

# **Philokalian distinction between Orthodoxy and heresy**

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## **1. Introduction**

It is a known fact that a precise definition of Orthodoxy as a

Church is impossible, because “Orthodoxy-Church” is a Divine-human magnitude and, as far as its divine element is concerned, it supersedes every intellectual-logical conception. So, if we wished to somehow define Orthodoxy, we could say the following: Orthodoxy is the presence of the Uncreated in the world and in History, and the potential of the created to become sanctified and attain theosis. A (Christian) Deismus: “Deus Creator, sed non Gubernator” (A God Creator, but not Governor) - is a pure delusion, orthodoxically speaking. The Time-less and supra-Time element is constantly within the world and within Time, so that it may sanctify Time and transform it into the Time of the divine Kingdom, into eternity (see the words of the Apostle Paul: ***“It is necessary for this perishable thing to clothe itself with imperishability, and this mortal thing to clothe itself with immortality”*** - Cor.I, 15:53).

## **2. Faith**

It is understood that Orthodoxy is always closely linked to faith. Thus, we speak of the “right and true faith”, in order to distinguish it from the “adulterated faith”. Orthodoxy is the true glory and glorification of God - the genuine perception of God - while a heresy is a manufactured glory, a morbid glorification of God. Orthodoxy and heresy thus confront each other in the area of Faith, and that is exactly where they diversify. What, therefore, is “faith” and how is it perceived in the life of the Church as the Body of Christ?

First of all, "faith" in the language of theology signifies divine revelation; it is that which is revealed to Man, by God - it is the content of the revealed, Divine Truth (Fides quae creditur). However, Divine Revelation is not an abstract thing, that is to say, a collection of intellectually conceived truths, ideas and basic positions that Man is called upon to accept, in order to be saved. Such is the Scholastic view of faith, which has infiltrated our Dogmatics also. **The Truth of the Church is a Persona**; it is the incarnated Son and Logos of God; it is the incarnate All-Truth. It is the Persona of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unknown and inapproachable God became (and continues to become) known, ever since the beginning of Creation, in Christ. In other words, God discloses Himself; He is self-revealed, "***in multilateral and resourceful ways***" (Hebrews 1:1), the culmination being His self-revelation "in the Son" - the incarnation of His Son - which was the prerequisite for the event of the Pentecost, for the sake of which Creation (according to the Saints) was "composed". The Pentecost is God's supreme revelation in the Holy Spirit, and Man's supreme experience within History.

Christ, as the God-Human, is in a certain way the "documented" faith, which is offered "from above", so that we may come to know God "in Himself" (see John 14:9 - '***whomsoever has seen Me, has seen the Father***'). He is our "hypostatic" (=personal) faith, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor. We become "faithful", by participating in that personal and incarnated Faith (=Christ).

Only in Christ can there be a possibility to know the true God. And that is what establishes Orthodoxy's uniqueness and exclusivity, in the event known as "Salvation". (Acts, 4:12)

To the revealed Faith, which is "accredited" to Man for his salvation, Man reciprocates with his own (subjective) Faith. Man's faith is absolutely essential, in order for God's power to function inside Man; to lead him to salvation. Its significance is stressed by Christ Himself: "**Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; whoever disbelieves shall be reproached.**" (Mark 16:16). The "objective" Faith must necessarily be transformed into Man's "subjective" Faith, for his salvation. And that is effected, through the "indwelling" (Rom.8:9 '...**if the Spirit of God dwells within you** ...') of the "objective" Faith; in other words, the indwelling of the Uncreated inside the created; of God inside Man. Man is invited by Christ to become "faithful", to be receptive of the revealed-in-Christ Truth as a "life in Christ", and to live that Truth, so that he too may become "true", just as Christ is "**the true One**" (John I, 5:20). Man's salvation is when he is rendered "true", and the prerequisite for this, is his union with the true God.

A faith that is Orthodox is the one that acts soteriologically. And that is the precise point where heresy differentiates itself from Orthodoxy. "Heresy" is the adulteration of the faith and its retraction at the same time, because it is adulterating the faith in two directions: on the one hand, with regard to the

“believed” (Christ) and on the other, with regard to its manner of accepting Christ. In a heresy, Christ is segmented and is accepted, not in whole but fractionally, by a segmented - not whole - person, because He is approached **only** by Man’s intellect and his lips, while the heart and Man’s entire existence is “**a long way off**” from God (Matthew 15:8). A heresy (every heresy) is not only a false teaching; it is literally a “non-Orthodoxy” and a “non-Christianity”. By approaching the matter in this way, we disentangle ourselves from the confessional disagreements of the past and their scholastic terminology. After all, what is of primary concern is not how false a teaching might be, but whether it is capable of healing Man (as fr. Romanides used to teach); whether it is capable of saving him.

Thus, one could say in conclusion - with regard to the process of the event called “faith” - that faith begins as a logical-intellectual process, in the sense of an *external* affirmation by Man, then progressing as an acceptance of God’s offer and a loyalty towards Him, to be fulfilled however, with an *internal* certainty and cognizance of God, in Christ. These are the exact basic meanings -linguistically - contained in the term “faith” (pistis) in the Greek language, the language of the Gospels: em-pisto-syni (trust), pisto-tita (fidelity, faithfulness), vevaiotita (certainty, confidence). Further along, we shall attempt - from within our Philokalian (ascetic-neptic) tradition - to elucidate these meanings, in order to comprehend as much as we can the function of faith as a factor of salvation.

### **3. The “first” faith - the “simple” faith - or, the “faith through hearing”**

Jesus Christ - the eternal Logos of God - teaches mankind throughout all the ages, revealing through His teaching the path to Salvation. This was already taking place in the Old Testament, through His “mouths” - the Prophets. But it also took place after His incarnation, through His own most holy mouth, and continues to take place historically, with His Apostles and the saintly Fathers and Mothers, through “to the end of Time” (Matthew, 28:20).

Man’s stance, which is characterized by his reply/response to God’s calling, is, in the worst case a denial-rejection of God’s offer, and in the best case it is our trust in Him. Given that Christ acts in History as “the Physician of our souls and our bodies” (words taken from the Divine Liturgy), we could say that this applies in the case of every Physician: either one shows trust in him and obeys the doctor’s orders and is cured, or, he violates his orders and dies. This first “faith”, in the form of trust, is the trust that originates “through hearing” a sermon and is a necessary prerequisite for the cognizance of God (see Romans 10:17: ‘...**faith through hearing, and hearing, through the word of God**’).

This first faith of Man is linked to his natural knowledge, which has intellect/ logic as its instrument. There are two kinds of faith, but also two kinds of knowledge/cognizance; at the same time, there are two instruments for each type of

knowledge; i.e., for the cognizance of God and the cognizance of the world. That is what was stated by Saint Isaac the Syrian, a major ascetic of the Church: "It is one knowledge, which has faith as its prerequisite, and another, which is born of faith. The former is a natural knowledge, while the latter is a spiritual knowledge." With natural-logical knowledge (albeit it, too, is a gift of God), we can discern between good and evil. But how does natural knowledge lead us to Faith? According to the Apostle Paul, it turns Man towards God, through Creation (Romans 1:20). The divine path, however, is the one of teaching and of miracles - the "divine signs". The teaching and the miracles of Christ orientated Man's natural knowledge, in order to arouse the "first" faith. For instance, when Christ fed the "five thousand" in the desert, the people, on seeing the miracle that Christ performed, exclaimed: "**this man is truly the prophet who was to come into the world**" (John 6:14). In another place, John the Evangelist observes: "**Thus, Jesus had performed many and other signs before His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. These however have been recorded, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (the anointed One), the Son of God, and in believing, you shall have eternal life in His name**" (John 20:30-31). But even Christ Himself would say to the Judeans: "**and even if you do not believe me, then believe through (my) Labors, so that you might know and discover that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father**" (John 10:38). And: "**They told you, and you did not believe. The acts that I do in the name of my**

***Father, they testify about me***". (John 10:25)

Christ's words and actions are being repeated, by His saints, during every moment of History, and they are what arouse Man's faith. Only the "***rough-necked and uncircumcised in the heart and ears***" (Acts 7:51) - the Pharisees of every era - reject God's calling for salvation. The toughening and the callousness of the heart is the spiritual death of Man. In a situation like that, Man is rendered incapable of accepting God's Grace.

The "simple" faith alone, as a logical acceptance of the divine truth, is naturally insufficient for salvation; the devil and the demons also possess a similar kind of faith. According to Saint James, the brother of Christ, "***Where is the benefit, if one says he has faith, but shows no Labors? Can his faith save him?***" (he is referring here to the "first" faith; i.e., if he were to stop there) ***Even the demons believe, and they shudder.***" (James 2:14-19) The first faith contributes towards salvation, when, according to the same Apostle, it has "Labors" to show for it. Labors of faith constitute the enacted sequel of a person's belief in Christ; in other words, they represent his trust and his obedience in Christ - his recognition of Christ as Savior.

But what are those Labors that the first faith gives birth to? Saint Simeon the Theologian (11<sup>th</sup> century) speaks of the "virtues" that are born of the first faith: "***Faith in God gives birth to the desire for good things and the fear of condemnation. The desire for good and the fear of***



***condemnation lead to a precise observation of the commandments. The observation of commandments however, will reveal the human weaknesses. The awareness of one's weaknesses will give birth to the remembrance of death. However, he who has reached the stage of having that remembrance of death as his living companion will hasten to discover what his situation will be, after death. But whoever does indeed preoccupy himself with learning something about what happens after death, abstains from the pleasures of this life; because if he becomes attached to even one of them, he will be incapable of attaining complete knowledge.***” Virtues that are born of the first faith are in an inter-dependent relationship between themselves, because the one produces the other. According to Saint Maximus the Confessor: ***“Whoever has the Lord in his thoughts, maintains a fear of Hell. By remaining afraid of Hell, he keeps himself at a distance from passions. Whoever keeps himself away from passions, will tolerate the ordeals of life. By tolerating the ordeals of life, he acquires a hope in God. He who has his hope in God, distracts his mind from everything terrestrial, in other words, he attains apathy (a-pathos = passion-less). And when Man distracts his mind from everything terrestrial, he acquires divine love.”***

We must point out here that the confusion that ensued in the West regarding the relationship between faith and labours, is, in the Patristic tradition, nonexistent. James speaks of the first

faith, which must be complemented by labors of salvation. But Paul speaks mainly of the second faith, which we shall talk about, further on. This faith is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, inside the heart. Let us return to the first faith for now:

The labors of the first faith are of a therapeutic character, and they act as spiritual medicines for the healing/restoration of the human existence, in its communion with God. The “labors of the law” - which is essentially Paul’s sermon to the Romans - cannot, on their own, earn any recompense (reward: Luke 17:10), nor can they save Man. For example, the Pharisees had labors of the law to show, but they could not be saved, because they were not “pure of heart”. The catharsis (cleansing) of the heart is a prerequisite for the cognizance of God. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall look upon God”** (Matthew 5:8). The criterion, therefore, that evaluates the first faith, is that it leads to the cleansing of the heart. That is why faith is subjected to monitoring, exactly like a therapeutic, medical method is proven correct, when it leads to a person being cured. And here, again, the difference between Orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy is evident. Non-Orthodoxy (heresy) does not lead - cannot lead - Man to becoming cured, because it does not possess the “medicines” required for salvation. These “medicines” are the proper teaching of the Bible and the dogmas (decisions) of the Ecumenical Synods, which are nothing more than the recording of the experiences of the Saints on the matter of salvation. The dogmas of the Church provide the faith that saves, and they determine the course of the faithful person

towards salvation. That is why the Saints throughout the ages struggled to the death for the preservation of the purity of the dogmas, just like genuine Physicians struggle for the preservation of a therapeutic method. Adulterated dogmas do not save, and this, again, is where the tragedy of heresies becomes apparent. Their dogmas are adulterated medicines that are lethal for Man, and lead to eternal destruction. And that is the reason the Saints are afraid, not of sin, but of heresy.

This also explains a historical practice, which is often misconstrued. Heresy, as maintained by fr. John Romanides, was regarded by the Christian State as an adulterated medicine, as it contains poisonous teaching. That is why heretics' books (but not the heretics themselves!) were often burnt (that is, destroyed) in the Orthodox East... the way that any justly governed State is obliged to destroy any medicine that endangers the lives of its citizens, and to obstruct the activities of pseudo-physicians. In this matter, it is not about restricting the free movement of ideas, because here, Man's very eternal existence is threatened.

These are the prerequisites, with which our Church to this day is struggling to protect its flock from heretical groups of the East and the West, which are employing (especially in our homeland) an open and provocative proselytism. This is why we need the prayers and the support of everyone.

#### **4. The "perfect" faith - the indwelling (inner) faith**

The first faith may not save, but it does open the way to salvation, which is expressed by the perfect, inmost faith. This is what is preached by our Saints, such as Saint Makarios the Egyptian (4<sup>th</sup> century): ***“He who tries to believe and to become united with the Lord, must try to receive the Holy Spirit during this lifetime. That is why Christ came to the world: to administer the Holy Spirit to the soul... But if someone does not try to discover, here, from this lifetime, where the light of the Holy Spirit is, and preserve it inside his soul, then, when he dies, he can expect to be received by the place of darkness, at the left hand of the Lord.”***

This faith is called “supreme”, “perfect”, “inmost”, “originating from vision”. It is the faith that is linked to the event of salvation, because it constitutes the certainty of salvation within Man. The “first” faith is more of a human achievement - albeit naturally with the help of God. The “perfect” faith is the fruit and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In order for someone to attain it, he must acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit. That is why the assumption of the Holy Spirit is the Christian’s aim (ref. ***“receive ye the Holy Spirit”*** (John 20:22)). The prayer of the Orthodox faithful is: “Heavenly King, the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth...come, and camp inside us...”. Life in Christ, as an exercise, is called “spiritual effort”, precisely because it aspires to render Man receptive of the Holy Spirit.

**Patristic references on the two-fold faith:**

**John the Damascene (PG 94, 1125C - 1128A)**

*“Faith is two-fold. There is the faith that originates through hearing; for, having heard of the divine scriptures, we believe through teaching...Then again, there is the faith which is the hypostasis of things hoped for... As for the first, it springs from our conviction, while the second belongs to the endowments of the Spirit.”*

**Anastasios of Sinai (PG 89, 76 CD)**

*“The upright faith is understood as two-fold. There is the faith upon hearing a sermon, and there is the more certain faith, which is the hypostasis of things hoped for. And as regards the one upon hearing, all people are able to attain it, whereas the second one is only attained by the righteous.”*

A living member of the body of Christ is the one who has the Spirit dwelling inside him, with **“unutterable sighs within his heart”** (Romans 8:26). This person is “faithful; he is **“a temple of God”** (Cor.I, 3:16). A spiritual person in the language of Orthodoxy is the bearer of the Holy Spirit, and it is he, who truly belongs to Christ, as a genuine member of His body. The Paulian distinction of the “spiritual-natural-carnal” person is upheld by the holy Fathers also, when they refer to a person being “according to nature”, “above nature” and “contrary to nature”. Saint Mark the ascetic underlines this division, with the following words: When the Nous is in a

“contrary to nature” condition, Man is forgetful of God’s justice, and he is in conflict with his fellow-man whenever they wrong him (=the carnal person). But when the Nous is in a “natural” (according to nature) condition, then that person discovers that he himself is the generator of evil thoughts. This person confesses his sins to God and is fully aware of the cause of his passions (=the natural person). However, when the Nous reaches the “above nature” condition, it receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and this person knows that when he begins to prefer attending to bodily matters, he cannot keep the Spirit (= the spiritual person).

The inmost faith according to Saint Gregory of Palamas is the best of all proofs of God. **“Faith”**, he says, **“is the best of all proofs, and an improvable proof of a holy proof”**, because it is something that is experienced; it is an inner certainty. That is why logical proofs of God were not developed in Orthodoxy - they were never deemed necessary. The “sight” of God - “theoptý” - is the direct and insurmountable proof of divine existence and presence.

The perfect faith is frequently mentioned in the New Testament, but it requires a knowledge of the linguistic code of the Holy Scripture in order to be comprehended. Here are some examples:

John 3:16: **“...so that every believer in Him shall not be**

**lost, but shall have eternal life..**" ('eternal life' = divine Grace, divine energy. 'believer' = the one who has Grace dwelling inside him)

John 3:18: "**The believer in Him is not judged**"

John 11:6: "**The believer in me, even if he dies, shall live**"

John 14:12: "**The believer in me, whatever works I do (=miracles), he too shall do, and even greater than these shall he do**" (see the miracles performed by the Saints, even during the New Testament era).

Paul's address in his epistle to Hebrews (11:1) is related to the perfect faith: "**And there is a faith, which is the hypostasis of things hoped for; the monitoring of things that are not seen**". The "thing hoped for" is the uncreated grace of the Triadic God. We are in anticipation of the Kingdom of God, of His Grace. Furthermore, the "thing that is not seen" is uncreated grace itself. The inmost faith becomes the monitor, that is, the verifying factor, of that which Man cannot see with his physical eyes. With the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Man reaches the stage of "theory", in other words, the vision of divine majesty (the kingdom). This is what is expressed by the other word of the Apostle: "**...if...you believe in your heart...you shall be saved.**" (Romans 10:9). Therefore, this is not about a logical faith, but a cardiac one, which is possible, only with the presence of the Uncreated within the heart. It is in this context that Christ's words should also be comprehended: (Luke 18:8): "**However, when the Son of Man comes, I wonder if He will find the**

***faith on earth?"***

Today's man could ask about the way the inner faith functions. We shall reply, with a New Testament excerpt (Acts 3:1-8): ***"Peter and John were going up to the sanctuary on the hour of prayer - the ninth - when a certain man who was lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they placed every day near the portal of the sanctuary - the so-called 'majestic' portal - so that he could beg for alms from those who entered the sanctuary. This man, on seeing Peter and John intending to enter the sanctuary, asked to receive alms from them. Peter looked upon him, together with John, and said: 'Look at us'. He turned towards them, hoping to obtain something from them. And Peter said: 'Silver and gold I have none on me; what I have, that I shall give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk! ... And in a daze, he stood up and walked..."***

Only those who are conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts can speak like the Apostle Paul did. Analogous moments are encountered in the lives of Saints (for example, Saint Spyridon would go to his daughter's grave and address her, with the certainty that he would receive her reply). Why don't we clergymen, who have received the same ordination as them, dare to venture into similar actions? Quite simply: because God's grace is inert inside us. We are not proper bearers of Grace; we are mere "transporters" of it!



The criteria of true faith and the outcome for Man is, for us Orthodox, those proofs of theosis provided by God Himself; i.e., the relics of Saints such as Saint Spyridon's nowadays in Corfu, and the 120 relics in the Great Cloister of Kiev in the Ukraine. A heresy has no holy relics to show: relics that are intact, miracle-working, and fragrance-exuding (=evidence of theosis). Besides, a heresy adulterates the faith in two directions: it either turns the faith into a philosophical system and ideology, or, it absolutizes one's labors -like the Pharisees did- and leads one into a barren activism (=missionary labors without any esoteric rebirth).

But here is where we come to comprehend the words of Saint Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> century): "extra ecclesiam nulla salvus" (there is no salvation outside the Church). "Church" here is not what is conventionally known as "Church" nowadays (even heresies call themselves churches); "Church" is the one and only Body of Christ. These words mean: "Outside of the lifestyle, which comprises the way of existence of that Body within History, Man cannot be saved." The Church exists wherever that way of life is preserved: according to Saint Irenaeus, bishop of Lugdunum (2<sup>nd</sup> century), "Ubi Spiritus Sanctus, ibi Ecclesia et omnis Gratia". Wherever the presence of the Holy Spirit is perceived (Saints, miracles), that is where the Church and all of God's Grace is.

## **5. Points of conclusion**

1) Orthodoxy exists, only where the method for the perfect faith is familiar and is applied. Wherever the path to theosis is unknown - even if the ground is characterized as "Orthodox" - that is where a heretic way of existence is pursued and is consequently non-Orthodox. Heresy, as a heretic way of existence, is oblivious to the experience of theosis. Instead, it "religionizes" the faith (it seeks to bridge the gap between man and God with the external-ritual media of a religion). The religionizing of the faith refutes the faith, as does its ideologicalizing. Heretics theologize intellectually, academically, and they cannot discern between truth and fallacy. Thus, "Orthodox" is the one who does not formulate heretical views, but the one who purifies himself, in order to attain Holy-Spiritual enlightenment. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, heretics show up, wherever "theumens" (enlightened ones) are absent.

2) The ecumenical dialogue would have acquired a certain meaning, if it dealt with these problems and not with "scientific" compromises for the purpose of seeking solutions.

3) Heresy is repulsed, not with violence or with legalistic or police measures, but with the experience of Theosis. Wherever this experience exists, there the Church exists. Unfortunately, in contemporary Christian societies, the seeking of Grace is tending to vanish altogether, and only monasticism is the area in which this seeking of the "perfect faith" has been preserved. This is why only monasticism is left

as the continuance of Apostolic-Patristic spirituality.

4) The seeking of the perfect faith is the criterion for the genuineness of the ecclesiastic Mission; because with regard to the Missionary matter, certain basic questions are raised: What is the meaning of the term "Mission"? What is preached by it? Where are non-Christians invited? To which Church? Which Christ? Are they invited so that they might be saved, or merely to become the followers of a certain authoritative circle?

5) Orthodoxy is not afraid of persecutions, only heresy, because only heresy can irrevocably harm the Faith.

Orthodoxy, as Orthodoxy, gives birth to Saints and thus remains in the world a place of sanctification and sanctity.

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