

Sunday, June 10, 2012

# Characteristics of the Orthodox teaching

The Orthodox faith has important characteristics, which sets Orthodox teaching apart from the teachings of other denominations. I would like to shed some light these characteristics in this article.

1. **God's grace works in synergy with personal strive.** Human strive alone cannot lead man to salvation, nor the divine grace on its own, without the human will, spiritual interaction, and striving according to the rules (2 Timothy 2). While some denominations deviate left and right either by relying only in grace or by human efforts only, orthodoxy emphasizes the importance of fellowship and synergy between the divine work and the human effort for the salvation of man.
2. **The spiritual life is a life-journey and not just a moment we live.** Some denominations only focus on the starting point as though it is the end of the journey. Orthodoxy sees that as a great deception, because the starting point is never the ending point. To the contrary, there is a **long journey that must be successfully completed**, and not all who started the journey finished it to the end. Some begin in the Spirit and end in flesh (Galatians 3:3). And there are some who were liberated from the bondage of Pharaoh, passed through the baptism of the Red Sea, ate spiritual food coming down from heaven, and drank a spiritual drink, however they perished in the wilderness, and did not get to the Promises Land (1 Corinthians 10). Therefore, the starting point is not the ending point by any means, rather there is a journey which has dangers and ware fares that need grace, vigilance, strive, persistence, and faith working through love (Galatians 5:6), until our salvation is completed ***“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*** (Philippians 2:12), ***“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”*** (Hebrews 3:14).
3. **Level headedness is important and essential in the orthodox faith, along with spiritual feelings and passion for Christ.** Irrational emotions could cause man to fall into dangerous deviations that lead him away from the spirit of Christ and the church doctrine that she received from Christ and the Apostles. **The Orthodox path is a balanced one, it honors reason of the mind and emotions of the heart**, there is no showmanship or uncontrolled emotions.
4. **When trying to form any orthodox dogmatic concept, one cannot use a single verse approach from the scriptures.** It is important to gather all biblical verses, church traditions, quotes of the early fathers that speak about the topic. You cannot separate dogma from the patristic, liturgical, and historical heritage of the church. We accept the Bible as it is approved by the church, interpreted by its fathers, living in its worship and liturgies, and lived by its saints.
5. **Theology and prayer are intermingled in the Orthodox life.** The knowledge and fellowship of Christ and the personal relationship with Him come together in unison. Theological study alone is insufficient; there should be passion for Christ, praise for His name, and delight in the church worship as a foundation to any theological studies. **Christianity cannot be tasted through books alone, but it requires a fellowship of love with the Holy Trinity in a sincere worship, continuous and living repentance, and unceasing praise.**
6. **Man cannot have God as a father unless he takes the church as a mother.** Man cannot be a child of God unless he is born of water and Spirit from the womb of his mother, the church, i.e. Baptism, nurse from her pure milk, i.e. worship and doctrine, and to be always nourished from the bread of life of her spiritual table, i.e. the Altar. **The church is a prolific mother who gives birth for God the children of the kingdom**, as St Cyprian said: ***“there is no salvation outside the church”***.

The Orthodox Church considers the call to believe in Christ without entering into the membership of the church, which is the body of Christ, is an incomplete one, if it stops at that extent, it wouldn't be sufficient to save man. And whoever convinces others that God can be their father without the church being their mother, he deceives them and leads them away from entering into the membership of the body of Christ.

7. **Faith alone is insufficient for salvation. It is necessary to enter into a covenant with God through baptism**, and to enjoy the church sacraments necessary for salvation such as Confirmation, Confession and Communion, along with good conduct.

God did not love us only in words, so we cannot enter into a covenant with Him in words only. As He was incarnated, gave Himself up on the cross, and died and rose again to give us freedom and victory over death, we also ought to enter into a covenant with him on the same level through baptism. He loved us till death, we accept Him as a king to reign over our lives, we die and get buried with Him in baptism to rise with Him in a new life. This is the covenant with Him. We remain faithful to this covenant through our lives so we do not betray Him through sin. Therefore, we continuously live in vigilance, repentance, and love to all. We remain cautious ***“that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”*** (2 John 1:8)

From these seven concepts, It appears that the Orthodox faith is a comprehensive one. It is not a close-minded faith but rather it offers a comprehensive edification and original divine teaching through which we are filled and enlightened, and leads us to eternal life.

*Fr. Yohanna Naseef*

[fryohanna@hotmail.com](mailto:fryohanna@hotmail.com)

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL