

A Few Remarks on the Traditional Procedure for the Recognition of Saints in Orthodoxy*

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1. The sacred Tradition of our most holy Orthodox Church has never established any official *ecclesiastical procedure* for the *recognition* of Saints.

2. Initially, it was the *common conscience* of the pious People of God at the local level (that of the monastery, parish, village, city, province, or local Church) that would immediately, spontaneously, and unanimously accord honors to a reposed Christian with Icons, services, and festal celebrations, to which common conscience were known his or her holy manner of life and gift of boldness before God, as well as the miracles worked through his or her intercessions, whereby he or she was shown to be a protector and benefactor of, and consolation for, the Faithful.

3. This immediate *recognition* of the holiness of a particular Christian, without any special procedures and on the basis of local knowledge of his or her life, gradually spread, over the course of time, and entered into the *universal life* of the Church.

4. Right up to the Fall of Constantinople, the spontaneous honoring of the Saints at a local level occurred without the mediation of the Church authorities; whenever the authorities did intervene—and this was very rare, in any case—, such action was of a *corroborative* and *proclamatory* nature.

5. That is to say, the Holy Synod of a particular Church did not intervene in order to approve or reject the honor given to a Saint, but for the purpose of confirming (*διαπίστωσης*) what was already existent and in effect—namely, the local knowledge of someone’s holiness—, proclaiming this in a solemn ceremony (*διακήρυξις*) and entering his or her name in the list of Saints (*έγγραφή εις τὸ Έορτολόγιον*), so as to inform the universal Church of his or her sanctity and to further his or her celebration (*καθολική βίωσις*).

6. The continuous maintenance of this tradition attests, in and of itself, that impugning or hindering the immediate and spontaneous according of honors to Saints revealed by God, before this is officially appointed by the Church authorities, is not a correct practice. It unquestionably constitutes an innovation, deriving, indeed, whether unconsciously or directly, from influences alien to the Church; namely,

from Papism, the influence of which has been and, unfortunately, continues to be most pronounced chiefly in the Russian Church—especially with regard to the subject at hand, and specifically with regard to the “rite” or “service” for proclaiming a Saint [the service of “canonization,” to use the more common word, which is taken directly from Roman Catholicism; or “Glorification,” to use a more proper, but also not *wholly accurate* term—*Trans.*].

7. On the basis of this more recent practice, the question of whether a Saint should be honored depends more, or even exclusively, on the findings of a committee, and the decisive criterion is a minute “examination” of a Saint’s life, and not that of the *common conscience* of the pious People, who alone have the power to grant immediate *recognition* to a Saint and to keep his veneration alive throughout the centuries.

8. In conclusion, and by way of rounding off this brief overview of the issue of the *recognition* of Saints, the following points should be made, so that the hazardous policy stemming from the aforementioned innovative practice might be avoided:

a. Within the bosom of the Church there have lived persons richly endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but who have not been honored as Saints by the Faithful or promoted as such by the Church, although her conscience has always recognized them as *outstanding* members of the body ecclesiastic.

b. It is God alone Who decides who among the *outstanding* and indisputably saved members of the Church is to be honored as a Saint. It is He Who will enrich a Saint with the gift of boldness in prayer and miracles after his repose, thereby revealing His servant, in an exceptionally special way, to be a protector and benefactor of, as well as consolation for, His People.

c. The exceptional gifts of intercessory boldness and wonder-working after death, which are causally connected, constitute the unique and particular hallmarks of a Saint, which distinguish him from the other *outstanding* members of the Church.

d. Ignoring or overlooking these essential *hallmarks of sanctity* leads to misunderstandings and excesses, the consequence of which is the adulteration of the Orthodox Church’s Festal Calendar.

9. Needless to say, the foregoing comment about the *hallmarks of sanctity* does not pertain to Martyrs and Confessors of the Faith, or to the theologians and Fathers of the Church. For clearly these Saints, merely by virtue of their extraordinary gifts of martyrdom, confession, and theological insight, have put forth a good witness at extremely crucial times, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, have averted the adulteration of salvific Truth, showing themselves to be Fathers and Œcumenical Teachers of the Church.

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