

## **PATRISTICS KNOWS NO ERROR**

by

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We pride ourselves on being rational, thinking things through, setting up hypotheses and postulates, conducting experiments and continually defining and redefining our relative positions. This has done immense wonders in the realm of science and thus resulted in quantum leaps in technological progress.

Yet, in our ardour to embrace and apply rationalism in our everyday lives, we run the risk of losing our souls. The relativism as applied in the rationalistic west blocks our ability to see and experience the Lord of the New Testament as proclaimed by Holy Scripture, Christ's ministry on earth, and the proclamations of the Good News far and wide by the Apostles and their Patristic Successors, the Fathers of the Undivided Church. (The Undivided Church I am referring to is the True Orthodox Church as it existed up to the time of the Schism [1054 A.D.]; and, in particular the Church as experienced and witnessed to by the early martyrs and Fathers of the first few centuries.)

In order to actually be a true Christian, not just say one is, we must state and follow absolutes -e.g., we must believe everything in The Creed (Nicene) as hammered out by the Holy Spirit acting through the assembled Fathers at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils in 325 A.D. and 381 A.D. We must accept and follow the Orthodox 'Mind' of the Church as expressed by the Fathers of the Undivided Church and as interpreted by the First Seven Ecumenical Councils in times of heretical disputations. I.e., we must accept and follow the Holy Tradition of Christ's Church.

Thus, we must reject the politically 'correct' relativism that has led millions to abandon the true Faith in exchange for polyester praise of the self and the need to 'fit in'. This means acceptance of our struggles and sufferings while on this earth's journey to deification. In the words of a former Australian prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, "Life wasn't meant to be easy." I have never forgotten this refreshingly candid comment, and it is certainly applicable to our Christian journey. The True Church has always suffered. Bearing the sufferings and continuing on the Royal Path is the mark of a True Christian.

But you say: what about the trend in American Christianity to select a 'church' which is just right for that particular person or family? Perhaps the selection is based on political power and hierarchical authoritarianism... And/or money, social connections. And/or the numbers of people attending. And/or ball teams for the kids. And/or everyday conveniences like parking, nursery, coffee social hour after the sermon. And/or the 'right' to individually interpret the Holy Scriptures, i.e., the 'right' to believe whatever one wishes about them etc. These are attempts to make the Church conform to society. As Christians, we must conform ourselves to the Royal Path of Salvation..

A True Christian does not have the right to pick and choose in the above manner. The choice to follow the Way is free. There is no coercion involved, but once one makes that choice he is bound by it. Of course, there is also a free choice to stay or leave. It's up to us! But staying and living the True Orthodox way, struggling to reach and remain on the Royal Path without deviation, is what a real Christian is about.<sup>1</sup>

Afflictions are a great teacher; they show us our weaknesses, vices, and need of repentance; they cleanse the soul, and sober it, as from drunkenness; they bring down grace; they soften the hard heart, they inspire us with a loathing for sin, and strengthen us in faith, hope, and virtue.<sup>2</sup>

We need nothing more to sustain us than the watering of Christ's Garden by the Fathers of the Church. We have no need for any philosophic structure or theory other than Patristics. Ivan Kireyevsky (1806-1856), one of the greatest lay theologians of the Orthodox Church and disciple of the great Staretzi of Optina Monastery in Russia, immersed himself in the Holy Church Fathers. He saw that one needed nothing else, no matter what the problem or circumstance:

Kireyevsky saw that apart from these Holy Fathers man needs no philosophy whatever because the Orthodox world-view is all-encompassing and is not at all the sphere of 'theologians', much less of a theology which is divorced from actual life. He laid the foundations for a Christian philosophy of 'wholeness', one which would encompass not just the **mind** of man, but also **everyday life**.<sup>3</sup>

The Fathers do the teaching:

The Divine Scriptures and the words of the Holy Fathers are as numerous as the sand of the sea. Diligently searching them out, we teach them to those who come to us and who are in need of them. More correctly, it is not we who teach, because we are unworthy to do so, but it is the blessed and Holy Fathers who teach from Divine Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

What we all need to do is reconcile ourselves with the true Church. Our spiritual route is through Patristics, reading the Fathers of the Undivided Church, the decrees, definitions and canons of the First Seven Ecumenical Councils; and then, slowly but surely, experiencing the Truth of the Church as expressed through the Fathers. Don't let anyone tell you anything else will suffice. It won't and that's the absolute Truth.

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

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<sup>1</sup> see the words of Saint John of Kronstadt: "What peace or rest shall there be [after death] for him who has already had his peace and rest here, without **enduring** anything?" quoted in Alexey Young, *A Man is His Faith*, Saint George Information Service, 243 Regent Street, London W1R 8PN, 1980, at p.23.

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *id.*, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> *id.*, at p.17 referring to the highly spiritual nineteenth century hierarch, Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov's *The Arena* where the Bishop quoted St. Nil Sorsky's explanation in the fifteenth century.