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True Orthodoxy

by Archbishop Averky of Blessed Memory

Few people today know that the Orthodox Church is nothing less than that Church which has preserved untainted the genuine teachings of Jesus Christ, the very teachings delivered to every subsequent generation of believers. These teachings came down the centuries, from the Holy Apostles, explicated and carefully interpreted by their legitimate successors (their disciples and the holy Fathers), traditioned and conserved unaltered by our Eastern Church which is alone able to prove her right to be called "the Orthodox Church."

The divine Founder of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, said clearly, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her" (St. Matt xvi, 18). To the Church, He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon the Apostles, the Spirit of Truth (St. John xv, 16f) Who "manifests all things" to Her and guides Her (St. John xvi, 13), protecting Her from error. Indeed, it was to declare this Truth to men that the Lord came into the

cosmos, according to His own words (St. John xviii, 31). And Saint Paul confirms this fact in his letter to his pupil, the bishop Timothy, saying that, "the Church of the living God is the ground and pillar of the Truth" (I Tim iii, 15).

Because She is "the ground and pillar of the Truth," "the gates of Hell cannot prevail against Her." It follows, then, that the true Christian Church—palpably unique since Christ established but one Church—has always existed on earth and will exist to the end of time. She has received the promise of Christ, "I will be with you even unto the end of the age." Can there be the slightest doubt that the Lord refers here to the Church? Any honest and sane judgment, any act of good conscience, anyone familiar with the history of the Christian Church, the pure and unaltered moral and theological teachings of the Christian religion, must confess that there was but one true Church founded by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and that She has preserved His Truth holy and unchanged. History reveals, moreover, a traceable link of grace from the holy Apostles to their successors and to the holy Fathers. In contrast to what others have done, the Orthodox Church has never introduced novelties into Her teachings in order to "keep up with the times", to be "progressive", "not to be left at the side of the road," or to accommodate current exigencies and fashions which are always suffused with evil. The Church never conforms to the world.

Indeed not, for the Lord has said to his disciples at the Last Supper, "You are not of this world." We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept Her unchanged, that is, like the immutable God Himself. That which the learned call "conservatism" is a principal and, perhaps, most characteristic index of the true Church.

Since the *TRUTH* is given to us once and for all, our task is *to assimilate* rather than to discover it. We are commanded to confirm ourselves and others in the Truth and thereby bring everyone to the true Faith, Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, there have appeared in the very bosom of the Church, even among the hierarchy, opinions expressed by well-known individuals which are detrimental to Her. The desire to "march with the times" makes them fear that they will not be recognized as "cultured", "liberal" and "progressive." These modern apostates to Orthodoxy are "ashamed" to confess that our Orthodox church is precisely *the* Church which was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church to which appertains the great promise that "the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her," and to which He confided the plenum of divine Truth. By their deceit and false humility, by their blasphemy against the Lord, these false shepherds and those with them have been estranged from the true Church. They have given tacit expression to the idea that "the gates of Hell" have "prevailed" against the Church. In other words, these apostates say that our holy Orthodox Church is equally "at fault" for the "division of the churches" and ought now to "repent" her sins and enter into union with

other "Christian churches" by means of certain concessions to them, the result being a new, indivisible church of Christ.

This is the ideology of the religious movement which has become so fashionable in our times: "The ecumenical movement" among whose number one may count Orthodox, even our clergy. For a long time, we have heard that they belong to this movement in order "to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy," but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than "throwing powder in our eyes." Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.

As a matter of historical fact, the "ecumenical movement"—of which the WCC is the supreme organ—is an organization of purely Protestant origin. Nearly all the Orthodox Churches have joined, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia being the most notable exception. Even those churches behind the "iron curtain" have joined. For some time the Russian Patriarchate resisted, flattering herself with the purity of her Orthodoxy and quite naturally viewing this movement as hostile to Orthodoxy. She has since become a member.

The Russian Synod almost stands alone in her opposition to the "ecumenical movement." How can we explain her isolation from the rest of "global Orthodoxy"? We must understand the situation in terms of the words that "this Must take place" (St. Luke xxi, 9), that is, the "great apostasy" clearly predicted by the Lord (Sol ii, 3-12). "it is permitted by God," as [St.] Ignatius Brianchaninoff said almost a century ago. (Another spiritual father, Theophan the Recluse, announced with grief that the horrendous apostasy would begin within Russia.) [St.] Ignatius wrote: "We are helpless to arrest this apostasy. Impotent hands will have no power against it and nothing more will be required than the attempt to withhold it. The spirit of the age will reveal the apostasy. Study it, if you wish to avoid it, if you wish to escape this age and the temptation of its spirits. One can suppose, too, that the *institution* of the Church which has been tottering for so long will fall *terribly and suddenly*. Indeed, no one is able to stop or prevent it. The present means to sustain the institutional Church are borrowed from the elements of the world, things inimical to the Church, and the consequence will be only to accelerate its fall. Nevertheless, the Lord protects the elect and their limited number will be filled."

The Enemy of humanity makes every effort and uses all means to confound it. Aid comes to him through the total co-operation of all the secret and invisible heterodox, especially those priests and bishops who betray their high calling and oath, the true faith and the true Church.

Repudiation of and preservation from the apostasy which has made such enormous progress demands that we stand apart from the spirit of the age (which bears the seeds of its own destruction). If we expect to withstand the world, it is first necessary to understand it and keep sensitively in mind that in this present age all that which carries the most holy and

dear name of Orthodoxy is not in fact Orthodox. Rather, it is often "A fraudulent and usurped Orthodoxy" which we must fear and eschew as if it were fire. Unlike this spurious faith, true Orthodoxy was given and must be received without novelty and nothing must be accepted as a teaching or practice of the Church which is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the dogma of the Universal Church. True Orthodoxy thinks only to serve god and to save souls and is not preoccupied with the secular and ephemeral welfare of men. True Orthodoxy is *spiritual* and not physical or psychological or earthly. In order to protect ourselves from "the spirit of the age" and preserve our fidelity to the true Orthodoxy, we ought firstly and with all our strength live blamelessly: A total and rigorous commitment to Christ, without deviation from the commandments of God or the laws of His holy Church. At the same time, we must have no common prayer or spiritual liaison with the modern apostasy or with anything which "soils" our holy Faith, even those dissidents who call themselves "Orthodox." They will go their way and we will go ours. We must be honorable and tenacious, following the right way, never deviating in order to please men or from fear that we might lose some personal advantage.

The sure path to perdition is *indifference* and the *lack of principles* which is euphemistically called "the larger view." In opposition to this "larger view" we put the "rigor of ideas" which, in modernity, it is fashionable to label "narrow" and "fanatical." To be sure, if one adopts the "modern mentality," one must consider the holy martyrs—whose blood is "the cement of the Church"—and the Church Fathers—who struggled all their lives against heretics—as nothing less than "narrow" and "fanatical." In truth, there is little difference between "the broad way" against which the Lord warned and the modern "larger view." He condemned the "broad way" as the way to "gehenna."

Of course, the idea of "gehenna" holds no fear for those "liberals" and avant-garde theologians. They may smugly "theologize" about it, but in rashly and wantonly discussing "the new ways of Orthodox theology" and acquiring a number of disciples, they give evidence that they no longer believe in the existence of Hell. This new breed of "Orthodox" are really no more than modern "scholastics."

In other words, the way of these "progressivists" is not our way. Their way is deceptive, and it is unfortunate that it is not evident to everyone. The "broader" or "larger view" alienates us from the Lord and His true Church. It is the road away from Orthodoxy. This view is sinister, maliciously invented by the Devil in order to deny us salvation. For us, however, we accept no innovations, but choose the ancient, proven way, the way in which true Christians have chosen to serve God for 2,000 years.

We choose the way of fidelity to the true Faith and not the "modern way." We choose faithfulness to the true Church with all Her canons and dogmas which have been received and confirmed by the local and universal Councils. We choose the holy customs and traditions, the spiritual riches of that faith transmitted complete and entire to us from the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the Church, and the Christian heritage of our venerable

ancestors. This alone is the faith of the true Orthodox, distinct from the counterfeit "orthodoxy" invented by the Adversary. We receive only the Apostolic Faith, the Faith of the Fathers, the Orthodox Faith.

From *Orthodox Christian Witness*, wherein it appeared translated from the French in *La Foi Transmise* (Nov. 1968), pp. 19-22.