

THE ROYAL PATH

by

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To be Orthodox means *inter alia* to experience the intense spirituality of, and not deviate from, the Royal Path as Orthodoxy was known to the Fathers of the Church. There is a right way—and all others. The Fathers of the Orthodox Church, as relevant now as 2000 years ago, did not modify positions to [albeit, our modern politicians to satisfy their secular electorate] ‘be popular’ or ‘fit into’ their society. They were guided by the Holy Spirit.

In Orthodox Christianity, one is either an Orthodox Christian or, one is not. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Perfect. He is always right. Thus, those who follow Him and do what He counsels are always right. The Apostles were always right as long as they followed His instructions, His Path. The Apostles’ successors will always be right if they continue to follow in these footsteps.

Unfortunately, you and I know that a straight path is difficult to follow. Yet this is exactly what we must do without *deviation*. The Royal Path has been laid out clearly by the Fathers of the Orthodox Church. The decrees/acts/definitions and canons of the first Seven Ecumenical Councils confirmed the ‘Mind’ of the Holy Fathers when heresies raised their ugly heads as they have throughout Christian history. These Ecumenical Councils did not make ‘new law’. They did not proclaim any new dogmas. They simply confirmed what the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Fathers were (and are) and thus what the teachings *of the Church were (and are)* in relation to the matters in debate. Not only did the Ecumenical Councils not determine any new dogmas, but also their confirmation of the ‘Mind’ of the Church was (and is) subject to the acceptability of the Orthodox Church through time. The point is the Ecumenical Councils are not infallible *per se*.

However, a ‘new’ Ecumenical Council called to legitimise nonOrthodox groupings such as Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and consider them Orthodox would not be a ‘valid’ Ecumenical Council since no Holy Father of the Orthodox Church would ever have taught such heresy much less all of the Holy Fathers. To suggest they would have is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Thus such an ‘Ecumenical Council’ could not be guided by the Holy Spirit, but rather by the Evil One.

Orthodoxy breathes through the Holy Spirit as witnessed by the Martyrs and Holy Fathers of the Christian Church. The heroic spiritual examples of the early Fathers are excellent role models for us in the midst of today’s modernistic virtual cybernetic world. Truth knows no relativity. There is no room for

epistemological relativism in Christ's Truth. Either you accept Christ and His Way, repent, reform your ways, and take up the Cross; or, you don't. It's that simple.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation, but, of course, faith is not enough. Listen to the words of the Apostle James the Just, First Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem (or, you could say the First Bishop of the Church or the First Archbishop of the Church):

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

And one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.¹

Faith is made perfect by our works:

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?²

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.³

It is the consensus of the Fathers through time that makes up the 'Mind' of the Church, not the opinion of an individual Father or a few Fathers. No Father would dispute that Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the Church.⁴ Upon Peter's confession "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," He promised to build His Church "upon this rock" (upon Peter's confession of faith, not Peter personally as the Roman see erroneously teaches) "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."⁵ Neither the Fathers nor the Ecumenical Councils could declare doubt upon the Divinity of our Lord or contradict Holy Scripture. For if they did, they would not be acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There can be no foundation but our Lord Jesus Christ.

Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.⁶

The consensus mentioned above does not mean a 'majority opinion' that might be sufficient in parliamentary or representative democracy. One of this century's most spiritual Orthodox theologians, the late Father Michael Pomazansky, stated it this way:

For guidance in questions of faith, for the correct understanding of Sacred Scripture, and in order to distinguish the authentic Tradition of the Church from false teachings, we appeal to the works of the holy Fathers of the Church, acknowledging that the unanimous agreement of all the Fathers and teachers of the Church in teaching of the Faith is an undoubted sign of truth.⁷

The Church's definitions of truth, its dogmas, are founded on the teaching of Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Sacred Tradition, the latter being both oral and written. Certain dogmas, sermons, customs were handed down secretly from the Apostolic Tradition as can be gleaned from the *Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem and Ch. 27 of *On the Holy Spirit* by St. Basil the Great. These together, Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Sacred Tradition (oral as well as written), give the fullness of faith which was called by the ancient Fathers of the Church the "catholic faith," "the catholic consciousness" of the Church. This consciousness is guided by the Holy Spirit.⁸

The Royal Path we must trod is the patristic "royal path" that Fr. Seraphim Rose of blessed memory weaved so spiritually into his writings: a state of Orthodox balance being careful in our zeal not to over compensate and become pharisaically 'correct' to the point of not being Christian.⁹ This can happen to us if we lose sight of the great Commandment to love thy neighbour as thyself. Since all are our neighbours, this includes those who consider themselves our enemies or those unlike ourselves. We should pray for them. This does not mean that we deviate from the path of patristic Orthodoxy; however, we seek a middle ground, a mean between extremes, a path of spiritual moderation; this is what the Holy Fathers called the Royal Path.¹⁰ It is our lighthouse in the night that helps us keep our spiritual bearings as we pursue the ideal of Orthodoxy — the deification of man!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ James 2: 14-17

² James 2: 22

³ James 2: 24

⁴ Eph. 2:20

⁵ Matt. 16:17-18

⁶ I Cor. 3:11).

⁷ Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (tr. from the Russian and edited by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose) Second Edition, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1994, pp.37-38.

⁸ Pomazansky, *id.*, p. 25.

⁹ see Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Royal Path*, Orthodox Word, # 70, 1978.

¹⁰ see Deut. 5:32, 17:11