord taught and sacrificed his life to achieve.

I am acutely aware of the consequences of announcing, “The emperor has no clothes” (Anderson, 1837) and antagonizing the “Group Think” comfort provided by the psychological drive for consensus that stifles disagreements (Janis, 1972). However, each leader defending their Denomination’s correctness by explaining why another disciple of Christ is wrong tears at the fabric of the Lord’s OIC.

The OIC Promise requires us to love one another, acknowledge our differences, and work to achieve salvific unification with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and each other. Christ's final "commandment" that everyone must "*love one another*" was modeled when the Lord was crucified for all humanity (John 13:34-35). This pronouncement challenged the Apostles since they believed only God could issue "commandments," thus defining who Christ was. When this Love Commandment is combined with the OIC Promise, DD must give way to OICD.

Risking ostracism or ex-communication (as has been the consequence in the past within the Orthodox faith when non-traditional arguments are advanced) (Helmholz, 1982), I call upon over 40 years as a mergers, acquisitions, and outsourcing lawyer to identify eight reasons that consolidation/combinations/mergers frequently fail (Marianes, 2023):

1. No real reason and sense of urgency to combine,
2. Absence of a formal deadline,
3. The timing is not optimal,
4. Lack of commitment by the required stakeholders,
5. "Friendly Fire" usually in the form of internal people (i.e., DD) trying to protect their turf, positions, identity, authority, agendas, financial situations, etc.,
6. External forces who fear the impact of consolidation,
7. Lack of the requisite resources, experienced and dedicated leaders, and teams charged with accomplishing the consolidation,
8. It is demanding work.

Countless treatises identified reasons mergers/combinations fail (Bekier et al., 2001; Faelten & Driessen, 2016; Freund, 1975; Koi-Akrofi, 2016). Fewer treatises tackle the Christian thorny (pun intended) challenge of cross-Denominational mergers/consolidations (Pietrylo, 2018; Simmons, 1996; Tomberlin & Bird, 2020). The presumptuous attempt in my Roadmap to briefly outline a future vision of American OIC is offered with great humility and sincerity.

Christ's House – Foreshadowing The Roadmap To Christian Unity.

Before I provide you with my **Christ's House** metaphor, which I believe can lead to OIC, let me respond to my critics, who will rightfully allege I am not a theologian. This is why, on theological issues, I turn to experts for guidance. I was struck by St. Paul's instructions to the Romans, where he chastised them for "virtue signaling" when they condemned those claiming to be Christians who did not fast or eat like them. His bold words to them (and us) were:

*Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over **doubtful things**...Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he*

stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand (Romans 14:1, 11).

The indictment not to judge is palpable and enlightening. The words “**doubtful things**” are footnoted in the Orthodox Study Bible with the following instructive teaching:

In Orthodox Christianity, there are things that cannot be compromised, and there are areas of flexibility. God is gracious and allows diversity in “**doubtful things**” (verse 1), matters not related to “**essential doctrines**” and moral teachings. The “weak in faith” (verse 1) are people who assign primary importance to secondary matters. The two examples of flexible areas here involve food restrictions (verse 2) and the calendar (verse 5), things which the weak try to use to judge others or to divide the Church. In both cases, we are commanded to give flexibility to others, just as God Himself does (verse 3) (*Orthodox Study Bible*, 2008, p. 1545)

So, to my Denominational Disciple (DD) brothers and sisters, I say, **προσκυνέω** (let us attend) and pay attention to the wisdom in the above guidance from the Orthodox Study Bible. I urge you to take to heart the teachings of God, Moses, Christ, St. Paul, and the Orthodox Study Bible. Who are any of us to judge the Christian discipleship beliefs of others? This leaves us first to discuss and prayerfully discern those “**essential doctrines**.” To that end, in the spirit of OIC, I humbly offer the following **Christ’s House** metaphor.

“Christ’s House” Metaphor.

I believe the puzzle of a divided Christian church might be analyzed through the lens of a metaphor of a house. Every house in America (no matter what it looks like or where it is built) must have a solid and similar foundation. Most of the time, it is some form of concrete or other reinforced material that can withstand the weight of the house to be built on it and the natural elements, including wind, rain, and erosion. Occasionally, houses are built on extremely solid and densely packed earth or stilts. However, time has repeatedly proven that any foundational substance other than concrete is not as stable and cannot easily withstand the test of time.

Indeed, the National Association of Home Builders found that nearly 75% of all houses in the United States are built on concrete slab foundations, with another 18% or so built over basements that, in turn, have concrete foundations (National Association of Home Builders, 2024). The fact that less than 10% of U.S. houses are not supported by concrete foundations tells us everything we need to know about building something on solid footing in the U.S. (I leave the amazing Pyramids to building differences in Egypt.)

Additionally, in the U.S., 92% of houses are wood framed, with the other 7% being concrete framed and the remainder steel framed (National Association of Home Builders, 2024). However, what goes over the wood (or other) framing, how big the house is, how many bedrooms and bathrooms, common areas, dining rooms, kitchens, colors, utilities, appliances, and endless other details differ so widely that, for the most part, one house

looks nothing like the other. This is increasingly true even in planned seniors' communities with set model styles but widely differing insides.

Regardless of the exterior and interior covering and house size and composition variables, the interior decorations vary 100% in every house. Also varying widely are the various traditions and rituals practiced by the people who live in those houses, the languages they speak, the foods they eat, the beliefs of the inhabitants, and countless other traditions. So, while the foundation and framing elements are almost entirely uniform, everything else varies from house to house. Yet we still call all of them houses.

Foundational Christian Truths.

So, what does construction data have to do with Christian unity and OIC? What if the foundation represented the most critical core elements (the “**essential doctrines**” referred to in the OSB) that we would need to be genuinely called Christians? I call these essential doctrines “**Foundational Christian Truths**” and submit they would inevitably include at least the following:

1. **God is one eternal being in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).**
2. **The three persons of God are exactly who They say They are.**
3. **Jesus Christ (God the Son) took a human form, lived on the earth, was crucified and died for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into the Kingdom Eternal.**
4. **The Holy Spirit was given to us to help us live righteously.**
5. **The Holy Scripture is God’s inspired word, which was written by humans and reveals Christ.**
6. **We are called to practice Christ’s commandment to love God and each other.**
7. **Salvation is a gift from God, received by faith and lived out through love and righteous conduct.**
8. **Christ will return to renew and reunite all of creation.**
9. **_____...**

Notice that **Foundational Christian Truth #5** acknowledges the Bible as God’s inspired word but does not go so far as to say that only one language and linguistic interpretation is the only truth. Language is man-made, varies from place to place and even from time to time, and has some fluidity and interpretive differences. New words are constantly added to our dictionaries, and definitions are always subject to change. A soft drink (regardless of brand) may be called a soda in Boston, pop in the Midwest, or a Coke in the Southeast. But irrespective of its brand name, it is still a soft drink. Yet, as

Dr. Russell Huizing explains, the aggregate mosaic of all pieces of Holy Scripture reveals the truth that is Christ.

I leave a **Foundational Christian Truth #9** empty with an ellipsis to signal openness for reasonable discussion of added Foundational Christian Truths. I submit that the teachings of Christ and Holy Scripture, plus the decisions of those universally recognized Ecumenical Councils, support the above items. I am confident that the DDs reading will want to load up the list of Foundational Christian Truths with their detailed beliefs, rituals, traditions, and insistence on perfect adherence to their views to be called a Disciple of Christ. This is the behavior that has gotten us to the House Divided that Christianity represents today. We must stop this unproductive and divisive approach that unravels rather than unites. I recommend **respectful affiliation rather than absolute subjugation**.

Allow me to propose that the best question is: what are the non-negotiable Foundational Christian Truths that define a Christian versus the secondary stylistic manifestations that were NOT mandated by Christ and were instead created and imposed by men? If the Foundational Christian Truths represent the required concrete foundation present in God's house, can you righteously say that a person who speaks a different language practices a different custom, fasts differently, likes performing a unique ritual (not inconsistent with Foundational Christian Truths) is any less (or more) of a Christian than you? If you believe they are not Christians because they do not do precisely every man-made rule you follow, then how are you different from those in the First Ecumenical Council who were defeated notwithstanding their insistence that the ritual of circumcision (not mandated by Christ) was required to be a Disciple of Christ.

I love rituals and traditions as much or more than the next person. And I have come to appreciate most (although not all) of the rituals and traditions of my Greek Orthodox Church. However, as an Orthodox seminary distinguished professor confirmed to all the Orthodox Bishops, man-made lowercase "t" traditions and lowercase "p" practices have changed over time depending on the circumstances and place and were not mandated by Christ. Thus, perhaps, they are not foundational to being a Disciple of Christ.

In fact, Christ made clear in John 13:34-35 that we would be known as His disciples if we had love for one another. He didn't mention using incense or speaking only Greek, bowing, genuflecting, crossing ourselves, singing, chanting, not using guitars, and on and on for all the things that DDs cite to divide OIC (and many of which I choose to do, without judging others who do not).

I know some of my Christian friends from various denominations will want to challenge me on this. Some of my Denomination will insist that unless you do everything exactly like is done in American Greek Orthodox churches today, you are schismatic, a heretic, charlatan, apostate, heterodox, not a "real" Christian (and a few more invectives I have heard used by supposedly holy people). Please let me challenge my brothers and sisters with a few questions.

When the Ottoman Turks invaded Greece and banned religion, forcing the Greek Orthodox faithful to perform secret services and religious education in caves (as featured

on the old two Drachma currency in Greece), were they no longer Christians? Their Church, services, rituals, and practices looked nothing like yours do today. But I would advise you to be cautious about challenging their discipleship or piety. Indeed, perhaps we should add to the Foundational Christian Truth list NOT sitting in judgment of others as directed by Romans 14:11.

If one group wants to follow a Patriarch in Antioch and another in Rome, so be it. If a group following the Foundational Christian Truths wants one language and a particular type of service, while a different House of God wants a different language or ritual, how does that violate the OIC our Lord prayed for us at the end of His life? The early Church proved this is not a problem. The Gentile Church in Corinth was different from the Jewish Church in Jerusalem. But they were both ONE body in Christ regardless of their various practices. What else can St. Paul be telling us in Galatians 3:28? Indeed, the Orthodox Study Bible footnote for this passage specifically teaches:

We share one human nature in Christ. Therefore, valuing people based on opinions and ethnicity (neither Jew nor Greek), pride and social status (neither slave nor free), or gender (neither male nor female) has no place in the Church. All are one in nature, and so all are equal in dignity (p. 1593).

Before you stop reading and anathematize me, please prayerfully consider what it means for us ALL to be One In Christ and why you feel the need to declare anyone else not worthy of the title "Disciple." If this sinful and unworthy servant is ever permitted into the Kingdom Eternal with Christ, I want to meet the penitent thief on the cross who committed such sins that he merited death by crucifixion. And yet, he was saved by our Lord's Grace. I do not know for sure, but I am reasonably confident he never attended a Roman Catholic Mass or Orthodox Divine Liturgy and probably failed to "properly" fast or participate in the sacraments. And yet, Christ saved him and allowed him to be the first to enter the Kingdom Eternal with Him.

After the horrible schism in 1054 AD, no one thought unity was possible ever again. Then, many centuries later, two men, a Pope and an Ecumenical Patriarch, changed their minds and lifted the respective man-made ex-communications. When the Oriental Orthodox men had different interpretations of the nature of Christ from the other Eastern Orthodox men, there was also a disagreement between men and not Christ. And now, centuries later, those man-made divisions have primarily been reconciled.

If you look at all the differences in the world, it was because men intervened, came up with their interpretations or practices, and were willing to divide Christ's Church to prove they were right. I find that completely an anathema to Oneness In Christ. And I am ashamed of the arrogance and lack of humility it shows when looking at anyone else who believes in Christ, embraces the Foundational Christian Truths, and declares that person any less of a Disciple of Christ. (By the way, I am not picking only on the male gender, as I suspect females have had their moments of schism. I am merely identifying humans as the source of all division and acknowledging it always seemed to be men in charge who created our most significant divides.)

Yes, I am a proud Greek Orthodox Christian, and yes, I am honored to be an Archon and serve my Ecumenical Patriarch, Archbishop, Metropolitan, parish priests, and fellow Disciples of Christ, with whom I sometimes disagree on non-Foundational Christian Truths. However, all human leaders (including me) come and go and change over time as they die on this earth and transition to the Kingdom Eternal. The one leader who NEVER changes is the ultimate Divine Leader, Jesus Christ. It is to my Divine Savior that my unabashed loyalty remains in perpetuity. And since He commanded me to love (not just tolerate) everyone else and to seek Oneness with Him, my Creator, and the Holy Spirit, who guides my life, then that is what I will do.

So, if you believe in certain **Foundational Christian Truths** that are non-negotiable because Christ (not me or some other human) said they were, then what other traditions you follow or how you conduct your services makes you no less a Christian than me. Just as how differently you decorate your house makes it no less a house. This is why my Roadmap asks if you are a DD (Denominational Disciple) who must insist all your practices and non-foundational beliefs are the only true and correct practice, or are you an OICD (Oneness In Christ Disciple) who follows what Christ says and is unwilling to divide His Church by man-made ritualistic differences that constantly change over time.

In many old churches, the men were on one side and the women on the other. There were no pews, choirs, air conditioning, and many other ritualistic differences that are no longer practiced in any modern American Christian church. This does not make your parish or mine any less Christian, especially when the **Foundational Christian Truths** (concrete foundation) upon which everything rests are the same. The differences in construction, appearance, or other lowercase “t” traditions and lowercase “p” practices honored in the different houses are less critical than unabashed loyalty to the foundation that is Christ. I ask you to pray about this and for unity and OIC.

How Does The Miracle of Pentecost Fit In? (the “Pentecost Principle”)

It would be impossible to briefly describe the power and importance of a singular event in history that transformed all of history. In the most straightforward lay description, on Pentecost, the Apostles gathered together were literally “smacked upside the head” (as we say down South) by a Divine force that was promised throughout history but finally appeared. It took the form of powerful winds and fire to underscore its singular importance. As the promised third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, the unimaginable occurred. They immediately could speak perfectly in different languages (tongues) so that everyone could understand what they were saying. I believe this has both a practical and metaphorical impact that we should not miss. I call it the **“Pentecost Principle.”**

To be sure, among the messages I take and preach from this history-changing event is the necessity of those who impart the word of God and Christ to do so in the language of the people to whom they are speaking. But it must also mean that there is still OIC (Oneness in Christ) notwithstanding such vast diversity.

I am reminded of this fact every time I watch an Orthodox Divine Liturgy in Africa on YouTube. Not only is the language entirely different, but how they celebrate the Divine Liturgy looks nothing like what I see in the U.S. every Sunday. (Watch this joyous communion dancing at the end of the Divine Liturgy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VNptldyVzo>. Here are a variety of joyous celebrations of the Eucharist: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIKo-55vIhM>)

Notice that the entire congregation and even the clergy are dancing and singing (what, I cannot tell you) in a most joyous celebration of this sacred tradition. I unreservedly accept the **Pentecost Principle** that these faithful Orthodox Christians are celebrating the primacy of the same God, Christ, and Holy Spirit I accept, albeit in a method more suitable to their culture and traditions. I refuse to sit in judgment of their differences and ignore their OIC because they do not use the language, instruments, or methods I am accustomed to.

To me, the Pentecost Principle is The Holy Trinity's acknowledgment that we can speak different languages and indeed express our faith in various practices and traditions and still believe in "One God, Father almighty..." and in "...one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God..." and the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life..." And yes, with those Foundational Christian Truths mutually shared, I can still accept you as my brother or sister in Christ even if you do things differently than me or hierarchically report to different church leaders (Bishops, Popes, Patriarchs, etc.) and even have a distinct linguistic human understanding of specific Biblical passages.

St. Paul's Constant OIC Teaching.

St. Paul redirected our attention so that we must use our unique skills to serve the same God who united everyone and kept us focused on unity and not divisiveness (Allen et al., 2008). St. Paul consistently preached the unity of people in one Spirit, even among people of different circumstances (Ephesians 4:1, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 15:1-6). In his ministry, St. Paul advised everyone to remain humble in their faith (Ephesians 1:1) as we acknowledged our servanthood (Lingenfelter, 2008). St. Paul practiced what he preached by referring to himself as the least of the Apostles (I Corinthians 15:9), even though his teachings and letters compose the most material part of what we acknowledge as the New Testament.

St. Paul's Ephesians 4:1 "mic-drop moment" was a proclamation, "***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...***" He claimed authority as the Lord's prisoner/servant, yet he did not command a particular behavior (Duvall & Hays, 2012). Instead, St. Paul humbly pleaded with all people to understand everyone was called to a unique life and faith journey.

St. Paul told all Jews, Gentiles, and others they were each called to use their unique gifts. He also diverted their focus from God's gift to them to their obligation to do something with those gifts (Allen et al., 2008, p. 1603). Thus, everyone with "*ears to hear*" (Matthew 11:15) can thank God for their gifts as they recognize their duty to use

them righteously while celebrating the diversity of others around them who have different blessings.

By now, dear reader, it should be clear that I am strongly advocating you join me in getting serious about *Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν*” **One, holy, catholic, and apostolic church**. To do this difficult work, let’s explore how all American Orthodox Christians can be united in an OIC American Orthodox Church and how the Roman Catholic Church (and eventually other Christian Denominations) can join the American Orthodox Church to form the American Christian Church and rebuild Christ’s unified House of God based on **Foundational Christian Truths**.