

The appeal to Tradition is really an appeal to the mind of the Church. It is the method of discovering and determining faith as it has been done from the beginning: ***what has always been believed***. The permanence of Christian belief is the most remarkable sign and display of faith: ***without innovations***.

And this permanence of the Church's holy faith can be demonstrated by the witnesses of the past: The Holy Fathers. And the authority of the Fathers is a charismatic authority based on the assistance of the Spirit. The Fathers are not infallible, for infallibility belongs to the whole Church, but they represent the unbroken chain of Tradition received from the Apostles.

True Tradition is the transmission of truth. This Tradition, according to the Holy Martyr Irenaeus, is born and nurtured through the faithful and blessed truth, which was given to the Church from the beginning and is preserved in the incessant repetition of episcopal service. The Tradition of the Church is not the force of human memory, it is not the persistence of rites and customs. This living Tradition is a flourishing institution.

Following the Fathers is first and foremost the invocation of the witness of the saints. The witness of the Holy Fathers enters deeply — and inseparably — into the very fabric of the Orthodox Faith.

"The Apostle with the preaching, and the Father with the dogmas, left engraved a single Faith in the Church, and also the garments worn by the Truth, woven by the forces superior to Theology, which act and glorify the great mystery of devotion." (Romanos, the Melodious)

Without the Holy Fathers the Church would not be authentically Apostolic.



APOLOGETICAL CATECHESIS

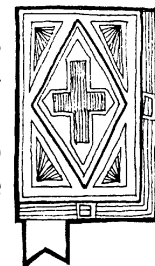
SHOULD WE ACCEPT THE HOLY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH?



The Holy Fathers ***wrote with the help of the Holy Spirit***. Their writings are based on the Holy Scriptures and the teachings they received from those who had learned them directly from Christ, or from His disciples.

The New Testament came into existence long after the teachings of the Fathers. The various books of the New Testament and other books found in manuscript form ***were collected and examined by the Holy Fathers of the Church***. A few were approved in accordance with the truth of the Faith handed down by the Tradition of the Apostles. ***If the Fathers had not done this, there would be no New Testament or the Christian Bible.***

If the early Church Fathers had not taught, it would not have been possible to learn anything from the Bible, for there was no Bible at that time. The Bible, in book form, was not codified until 401 A.D. In the early centuries of the Church, a multitude of heretics and false teachers arose who tried to deceive the faithful. The epistles were written to counter the teaching of heretics.



The Ebionites and Cerinthus proposed that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary; Marcion denied the incarnation of Christ and taught that crucifixion was an illusion. Mani believed that Christ had neither soul nor body. Navai said that Jesus was not crucified, and Eutychius taught that Christ did not take anything from the Virgin because He was not human. ***If the Holy Fathers had not objected to these heretical teachings, and had not given us the New Testament. What would have been the result?***

ORTHODOX ANSWERS 9





In the fourth century a new heresy began, taught by Arius. He said that the Son is not equal to the Father, that the Son is not God. Arius was a great propagandist and managed to spread his errors with the help of kings.

Those who believed and proved that Christ is God were persecuted and exiled. Then, in 325 A.D., the Council of Nicaea convened, in which 318 Church Fathers demonstrated that Christ is of the same essence as the Father, and that He is God. His teachings make up the first part of the Creed.

If the Fathers had not defended the true teaching of the divinity of the Son of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, 71 years before the existence of the New Testament; we would not believe that Christ is God (as some sects do today, by resurrecting the heresy of Arius).

Later, another heretic named Macedonius began to teach that the Holy Spirit was a creature, and therefore, was not God. He managed to spread his mistakes to many places (still today, some believe the same). But God again revealed the truth through the Fathers at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, and the third paragraph of the Symbol of Faith was codified. If they hadn't taught this, we wouldn't believe that the Holy Spirit is God.

Nestorius declared that the Son of God was only a human, that He was not the incarnate Word. He denied that Mary was Theotokos (Mother of God) because that which was born of her was only man. This error was defeated by the Fathers at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

The Holy Fathers have preserved our Faith.

We cannot reject his teachings because they are not part of the Bible. They codified the Holy Scriptures, fought heresies, and suffered for the preservation of the true Christian Faith.

Anyone who departs from the teachings of the Fathers falls into error. The multitude of sects that exist today are the fruit of the departure from



the Tradition of the Holy Fathers. Believing in what they are told it is, they have ended up believing in what never was. There is only one Truth in the Church; it has always been the same, and that truth is in accordance with the Tradition of the Fathers and Scripture.

The "heretics... they do not possess the Gospel of God, for they do not have the Holy Spirit, without whom the Gospel thus preached becomes human. We do not think that the Gospel consists of words of Scripture but of a meaning, which resides not on the surface but in the marrow, not in the pages of sermons but in the root of meaning. In this sense Scripture is really useful to those who hear it when it is spoken only with Christ, when it is presented only to the Fathers, and when those who preach do so only with the Spirit..." (in Galat. I, 1. II; M. L. XXVI, c. 386), St. Jerome, one of the Fathers of the Church, tells us.

What is the final criterion of Christian truth?

There is a very simple answer — Christ is the Truth.

The source and criterion of Christian truth is Divine Revelation, in its two-fold structure, in its divine plan. The source of truth is God's Word. This simple truth was given and accepted without difficulty in the ancient Church, as it can also be accepted in the divided Christian world of our day. However, this answer does not solve the problem, for it leads us to a new question: How should Revelation be interpreted?

The early Church had no doubts about the "adequacy" of the Scriptures; He never tried to go any further, and he always kept it. And how do you know which of the many interpretations is correct? What is the guide for interpreting the scriptures?

This is still a very important question today.

At this point there is no answer other than the "faith of the Church," the faith and message (kerygma) of the Apostles, the Apostolic Tradition. Scripture can be understood only in the realm of the Church, as Origen had vigorously insisted, and as St. Irenaeus and Tertullian had done before him.

