



WHY ORTHODOXY?



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AND THE
CONTEMPORARY BELIEVER

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ORTHODOXY AND THE ENERGETIC BELIVER

The Orthodox Church is often called the Apostolic Church, and the Church of the Fathers, because the apostles established her on the chief Cornerstone, our Lord Jesus Christ; and the early Fathers are part of her living history. Moreover, she maintains a living connection with them, and preserves their faith, life and concepts.

The orthodox believer trusts in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the Church throughout history, and he feels that he is not alone. He has the sense of community in the Orthodox Church. He realizes his membership in the body of Christ in practice. He enjoys the communion with the whole Church, especially the Theotokos, the apostles, the early Fathers and the saints of all ages. He experiences this communion not only in the liturgical worship but also in his private room and wherever he is.

As members of a traditional Church, we don't live in the past, or we want to be carbon copies of the old, but we do not consider the twenty centuries of the church history as if they do not exist. For us, tradition is the living stream of the one life of the Church, which brings up the past with all its aspects as a living present, and extends the present towards the morrow without deformation¹

THE CONCEPT OF ORTHODOXY IN THE CHURCH FATHERS

Orthodoxy for the early Church Fathers is not confined in its narrow meaning, that is "the right or sound faith," nor it refers to certain Christian denomination. For them it refers to the true Church in its wide meaning, i.e. her true faith, teachings, worship, characteristics, conduct, stature, and her glorification.

¹ For more details see our book, "Tradition and Orthodoxy," 1979, "The Holy Tradition."

ORTHODOXY AND THE TRINITARIAN FAITH

Today "*faith in God*" is attacked by two serious attitudes:

First: God is just an idea; He is isolated in His own heaven as if He doesn't care for men who live on earth. He just asks them to believe in Him, to worship Him, fear Him and obey Him.

Second: The spread of new movements that concentrate on One of the Three *hypostases*, ignoring the other Two *hypostases*. As an example, for a long time there was a movement that concentrated on our personal relationship with our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now another movement concentrates on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, ignoring the fatherhood of the Father.

Orthodoxy is a daily experience with the Holy Trinity, through which we enjoy the divine love, grace, and providence in our daily life.

Orthodoxy means **to practice our adoption to the Father**, and to find our comfort in His divine bosom, longing for the Last Day in which we attain this gift in its perfection.

Orthodoxy **presents us to our heavenly Groom**, the Only-Begotten Son, as our own Head. We receive His love, wisdom, righteousness, obedience, humbleness, purity etc. as ours. Virtue for us is not just a good behavior that we struggle to attain, but it is a sharing in Christ's divine nature or in His characteristics. We are formed by His Holy Spirit to be His icon, and to be prepared for our heavenly marriage.

Orthodoxy is an **unceasingly response to the work of the Holy Spirit** who dwells within us. He guides us to heaven as our own conjugal home, unites us with each other (the believers) together with God the Father.

It is noteworthy that the Orthodox Church constantly draws the attention of her children to the Father, to enjoy His heavenly fatherhood; to the Son that they may be prepared for

eternal marriage, accepting Him as their own Heavenly Head, and to the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in the royal way towards the bosom of the Father. The Holy Spirit not only grants us adoption to the Father and unity with Him in the Son, but also interacts in our lives to enlighten our minds, souls, and hearts. He also sanctifies our bodies, senses and emotions, and guides us in our meditation in the scripture, in our prayers, in our behavior, and in preaching.

In other words, the Orthodox Church is truly Trinitarian, not only in her doctrines and dogmas, but even in her worship and practical life.

- ❖ The Father of the universe cherishes affection towards those who have fled to Him, and having begotten, them, again by His Spirit to the adoption of children, knows them as gentle ones, loves them, aids and fights for them; and therefore He bestows on them the name of child.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ Men, by receiving the Spirit of the Son, became children through Him.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

For us, we acknowledge God as more loving than our parents and friends, closer than our own limbs, and more necessary to us than our hearts.

ORTHODOXY AND THE HOLY BIBLE

For the Alexandrian Fathers, the Holy Bible is a joyful journey of the soul from the mud of this world to the bosom of the heavenly Father. The Bible is the Word of God, revealed and interpreted by the Holy Spirit who grants us Himself as divine wings that raise us daily towards heaven, and offers a daily supernatural glory. It is the church book presented to all mankind, and a personal message sent from God the Father and addressed to every man.

The core of the whole Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament we realize the divine love, as the Father

promised men, of the first and humble advent of the Messiah, who is anointed for the salvation and glorification of mankind. In the New Testament we realize His first advent and granted us His Holy Spirit to prepare us for the Last and glorious Coming of the Messiah.

ORTHODOXY AND OUR NEW STATURE

The Orthodox believer always is proud of his new stature in the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of the lamentation on our fall. His entire life is an unceasingly sacrifice of thanksgiving, as he is absorbed in enjoying what he has received as a pledge of his eternal glorification.

- ❖ **Children of God:** In Christ, the believer becomes one of the children of God the Father in baptism. He becomes a member of the divine family. He acknowledges that he is a special child, and God is interested in him. Thus he has the right to practice the royal and heavenly life.
- ❖ Through the Chrismation, the believer becomes **God's anointed one**. In other words, he becomes a spiritual prophet, priest and king. As a prophet, his heart enters the open gates of heaven and acknowledges the mysteries of his eternal destiny. As a priest, he never ceases of praying and working on behalf of the salvation of all mankind. As a king, he rules over his thoughts, senses, feelings, emotions and inner energies.
- ❖ **The heavenly bride.** The believer's life is a short joyful journey that prepares him to the heavenly wedding.
- ❖ **A member of the Body of Jesus Christ.** The believer partakes Lord Jesus' own characteristics, for He is the Head. He attains his Lord as his righteousness, humbleness, modesty etc.
- ❖ **The temple of God,** where the Holy Trinity are dwelling.

ORTHODOXY AND CHURCH LIFE

Orthodoxy is a continuation of the early evangelic and

apostolic Church, preserving its spirit without adulterating the original Christian faith and life. Orthodoxy is a loyalty to tradition, not by accepting the formulae or customs from past generations, but rather the ever-new, personal and direct experience of the Holy Spirit in the present, here and now.

Ecclesiastical tradition does not put the voice of the past in the place of the voice of the present; in it the past does not kill the present but gives it full force¹. Tradition must be creative and at the same time conservative. There is no contradiction between these two elements but they are essential and are indispensable to each other. Tradition cannot be conserved unless be continually developed. And it cannot be developed unless it takes place on the shoulder of the past². “Conservatism” and “Development” are two facets of the same process, which we call holy tradition.

A JOYFUL JOURNEY

A Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, he beholds the Holy Spirit carrying him, raising him up day by day, opening to him the gates of heaven to enjoy the bosom of his heavenly Father, and to find his heavenly Groom embracing him, and thus he rejoices in Him. His life here in this world is a joyful journey, as he practices the advice of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, “Remember God more often than you breathe³.”

St. Serapion the Sindonite (a well-known Egyptian father of the fourth century) asked a celebrated recluse, a woman who lived always in one small room in Rome, “Why are you sitting here?” She replied, “*I’m not sitting, I’m on a journey.*”

Orthodoxy is a dynamic life and a not static one. Our life is a joyful journey towards heaven, which we already attained its pledge. The Bible for us is a personal relationship with the

¹ Bulgakov: *The Orthodox Church*. p 38, 36.

² cf J.P.Mackey: *Tradition and Change in the Church*, p 24.

³ *Oration 27:4, Theological Oration, 1:4. PF 36:16 B.*

Holy Trinity, which unceasingly is in progress. And the liturgies are a continuous preparation for our heavenly wedding with our Groom.

LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND

Through baptism and Chrismation the believer receives the adoption to God the Father, and the Holy Spirit dwells in him who renews his inner man so that he may become an icon of Christ. He partakes the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of mankind, His divine nature, and thus his heart becomes very wide that every man may find a place in it. He shares his heavenly Groom His love for all men.

When the Roman soldiers arrived to arrest St. Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, he gave orders that food and drink should be set before them, and asked them to allow him an hour to pray. They were amazed as they heard him praying and remembering by name all whom he had ever met, great and small, clergymen and laity, and for the church throughout the world⁴.

When Emperor Diocletian sent his soldiers in Upper Egypt, the Christians in Esnah welcomed them, offering food and comfort. The supreme loving, even for the enemies was the flame that ignited Pachomius, the leader of the soldiers to accept Christianity, and to become a great pioneer of the cenobite system of monasticism.

St. Isaac the Syrian says, “When we have reached love, we have reached God and our journey is complete⁵.”

ORTHODOXY AND THE INNER KINGDOM

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to our world and chose our hearts as His own dwelling-place so that we may concentrate on our inner man. There we behold the kingdom of God.

According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, as we know

⁴ *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, 7-8.

⁵ *Ascetic Homilies*, 46 (43).

ourselves, we know God. And when we know God we will be in His likeness.

- ❖ Understand that you have within yourself, upon a small scale, a second universe: within you there is a sun, there is a moon, and there is also stars¹

Origen.

- ❖ Be at peace with your own soul; then heaven and earth will be at peace with you. Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you, and so you will see the things that are in heaven; for there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the kingdom is hidden within your soul. Flee from sin, dive into yourself, and in your soul you will discover the stairs by which to ascend².

St. Isaac the Syrian

- ❖ Everyone who has been baptized in an orthodox manner has received secretly the fullness of grace; and if he then goes on to perform the commandments, he will become consciously aware of this grace within him.
- ❖ However far a man may advance in faith, however great the blessings that he attains, he never discovers, nor can he ever discover, anything more than what he has already received secretly through baptism. Christ, being perfect God, bestows upon the baptized the perfect grace of the Spirit. We for our part cannot possibly add to that grace, but it is revealed and manifests itself to us increasingly, in proportion to our fulfillment of the commandments. Whatever, then, we offer to him after our regeneration, was already within us and came originally from him³.

St Mark the Monk

- ❖ Jesus as the Lord's body was glorified, when he went up the mountain and was transfigured into the glory of God and into

¹ *Hom. On Leviticus, 5:2.*

² *Ascetic Homilies, 2.*

³ *On those who think that they are made righteous by works, 85; On Baptism PG 65: 944A. 1028 BC.*

infinite light, so the saints' bodies also are glorified and shine as lightning. "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them" (John 17:22): just as many lamps are lit from one flame, so the bodies of the saints, being members of Christ, must needs be what Christ is, and nothing else... Our human nature is transformed into the power of God, and it is kindled into fire and light⁴.

- ❖ When the soul is counted worthy to enjoy communion with the Spirit of the light of God, and when God shines upon her with the beauty of his ineffable glory, preparing her as a throne and dwelling for himself, she becomes all the light, all face, all eye; and there is no part of her that is not full of the spiritual eyes of light. There is no part of her that is in darkness, but she is made wholly and in every part light and spirit⁵.

The Homilies of St Macarius

ORTHODOXY AND THE WHOLE CREATION

God created man as a king, and the world as his beautiful palace, through it he had to practice his kingship, authority and power. Creation for the early Fathers is a divine gift for the benefit of man. We glorify the Creator for this gift, and are in touch with His providence through it. We possess it and use it, and we must not allow it to possess us nor to use us. Man is the master of the world and he has to refuse to be its slave.

On giving hymns, the believers ask all the earthly creatures to share their praising to God. They ask the sun, moon, rivers, trees, fish, birds and animals to glorify God.

ORTHODOXY AND OUR BODIES

The Logos of God became flesh, so that we may be proud even of our flesh. His Holy Spirit sanctifies our bodies,

⁴ *The Homilies of St Macarius 15:138.*

⁵ *The Homilies of St Macarius, 1:2.*

emotions and senses. We accept the pledge of our eternal glorification, even in our bodies. Our bodies will share our souls their heavenly glorification.

ORTHODOXY AND OUR VICTORIOUS LIFE

The life of the orthodox believer is summed up in words attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ in the apocryphal Gospel according to Thomas: “Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds and, when he finds, he will become troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the All¹.”

In Jesus Christ, the believer **challenges the evil world**, as he hears within him the victorious words of the Lord, “In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

In Him he challenges sin, Satan and all his angels, plans and deeds. His life is a victorious journey; in every moment he attains new crowns, as he discovers his power and authority by the grace of God.

❖ The human nature has conquered in Jesus Christ and attained victory... He participated in our humanity that He would grant us much of His riches².

St. Cyril of Alexandria

ORTHODOXY AND OUR SUFFERINGS

St. John Chrysostom says that suffering is the school of philosophy that is the school of Christian wisdom. It is the narrow way that leads us to the fellowship with the Crucified One. Instead of involving in our agony we are absorbed in the sweetness of our new life in Jesus Christ. Through suffering we share our Savior His crucifixion, and acknowledge the brightness and power of His resurrection.

❖ If you would be victorious, taste the suffering of Christ in your person that you may be chosen to taste his glory. For if

we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him. The intellect cannot be glorified with Jesus, if the body does not suffer for Jesus.

❖ Blessed are you if you suffer for righteousness’ sake. Behold, for years and generations the way of God has been made smooth through the Cross and by death. The way of God is a daily Cross.

❖ The Cross is the gate of mysteries³.

St Isaac the Syrian

ORTHODOXY AND REPENTANCE

Practicing repentance and confession to God in our private room and in the presence of the priest is not only for the forgiveness of sins we committed but to change the way to proceed from the inside and outside. In **it we confess the overflowing richness of the divine love and offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Also, in it we confess our weaknesses, our evil deeds trusting in His redeeming work** and His potentials to lift us from our wickedness and lead us to an angelic life that is acceptable to God the Father. Likewise; everyday we practice a continuous washing with the spirit of hope, love and preparation to the eternal wedding. *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*” (John 20:23).

Such, then, is our experience of the “great understanding” or “change of mind” designed by the word repentance, filled with grief yet at the same time filled with joy? Repentance expresses the creative tension found at all times in the Christian life on this earth, and described with such vividness by St. Paul: “...always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body... dying, and behold we live... sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 4:10; 6:9-10). As a life of continual

¹ The Apocryphal Testament, 135-136.

² In Luc. (Concerning the temptation of Jesus Christ).

³ Ascetic Homilies, 36 (34), 59 and 74.

repentance, our Christian discipleship is a sharing at one and the same time in Gethsemane and the Transfiguration, in the Cross and the Resurrection¹. St. John Climacus sums the matter up by saying: “If you put on blessed and grace-filled mourning as a wedding robe, you will know the spiritual laughter of the soul.”²

- ❖ This life has been given you for repentance. Do not waste it on other things.

St. Isaac the Syrian

- ❖ Repentance is a great understanding.

The Shepherd of Hermas

- ❖ The saints are in need of offering repentance not only on their own behalf but also on behalf of their neighbors, for without active love they cannot be made perfect. So the whole universe is held together, and we are each of us helped providentially by one another³.
- ❖ No one is so good and merciful as God, but even He does not forgive the unrepentant ...All the wide variety of God’s commandments can be reduced to the single principle of repentance... We are not condemned for the multitude of our transgressions, but for our refusal to repent... For great and small alike, repentance remains incomplete until the moment of death⁴.

St. Mark the Monk

- ❖ God does not insist or desire that we should mourn in agony of heart; rather, it is his wish that out of love for him we should rejoice with laughter in our soul. Take away sin, and tears become superfluous; where there is no bruise, no ointment is required. Before the fall Adam shed not tears, and in the same way there will be no more tears after the resurrection from the dead, when sin has been destroyed. For

pain, sorrow and lamentation will then have fled away⁵.

St John Climacus

“Our Lord Jesus Christ,” states Abba Isaia of Scetis, “commanded us to go on repenting until our last breath. For if there were no repentance, nobody would be saved.” And St. Isaac the Syrian teaches: “During every moment of the four and twenty hours of the day we stand in need of repentance.”

Repentance is not an outburst of sorrow and self-pity, but conversion, the re-centering of our life upon the Holy Trinity.

As a “new mind,” conversion, re-centering, repentance is positive, not negative. In the words of St. John Climacus, “Repentance is the daughter of hope and the denial of despair. It is not despondency but eager expectation; it is not to feel that one has reached an impasse, but to take the way out. It is not self-hatred but the affirmation of my true self as made in God’s image. To repent is to look, not downward at my own shortcomings, but upward at God’s love; not backward with self-reproach, but forward with trustfulness. It is to see, not what I have failed to be, but what by the grace of Christ I can yet become”.

Repentance and confession, then, are not just something that we do by ourselves or with the help of the priest, but above all something that God is doing with and in both of us. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, “Let us apply to ourselves the saving remedy (pharmakon) of repentance; let us accept from God the repentance that heals us. For it is not we who offer it to Him, but He who bestows it upon us.” It should be remembered that in Greek the same word *exomologesis* means both confession of sins and thanksgiving for gifts received.

ORTHODOXY AND TIME

“Time” represents problem for man, as he often is in

¹ Bishop Kallistos Ware: *The Inner Kingdom*, 2000, p. 57.

² *Ladder*, 7. PG 88:809 A.

³ *On Penitence* 11. PG 55:981 AB.

⁴ *On those who think that they are made righteous by works*, 71; *On Repentance*, 1.

⁵ *Ladder*, step 7. PG 88:809 C.

grief of the past for it passed and will not return, and he is afraid that the present will pass also and it will become past. The future for him is unknown, and man does not know what he will face. The eternal Logos of God became man, and subjected himself to time. Thus, by entering into the circle of time He sanctifies it. The past was a preparation for His coming to our world; it is a living past. The present is the most joyful moments for He is dwelling among us in His own Church. The future is opened, and at hand, for He Himself is the eternal Life and the Resurrection. Thus, time takes its significance through the incarnation of the Logos of God, as we hear the angelic tidings at His birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14) And we can understand the hymn: "It is time for You to act, O Lord." (Ps 119:126)

In our Christian dictionary we look to "time" as a path to eternal freedom. We are absorbed in saving time and we never complain of wasting or killing time, even if we are in a jail, for we believe in the words, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

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