

Holy Orthodox Tradition

What is tradition?

- The Orthodox faith has its foundations rooted in the tradition of the Apostles.
- They themselves were meticulous and precise in forming the early church.
- The aim of the Orthodox faith is to keep the spirit of faith and practices as similar as possible to the ancient church of the disciples who were taught by Christ in the flesh.

- **2 Thessalonians 2:15**

- **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.**
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- Many people throughout the centuries have tried to use Christianity in a different way. Sometimes through delusion, sometimes for personal gain. The apostolic tradition ensures that it is very obvious when there is deviation.
- The term given is a well known one 'heretic' and was most important when the early church was blossoming.
- **If any man preach any other gospel to you than you have received let him be condemned. Galatians 1:8-9**

1 Timothy 4: →→→

- The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
- Such teachings come from hypocritical liars.
- If you point these things out to brothers and sisters you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of good teaching that you have followed.
- Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.
- Do not neglect your gift, which was given to you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.
- Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

(II)

- Nothing exists in a vacuum. Everything has context.
- Therefore our faith in Christ also does not exist in an empty vacuum but we understand it in the context of our Church.
- St Basil writes that there is an ‘inheritance’ we receive from the Church fathers which bear truth and unwritten words of Christ himself and we understand our beliefs through ‘the light of tradition’.

This is special

- The Church is not just a human collection of people but the living body of Christ working through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - The only way the Church can survive is through unity and working together.
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- The historical tradition noted by academics and observers is only part of the concept of 'tradition'; in reality much more important is the tradition of the power of faith and the holy spirit working through the Church since the beginning.
 - All of the ritual, lingual and practical tradition must therefore be interpreted as something much higher than just the physical. It is part of a forever unchanging Orthodox belief that we have kept for 2K years.

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- The faith that was handed to the disciples was in turn entrusted with the apostolic community, the church fathers, the bishops and all the congregation.
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- This is known as a living continuity the teachings are not dead but alive and inspires one generation to the next.
 - This is why its so important to keep the fire and passion for our true faith going amongst our peers and more importantly those younger than us.
 - In the liturgy: ‘from generation to generation forevermore.’

Our Father St Athanasius summed it up beautifully

- “ Let us look at the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Holy Catholic Orthodox Church from the very beginning:
- The Logos gave
- The Apostles preached
- And the Fathers preserved
- Upon this the Church is founded.

Dogma

What is Dogma?

- Principles, beliefs or rules that are dictated by an authority
- That are considered as uncorrupted, inconvertible truth.
- In the context of Christianity, Dogma is formed from divine authority and therefore cannot ever be altered.

(II)

- Sources of Dogma in Orthodoxy:
- Holy Bible, the Divine liturgies and the Writings of the Church Fathers
- Ecumenical councils, the Creed, Church Canons (instructions based on previous Synods)
- Even venerated Icons/art.

It is dynamic in application, yet unchanging in dogma.

- Of course Christianity, the faith and the teachings of the church are eternal and never change under any circumstance
- However the world is earthly and does change constantly through the ages and over the last 2000 years since the birth of Christ.
- The same with our knowledge of science, philosophy and logic.
- These changes pose more difficult questions and scenarios to the Church.
- There is therefore a responsibility of the Church to make sure our faith stays forever constant and truthful despite these challenges.

How does the Church deal with this?

- We believe that is firmly the Christ-Ordained role of the Bishops and Patriarchs in the Church to have the responsibility to keep our faith true to our core Christian beliefs (dogma).
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- Working and inspired through the Holy Spirit; they have been given this challenging task.
 - Christ himself spoke before the disciples:
 - **Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say^[c] to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Matthew 18**

Apostolic Succession

- Jesus clearly gave this responsibility to the disciples himself.
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- First of all Christ evidently gave the role of leaders and protectors of the Church to the disciples.
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- “In many different examples; one of the more well known: And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” Matt 16

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- In Orthodoxy we practice apostolic succession; that is the apostles chose through prayer their successors to be the next Bishops and in turn they chose the next Bishops; this has kept on going to the present day.
 - In the New Testament this is demonstrated visibly by St Paul 'laying hands' on Timothy and Titus.

Ecumenical Councils

- In the early church 300-700 (approx.) there were many large church meetings known as 'ecumenical councils' where all the bishops met, prayed and discussed important clarifications.
- Decisions made by the councils on matters of faith = canons
- The councils where Orthodox churches were involved and decreed canons are considered incorruptible and infallible. (example of a canon: Bishops cannot be married)

First Council of Nicea

- Declaration of The Holy Trinity
- Rejection of Arius
- When to celebrate Easter

Holy Synod

- Today we have the similar thing known as the ‘The Holy Synod’ where all the bishops of the church meet for prayer and discussion about what the orthodox teaching is for difficult new issues facing the church.
- It is the highest authority in the Coptic Church. The Pope is head of the synod as ‘first amongst equals’