

FOR POTENTIAL CONVERTS

By

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This is written for those considering coming into the true Faith. I will try to set out a few matters that all Orthodox Christians need to accept. As difficult as it may be, a person must shed his un-orthodox 'baggage' when entering the Church. This is not stated from any mean-spirited perspective, just as an observation. It may not be easy to do this, getting rid of old habits will take commitment and follow through, but...

The simpler faith a person has entering Orthodoxy, arguably, the better. Even if that faith is not complete, it might be easier to shed past concepts if one begins without preconceptions.

The true Orthodox Christian accepts and practises, albeit imperfectly since we are all sinners, the Faith of the Church as proclaimed by our Saviour, and passed on to us by the Apostles and through their spiritual successors over the centuries. Holy Orthodoxy follows and upholds the Holy Scriptures; however, Scripture is considered within the spiritual umbrella of Holy Tradition. This does not mean that Scripture is 'inferior' to Holy Tradition. Rather, that Scripture is the basic building block of the cornerstone, Christ's Church; it is part of the Church. It is not all of the Church. If we said it were, we would ignore oral Tradition. The Church, in fact, decided what books are canonical. The Bible did not generate itself spontaneously! The Holy Spirit working through the Church led It to the proper acceptance of those books.

Orthodoxy does not 'interpret' the Scriptures literally in the sense that fundamentalist protestants do. However, this does not mean that Scripture is not true. All Scripture *is* true. When the Holy Scriptures are clear about a point, there is no need for interpretation. In fact, such clarity could not be interpreted, other than to confirm it.¹ When such clarity is not present, and there is disagreement about Scriptures' meaning, the true Church relies on the decrees and writings of the First Seven Ecumenical Councils and The Rudder (Pedalion)² which contains all the decrees and canons of the Councils, Ecumenical or Regional/Local, and the accepted canons of the Holy Apostles and the Fathers of the Undivided Church.

The above paragraphs are very brief and thus, in no way, considered as full and complete. But they are where the potential convert might begin.

The Creed –

I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light: true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by Whom all things were made;

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man;

And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried;

And arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

And ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father;

And shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life; Who proceedeth from (emphasis supplied) the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the Prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead.

And the life of the age to come.

Amen.

The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church believes in our spiritual bedrock, The Creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as finalised by the Holy Spirit through the deliberations of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils in 325 (Nicaea) and 381 (Constantinople) A.D. There are twelve articles; the first speaks of God the Father, the next six of God the Son, and the last five the Holy Spirit, Church, baptism, resurrection of the dead and life eternal.³ The Creed stands as the dogmatic bulwark of the True Orthodox Church.

Monasticism –

Monasticism is vital to Holy Orthodoxy, but monks are not superior to the laity. Monks and nuns are expected to follow an ascetic way to Christ, but so are married priests and laity. There isn't a different 'standard' for those following the monastic calling as opposed to others in the Church. The particular way may be somewhat different. Monastics lead an active, yet contemplative, life within either of three modes (a) coenobitic (b) skete or (c) hermitage. You and I live 'in the world' so-to-speak. Monks and nuns have 'died' to this world. St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) quotes Saint John of the Ladder's comment about a monk: "A monk is one who is guided only by the commandments of God and the word of God in every time and place and matter."⁴ Yet, this statement can be applied to all of us. Our specific routes may vary, but our goal is the same: deification in God's energies.

No Spiritual Compartmentalisation –

Orthodoxy means spiritual immersion into Christ's Way; thus, it knows no approach where one believes that Christianity is just a part of life. True Christianity *is* life.

The Orthodox Episcopacy –

In the early Christian centuries, there were married bishops. However, the Church in the Sixth Ecumenical Council [Canon XII] confirmed that prelates should not be married.

Some bishops might consider accepting such a man as an Orthodox bishop under *economia* principles. Whether or not, this is an appropriate subject for the exercise of *economia* is a question beyond the scope of this short homily. Some otherwise truly dogmatic Orthodox in the United States have married bishops. This practise though deviates from Tradition. The Church has always favoured the unmarried state, and this does not denigrate the spiritually wonderful God-given Mystery (Sacrament) of marriage:

In the tradition of the Church, there is a clear preference for celibacy as opposed to the married state. This stance is not of course hostile to marriage, which is recognized as a profound mystery, but simply indicates the practical obstacles marriage puts in the way of the pursuit of spiritual life. For this reason, from the earliest days of Christianity, many of the faithful *chose* (emphasis supplied) celibacy.⁵

Also see *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, fn 2, St. Nicodemus gives a thorough if somewhat long spiritual explanation of the reasons for canon XII, on pp. 303-305, especially:

Accordingly, briefly speaking, this Council, being encouraged by the advancement of the Church for the better, prefers married men, or, more explicitly speaking, monks, for the prelacy; it does not want the married men, not because it has any fault to find with marriage or because it blames and opposes marriage, but because it prefers celibacy as something better. For this reason, it admits to the prelacy even those who have been married, but have separated from their wives, either at death or by mutual agreement, in accordance with the Apostle. [pp. 304-305.]

An additional spiritual problem is that in such 'jurisdictions' having married bishops, monasticism, in all probability, may be minimised, if not obliterated. Orthodoxy without monasticism, the asceticism of the desert so-to-speak, is unthinkable.

Rationalism and Scholasticism –

Rationalism spiritually separates the west from Orthodoxy. The true Orthodox Church is guided by the patristic witness of the Fathers of the Church, not by Scholasticism. Rationalism exalts the use of reason and logic. Orthodoxy, of course, uses reason; however, it does not elevate it to the position it has acquired in the Post-Schism west. Reason aids our faith but does not determine it. The convert should imbibe in the

spiritual waters of the Fathers of the Church as it has existed and does exist today. Orthodoxy knows no reformation. It does not deviate from the true Orthodox Christian Path. Those who do are not within the true Church. This does not mean they are 'bad' people, and as Orthodox Christians we are to love them. Some of them may be, in fact, "near" but still not within the true faith.

Church Government –

The true Church knows no controlling agent at its 'top'. Our 'top' is Christ Himself. The Church governs itself through conciliarism and consensus of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The same conciliarism present when St. James the Just headed the Church in Jerusalem and delivered the Apostolic Council's decision in the first major dispute in the Church; whether Gentile converts had to keep the Law of Moses, specifically, the rite of circumcision,⁶ is the guiding principle today.

Recognition of Saints –

Holy Orthodoxy 'recognises' Saints of both the east and west up to the Schism date of 1054 A.D. and the Saints of the Orthodox Church after the Schism. Consequently, those called saints by Anglicans or Roman Catholics after the Schism are not in Orthodoxy. If you attend an 'Orthodox' service, where Mother Teresa is 'commemorated,' you are not in an Orthodox Church [even if they think they are]. This doesn't mean that she wasn't a very spiritual, fine person...

Icons –

The True Orthodox Church venerates, but does not worship, icons. Only God is worshipped. Icons are prototypes of the saints they represent. In the Church, one will not see three-dimensional objects, statues; rather, there will be two-dimensional icons of Christ and a number of saints.

Christ can be considered the first iconographer. Recall he sent King Abgar a 'towel' he had used to wipe His face, which then had His Imprint/Image on it. The King was cured of most of his leprosy by the image, but Christ purposely left the last bit of curing for His disciple who would come to him after His ascension into heaven.⁷

Freemasonry –

Freemasonry is outside the Church. Those freemasons who wish to enter the Church must withdraw completely from any membership or affiliation with this group. Active Freemasons should not be allowed to take Holy Communion.

Branch Theory/Ecumenism –

If you believe that all 'religions' are equal or that all 'denominations' are *relatively* ok; or, there are different branches of the Church, you will have to get over this quickly. Orthodoxy is not another denomination or sect. Nor is it one lung of the Church. It *is* the Church.

To come to Orthodoxy, you must believe that the *only* way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. So if your question is “Can you be saved through Hinduism,” the answer is no. Only through Christ can we be saved. If you do not believe that, you aren’t a Christian. There is a visible Church; it is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, no other. So, no, pagans/witches cannot be saved unless they repent and come to Christ’s Church. Of course, God, in His mercy, can exercise it as He wishes...

Filioque clause –

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father not the Son. This is from Christ’s Mouth:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me [St. John 15:26]. [see The Creed as originally determined by the Holy Spirit guiding the assembled Fathers at the first two ecumenical councils.]. No Divine Liturgy can be celebrated without the deletion of the Filioque Clause.

Epiclesis –

In the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, there is to be an epiclesis, praying for the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord.

Confessional Statements outside Orthodoxy –

Articles, such as The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglicans, are not utilised in Holy Orthodoxy. The Thirty-Nine Articles do not comply with Orthodox dogma or Tradition.

Similarly, e.g., the Book of Concord, followed by the Lutherans, would not be used in Orthodoxy. Had the Lutheran Tübingen Scholars [in the 16th century] accepted Patriarch Jeremias the II’s’ spiritual guidance and changed what was necessary for them to come to Orthodoxy, they would have been Orthodox today. Because of their prelest (spiritual deception), they did not accept this spiritual opportunity. We invite them to accept the Patriarch’s ‘conditions’[which are Orthodoxy’s] now. It is not too late.

These are some things to consider for those contemplating coming to Holy Orthodoxy. No attempt has been made to be comprehensive. May the Lord bless you in your journey to the Royal Path!

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

¹ Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (Second Edition) [tr./ed. by Fr. Seraphim Rose], Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1994, “Of course, many truths of the Faith are so immediately clear from Sacred Scripture that they were not subjected to heretical reinterpretations; therefore, concerning them there are no specific decrees of councils. Other truths, however, were confirmed by councils”, at p. 36; “The law of the Gospel is given for all times, unto the end of the age, and is not subject to being abrogated or changed.” at p.213; “... some truths of the faith are expressed in a

completely definite form in Scripture, while others are not entirely clear and precise and therefore demand confirmation by the Sacred Apostolic Tradition,” p.34.

² Agapius, a Hieromonach and Nicodemus, a Monk, *The Rudder (Pedalion)* first printed and published in 1800 [tr. by D. Cummings into English from the Fifth Edition published by John Nicolaides (Kesisoglou the Caesarean) in Athens, Greece, 1908], The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, Chicago, IL, 1957.

³ see Bishop Alexander (Mileant), ed. By Donald Shufan, *The Principles of the Orthodox Faith*, p. 2, at <http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/creed.htm> .]

⁴ *The Arena*, (tr. From the Russian by Archimandrite Lazarus), Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 1997, p. 7.

⁵ Professor George I. Mantzarides, *Orthodox Monasticism* [abridged text from the *Images of Ashes* by monk Charlton], see Saint Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery at <http://www.stanthonymonastery.org/monasticism.htm>.

⁶ cf. Acts 15.

⁷ See my two homilies in the “Features” section (Home Page) on Jesus and King Abgar by clicking on “Features” and then going to them.