

THE MEANING OF CANONICITY

WE HAVE ALWAYS HELD that the essence of being Orthodox is following the teachings of Jesus Christ as:

- (a) In the dogmatic proclamations of the Seven Ecumenical Councils**
- (b) Being organized in an ecclesial body in spiritual communion (whether formally or not) with all branches that have remained faithful to the Orthodox Christian way of life in both teaching and practice**
- (c) In the bishop(s) holding uninterrupted succession. This means that Apostolic succession is always rooted in Apostolic tradition, not a mere independent laying on of hands.**

In all due respect, being part of a particular branch or Synod or carrying prestigious labels does not make one Orthodox or "canonical". This is especially crucial, as certain parts of Orthodoxy in modern times seem to have changed the Orthodox understanding of canonical into a new version of papacy. Their definition of Orthodoxy is focused on being recognized, for instance, by the Patriarch of Constantinople (as if he were some sort of Eastern pope), whereas there is no such rule in the entire Canon Law (PEDALION ["Rudder"]). They appear to have adopted the corrupted Roman ecclesiology by making legitimacy or canonicity dependant upon recognition by a particular Patriarch or Pope. This "neo-papal" concept has no historical precedent in Orthodoxy and contradicts centuries of Eastern tradition back to the times of the Holy Apostles. It is as if by being in communion with a particular segment of Orthodoxy, whether patriarchal or not, somehow would make one Orthodox.

Seeking worldly recognition in the eyes of men and a fallen world by merely emphasizing the administrative, legal entity of the church instead of true unity of Orthopraxis, is spiritually detrimental, utterly false and not at all Orthodox. The forming of self-styled organizations in mutual recognition with the purpose of denouncing others or in proclaiming themselves as the only legitimate institution(s), exemplifies the grave sin of "condemning one's brother and sister" (St. Ephraim Prayer).

What is our call in this situation? - In order to remain faithful, loving and compassionate, we cannot join in such unholy endeavors. Living the Orthodox faith must be most important to us. Engaging in assaults on others is contrary to the holy faith and most sinful.

Let us continue to live as sincere, compassionate, inclusive and welcoming Christians who obey the Gospel commands as we invite those "of good will" (Luke 2:14) to join us. We hope and pray that the hearts of the worldly-minded, through the grace of God, will be transformed to understand what *being* Orthodox means in its essence. The truth shall be revealed: Where faith and practice prevail, there is Orthodoxy. The more this is compromised, the more of the Orthodox way of life is absent, despite any claims of legitimacy and the spiritual walls that have been created through artificial means and worldly aspirations.

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