

OR HODOXY

IN A NUTSHELL: What about the non-Orthodox?

Every week in the Divine Liturgy, Orthodox Christians throughout the world, call upon God to send down the Holy Spirit upon them, that they may have the unity of Christ in a Mystery, and that He may accept their “sacrifice of praise” and their prayer “for the whole world.” “Thine own from what is Thine own, we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all, and for all” is declared, and shortly thereafter all of the people pray for “all mankind and everything.”

Why do we pray for everyone and everything? Because “We are all brethren in that we have one Creator and Lord, who is Father to us all. That brotherhood we share with animals and inanimate nature. We are also brethren one to another as descendants of one earthly father, Adam, and the creatures solely made in God’s image, which is common to all nations. More especially we are brethren in that we are of the same people and abide in the same house, and, above all else, we share one Mother, the Holy Church, and the true Faith, the Author and Finisher of which is Christ, the rightful Son of God. Not only is He our God but He was well-pleased to be our Brother, our Father and our Head, bringing us all together into one Body and making us members of one another and of Himself” (St. Gregory Palamas, 14th c. Homily 1; Christou v.9; cf Engvar.Veniamin v.1). This reminds us of the words of Scripture through the mouth of St. Paul: “do good to all people, especially to those of the Household of the Faith (Gr. tis Pisteos).” Notice in the Greek it does not say “the household of faith” but rather “the household of *the* Faith” with a definite article.

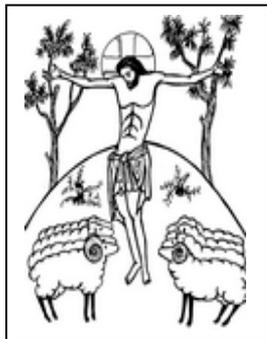
Of itself, apparent membership in the Church produces no advantage, but only the fruitful life of a true member of the Body, and more particularly one who abides in Christ and Christ in Him. In the words of St. Augustine: "How many sheep there are without, and how many wolves within!" (*Hom. John* 14.12). For there could be one who is outwardly not united to the Church, yet makes more legitimate use of the things of the Church than one who might be a member of the Church but does not fulfill his or her Baptism and

does not live the Christian life. Therefore, which one of these looks to the Apostolic Church as his Mother?

Father George Florovsky speaks of the "mystical territory" of the Church extending beyond "her canonical borders." He describes certain bonds, such as "right belief, sincere devotion, the word of God, and above all the grace of God" which are still unbroken even in schism. Indeed, grace is required to lead one to the Church in the first place. This means that the grace is obviously operative outside the Church, although, as St. Diodokhos points out, the operation of grace "from the outside" is distinct from internal operation. Nonetheless, for Father Florovsky, there is something of God connecting various schismatic and heretical communities with the life of the Church of God. What is valid in the sects, he says, is that which is in them from the Church [Clapsis, *Conversation* p. 6.]. This concept of "still belonging to the Church" even when currently not in the Church is not new, but was articulated by St. Basil the Great in the 4th century as the teachings of his predecessors:

"They have distinguished among heresy, schism, and para-congregations. A heretic is one **who has completely broken off** [from the Church] and has become estranged according to the Faith. A schismatic is one who has become a dissident because of some ecclesiastical matters which can find healing. Para-congregations are the gatherings of insubordinate presbyters or bishops, or those perpetrated by uneducated people...Thus, from the very beginning, it seemed good to our predecessors to totally disregard the baptism of heretics; but to accept the baptisms of schismatics, **for they still belong to the Church**" (Canons of St. Basil, ratified by the 6th and 7th Ecumenical Councils).

Not it is important to note the patristic distinction between that which "belongs to" or is "of the Church" on the one hand, and to be "in the Church" on the other. Not all sheep are now in the fold though they belong to it. Their rightful place is in the fold even if they are currently "lost sheep," wandering outside of the fold. But they belong to their Shepherd, and thus to His sheepfold, and shall be brought in to or back to the fold in His own time for them, and in His own way. Likewise, there are many wolves who are in the sheepfold who do



not belong there, and will be cast out. They are “in the Church” but they are not “of the Church.” The Lord alone in His foreknowledge knows those who “will endure until the end” and thereby “be saved.”

St. Gregory the theologian makes this distinction with regard to his father: "***Even before he was in our fold, he was ours***, for his character made him ours, as it were, by adoption. Just as many of ‘our own’ are not really with us, since their way of life alienates them from the common body, **so too there are many on the outside who are really with us, since their way of life anticipates their faith, and they need only the name Christian to add to their good works**" (St. Gregory the Theologian, 4th c. *Oration on the Death of His Father*, 5-13).

Metropolitan Philaret Nikolaeich, responds to the question, “Will the heterodox be saved?” first by responding that those who knowingly and willfully pervert the truth and sever the Church from within, lead others astray, or seek to destroy it, are at the mercy of God. But he continues: "It is self evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be termed renegades or heretics (i.e. those who knowingly pervert the truth)... They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of personal and conscious renunciation of orthodoxy. The Lord, ‘Who will have all men to be saved’ (I Tim. 2:4) and ‘Who enlightens every man born into the world’ (Jn. 1.43), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way."

Fr. Michael Pomazansky wrote the following with regard to Christian confessions and sects which are not part of the Orthodox Church: “there is no reason to view these confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflection on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, has an elevating power there among Protestants also. We cannot say that their prayers are... fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for *in every nation he that feareth Him. . .is accepted with Him* (Acts 10:35). The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God’s mercies. They help to restrain moral

looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism” (*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* 244).

“In the ineffable prescience of God, many who seem to be on the outside are in fact on the inside, and many who seem to be on the inside are nevertheless in fact on the outside” (St. Augustine of Hippo, 5th c.: *Bapt.* 5.27.38). We know that the Spirit is operative in the canonical bounds of the Church, but because we do not know where the Spirit is not operative “we must refrain from passing judgment on non-Orthodox Christians: Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord appointed to appear at the final judgement of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits. . . . She does not judge the rest of humankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of humankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgement of the great day” (Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 308).

Thus, as Orthodox Christians, we must not judge the non-Orthodox, but rather make our own “calling and election sure” as citizens of God’s Kingdom and members of God’s fold, and to make sure that we call upon His grace daily so that we are able to “persevere to the end” and take our place in His Kingdom. But along with this comes a monumental task from our Master, to “go and preach the Gospel to every creature” and “make disciples of all nations” so that those lost sheep who are ready may enter as soon as possible into the Chief Shepherd’s Fold. We have the power to invite others to “come and see” the richness of God in the Church, and if we fail to give out the invitations to the Master’s Supper, our fate will be that of the lazy servant, but if we do not bury this talent given to each of us, we shall hear the words “well done good and faithful servant,” and He shall give us “manifold more in this age, and in the age to come, life eternal.” Glory to Jesus Christ!



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