

An Orthodox Christian view of Roman Catholicism / My Orthodox Christian perspective on Roman Catholicism

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Last Sunday (*The day of the Resurrection* - Voskresenie) - as called in the largest Orthodox Christian country Russia), I've attended a Roman Catholic Holy Mass.

The reason for me to attend a Holy Mass in the Roman Catholic Church Saint Martinus Kerk in Arnhem, the Netherlands, was my desire to have a better understanding on Catholicism.



I should add I'm firmly Orthodox Christian and I know pretty well the evils Roman Catholic initiated Crusades have done I have no intention to be in any prayer or Eucharistic Union with Roman Catholics ever. Besides that I went to the Holy Mass service with the blessing of my priest, as I've asked him if he will bless me to go and be their with only educational aim.

The reason I don't want to pray or commune with them is pretty simple Roman Catholic Crusaders with their aggressive attempts tried to convert Bulgarian nations to Roman Catholicism on a multiple times.

Just to mention few of the other historical reasons which make me look with scepticism to Roman

Catholics is the fact that on Holy Mount Athos where we Bulgarian Orthodox have our strong spiritual fortress the monastery of Zographus under the patronage of Saint George the Glorybringer, Roman Catholic crusaders killed 26 of our monks with no evident reason coming and burning all of them, while they were all together in a prayer to the Lord. Nowadays the 26 Martyrs for Christ are saints in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - as the 26 saints from Zographus (Zograf). Along with the 26 Zographus martyrs was also the monastery abbot who in advance is known to have been notified by the Holy Theotokos (Virgin Mary) about the coming of the Crusaders (Cross scoffers - as they were called by our country priest *fr. Veliko* in Dobrich once).

It is known fact by every Orthodox Christian who seriously considers his faith and research in it about the erroneous nature of Roman Catholicism. We the Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics are no longer in Eucharist Union since the great schism. It is true the consequences around the West and East Church were very complex and partially two-fold, as it happened in times where the Country Government (Empire Government) was more or less bounded with the Church. However even though that it is a fact we Orthodox stayed keeping the decisions of the Holy Fathers taken priorly on the Ecumenical Church Councils in this number keeping the Nicene Creed of Faith intact, where Roman Catholics changed it. It is also a fact in the Roman Catholic Church a supremacy of one person over the whole Christendom was claimed a doctrine now recognized by early Church. The problems with Roman Catholics after the Schism and their division from the Christ truth has progressed severely as one can see in some events like the Witch Huntings / The Inquisition, The Crusaders marches, the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope and many many other doctrines which are ridiculous and out of truth and away from the teachings of the early Church Holy Fathers.

Just to name a few of the huge mistakes of Roman Catholics in their understanding of faith;

- The layman in Roman Catholic Church is administered in communion only the Flesh of Christ (The Bread which mystically gets transformed to Christ's Body), where only priests receive holy communion of both the Blood and the Flesh of Christ - Even the simplest reading of the Holy Gospel shows clearly this is a big mistake; We read in Holy Gospel Christ instructing us his pupils to eat his flesh and drink his blood which are being shed for our sins. Christ further says in the Gospels, whoever did not drink his blood and eat his flesh he is no one with our saviour *Christ (The Messiah)*.
- A multiple times of *Holy Liturgy* is served on the same altar, again breaking Church dogmatical truths decided in assembly during the few early Church Ecumenical Councils.
- The wrong understanding of supremacy of saint Apostle Paul and interpreting erroneously parts of the Holy Gospels and chapters from Holy Bible's New Testament. Roman Catholics says the saying that the keys to the kingdoms of heaven will be given to saint Paul means saint Paul is the person who allows people enter heaven and he is given spiritual authority and the Grace of the the Lord Jesus Christ to spread his salvational grace to the rest of layman (the newly baptized members of the Church)
- The erroneous understanding that the Priest within the Roman Catholic Church is a mediator between God and man. In orthodox Church the priest is considered an unworthy servant just like he multiple times says both during Holy Liturgies (like Holy Mass Church services) and even

during people's confession.

- The confession practice in Roman Catholic mistakes, in Roman Catholic Church the person does not openly confess to the priest eyes to eyes like in our Orthodox Church, the person has to confess in a special room, where both of the sides the Layman and Clergyman does not see each other. The priest symbolizes God who hears the confession in secret. The problem with this is again the same the priest is there just a "substitute for God". Just as a frame of comparison in Orthodox Church, we always confess openly in front of the priest face to face and most importantly in front of a Christ's icon which is always put near. In orthodox Church it is Christ's icon which Symbolizes God and actually it is just a symbolism and the icon itself is not representing God. During Orthodox Confession we know God and his Holy Angels is present and listen to the confession with no any representative. One more general problem with Roman Catholic Confession is the fact that if the confessing person does not see the priest face to face, his guiltiness of having confessed in front of a person is much lessened. According to our Orthodox Christian Church it is exactly those guiltiness during confession of layman to priest face to face which often makes us experience shame and is 1 barrier during next time we're thinking or willing to do the same sin. It is much to be said here probably but as the aim of this article was completely different I will stop here with Roman Catholic errs.

Even all its problems we cannot simply reject the importance of Roman Catholic Church easily and we should say through the ages even though not possessing the Grace of Christ in fullness as our Orthodox Church has it, still a lot of the ancient understandings and beliefs (but again not all) concerning our Christian faith are present in Roman Catholics. After all Roman Catholic Church is the closest to belief and Christian liturgical practices to the Orthodox Church. However the problem with it again is that what the Roman Catholic Church offers is not complete and from perspective of the many saints in our Orthodox Church, the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church is not salvational.

Now after having all this, I will go back to the topic of my article, which was to give **,my personal Orthodox Christian perspective on Roman Catholicism**. What I say may not be all truth and I'm not a representative of Orthodox Church in any way but it is my just observations based on my knowledge about our Orthodox Christian faith and my common sense, I'm just a layman in Orthodox Church, so i'm prone to sinfulness and mistakes. Thus if I'm mistaken forgive me.

I. What I've noticed in the Roman Catholic Church to be wrong from perspective teaching of the Holy Fathers and practice in our Orthodox Church

1. First thing noticable in the Roman Catholic Church was on the entrance of the Saint Martinus Church (which btw is located in Steenstraat just 2 minutes walk from the city center)



On the entrance there is a huge statue of Christ the saviour surrounded by Angels. We know well that in orthodox Church we rejected statues as they profane understanding of the depicted person and along with that are in no difference to idols. Some might argue the situation with the Holy icons is also like with statues, but in reality it is not due to the fact the icons are the icon painter best attempt to display Christ and the Holy Theotokos the saints, the martyrs and all that is in heaven. With Stone Statues instead of icons the depiction is much more profaned and even looking grotesque to the observer (profaning the person it illustrates, also it is fact that many of the worldly rulers like Napoleon and many ancient kings ordered creation of Stones, even in old testament it was a stone statue which was ordered to be venerated instead of God, also in the old testament it was the Golden calf which is again a statue which served to be

an idol for people there probably hundreds or even thousands of reasons one can easily see, by simply reading the Holy Gospels).

Another thing about the statues is the material of statues is usually a stone or a variation of stone the stone is hard or impossible to burn and does not have heat or hardly possesses heat, also it never used to be a living matter but is indifferent. All materials in icons is just for a contrast made of organic substances.

2. The enormous size of the Cathedrals and the General Church architectures

The Cathedrals size is subject of praise and admiration. It is really a miracle that such a majestic buildings occur, I or anyone sane person cannot simply skip that.

However this enormous sizes of Cathedrals makes the person feel little and insignificant for God. Where in fact we read in the Holy Gospels; I recite by memory "**... for God so much loved the Lord so he gave his only begotten son so nobody perish but all be saved through faith in the name of his only begotten son our Lord**". The sharp architecture of domes (coupols) in the Roman Catholic Church I find rather (impudent) / bold to God, and in my view it spills lack of humility.

3. The benches in the Church, though it is great to have benches in the Church having benches for everyone doesn't seem like something too good. After all one has a week time to stay on his chair at home and usually the time spend in Church service is about 1.5 to 2 hours time. It is good to have some benches for the old people whose health does not allow them to stay right, but having a bench for all is just an extra confort which brings the heart and mind back to the earthly thoughts.

4. The Crucifix of the Lord Jesus Christ - on the crucifix in Roman Catholic Churches we see our Lord Jesus Christ crucified being in torture on the Cross.

In Orthodox Church Christ is on the Cross but already peacefully given the spirit - as the Lord Jesus said - "Lord in your hands I command my spirit". Having depicted Christ torturing might trigger in non-believers and even in believers a thoughts on the topic of sadism.

Other error noticable was on the Crucifix itself, in Roman Catholic Churches the Lord's legs are pierced by one nail. Whether we know in Orthodox Church tradition, both of the legs of our Lord Jesus Christ was pierced with 2 nails.

Actually in the few other Cathedrals where I've been and all across the Roman Catholic art I've seen I see this kind of inclination to depict moments of the suffering and death of Christ. Nothing bad with that but I think this is too much. After all even though all the Crucifix is the center of our Christian faith, we should not forget the rest of the Holy Scriptures. It is my view by concentrating on Christ's suffering to Golgotha (Christ's trial) and our Lord's Crucifix, we tend to forget about the rest of the Holy Scriptures. For comparison in the Orthodox Church every fresco icon painted and icons reminds is in much bigger details to events from Holy Gospels and life events of the saints. The "visual information" provided in our Orthodox Church through frescos and holy icons is much more and better selected reminding us always of all the Holy Scriptures just like every Holy Liturgy is a remembrance of Christ's earthly life, crucifix for our sins, Glorious Resurrection, descendance to Hell and Ascendance to Heaven

5. The Priest's position towards people; heading most of the time backwards the Holy Alter and backwards the Alter Crucifix and the 12 apostles.

In the Orthodox Church during our Holy Liturgy the priest most of the time is praying and heading his face to the East (In our Churches the alter should always be headed East). In Roman Catholic Church, I've noticed a lot of alters are positioned South, West, North. During most of the Holy Mass goes the priest is staying with his back towards the Holy Alter in a way looks like turning back to God. As the layman pray towards his face it symbolically seems like the laymen are praying to him like he being a mediator. I know according to Roman Catholicism dogmatism this is not so, but really for me it looks like so.

6. 6 candelers burns on the Alter instead of the usual 7 or 8 in our Orthodox Churches

6 in itself is not a bad number, but I really see no reason for 3 candles to burn on one side of the Crucifix and 3 more to burn on the other side (overall numbering 6).

Even in Jewish old testament tradition the Menora is burning a 7 candles, ancient Church followed some of the old times tradition just we can see even to this day. According to Ancient even pre-Church existence faith tradition it was never 6 candles to burn on the alter.

7. The position of "icon" depicting the Last Supper.

Maybe it is just in st. Martinus Kerk in Arnhem and not all practice in all Roman Catholic Church parishes, however on those one it rather strided me. The Last Supper showing the Lord Jesus eating with the 12 Holy Apostles is positioned on parallel hight with legs. Really it looked like pure mockery with Christ and the Holy Eucharist. It is common sense that tells me this painting can only go over the head of the Priest or layman. It is exactly like this in our Orthodox Churches. Above the head of us above the Dveri (Alter Portals) is located an icon with the Last Support...

8. The too much talking by priest and clergy during the service.

I had the impression that the overall prayers and singing in glorification of God is less than the General "talks" which seemed like a lecture by the priest right during the service. I don't speak Dutch so I could not understand all but the gestures of the priest and the overall face expression and intonation was clearly showing he is definitely not reading prayers or from the Gospel. Here is good time to say he also read from the Holy Gospels, as far as I could understand (at least it looked like this I don't speak Dutch so don't know for sure), here I liked that whether there was a Gospel Reading there was silence and there was no priest or deacon with the incense-burner (censer) disturbing the Holy Gospel readings. This is something good, but on the other hand in some of our Orthodox Churches (in smaller ones) though the incense incense-burner is making noises still it is hear-able for the layman, so this is not really a big issue in our Orthodox Church. Something else here that rather strided, me that along with the clergy a woman was reading or even talking things on a microphone right on the middle of the Holy Mass !

9. The side alters which even didn't have a Crucifix on it

st. Martinus Cathedral is with 3 Alters, one central and 2 side on left and right. On the left side Alter I clearly remember on the top of the Alter was (Mother Mary? holding a Cross). I've longly heard that in Roman Catholic Church there are wrong doctrines about Virgin Mary (like the doctrine that Mother

Mary was sinless), but having an Alter like this in my view is wrong. On the Center of the Alter the only proper thing that seems to fit my understanding is a Crucifix. We also have an icon of Mother Mary on our Orthodox Church alters, however it is an icon positioned on the left side and not on the center of the Alter. In the Center of the Alter is always Christ on the Cross who completed our salvation and redemption on the Cross for us all.

10. The late time in which the Church service started

The Church service started about 11:10 or 11:15. I have not heard or know any Orthodox Church that starts the Holy Liturgy after 10:30. Actually if I'm not mistaken there is an ancient church rule saying the Holy Liturgy should over no later than 12:00 oclock? I heard this and did not investigated so I'm not completely certain if it is true or not? If any orthodox brothers and sisters knows drop a comment.

11. The feeling impression of incompleteness of the Holy Mass

I didn't have the temper to stay until the end of the Holy Mass. I stayed maybe about 45 minutes. It all started nice music, Organs sounded peaceful and beautiful. It felt a bit like a symphonious orchestra concert, but it was peaceful so in beginning I like it. Later when the Priest and clergy came it all changed, especially when the priest and the Lady started speaking to people on the Microphone. This was like an interruption of the prayer and the natural way it all go. This happened on a few occasions so it was a mixture of harmoneous Organ Instrument sounds with the (Church choire accompany) and the priest and lady interfering. I respect all so I don't want to offend any of the devoted Roman Catholics but I just tell how it looked like to me. So if you're a Roman Catholic insulted please Forgive me

12. Donations demand before the end of the Service and before distributing the Holy Communion

I stayed in the Church until the moment, they asked for donations. I'm not Roman Catholic and don't agree or wanted to help Roman Catholic Church, as it is not my Church and besides that it preaches incomplete Christianity. I stand up and went out of the Church. Moreover I'm a poor person, and can't afford to help them so but anyways as I said even if I could have possibility I would not give them donation but would rather give my donation to the mostly poor Orthodox Church. Later I've figured out the donation part is followed by the Eucharist Liturgy part, as I've studied a bit about Roman Catholicism as explained by a devoted Roman Catholics. The problem with asking for donation right before the Eucharist and the transfiguration of the eucharistics - holy gifts is the layman's attention is totally distracted from the main purpose of the service - the *Holy Eucharist*.

II. What I liked (enjoyed) in the Roman Catholic Church



1. The Choir and the Organ

I liked the quire and the organ, it felt like peaceful to listen to that, but that's all it was more human symphony than divine one. However, an instrument existence during the service sacrifices part of it is spirituality. The organ is not spirited (Not a living soul), and thus from purely spiritual point of view it is much better that we don't have any musical instruments in the Orthodox Church. There is a believe in the Orthodox Church, that we use only people's voices (singing) to glorify the Lord for the reason, man was the most higher creation of God and therefore it is righteous that God is glorified by using the voice of his most magnificent creation the man.

2. The meditation idea in the Roman Catholic Church

I liked those partially but same time I rejected the idea. The idea that they speak of meditation might implant in the unknowing non-Christian the idea that in the Church people go to meditate instead of praying. It gives the idea the goal of Christianity is to just be in some kind of "inactive" peacefulness. The heroism of attending the Grace of Christ is somehow missing all this 'meditation'. It is also rather easy for people to think that Buddhist meditation is like Christian meditation. The Church had an entrance

on the Right Corner, which I liked. There was a fresco remake of an Orthodox icon depicting the Holy Theotokos with Christ. It was a quite place like Paraklis (small chapel), where one can spend some time alone and pray to God asking for help and forgiveness of sins. In this little room I saw a notebook, where different people have written petitions to the Holy Theotokos, for physical healing, life blessing and all kind of petitions we humans have. I really liked that a lot in some form there is a similar "non written" tradition in our Orthodox Church, as people write their petitions on small piece of papers and put them under icons or near the Alter walls or just leave them somewhere in Monasteries and Church buildings. However though I liked that after thing for it I realized this is not 100% inline with faith, for the reason God knows every person on earth's heart and his presence is virtually everywhere, we know he even knows our thoughts before we think them. So what would be the reason to place them on piece of paper, where we can pray it simply with few words - he already knows it

3. What else I liked about the Roman Catholic Church (Synthesized)

I liked in the Roman Catholic Church, a lot of the well organized brochures, Church singing notes papers, leaflets and general organization in the Church. If we talk about simply organizing, they definitely beat us Orthodox. Everything in the Church seemed well coordinated. The Church choir sing very well and obviously well coordinated too. This however is also something which might be put to trial. Such a well coordinated organization that is in the Roman Catholic seems to human. If we look in the nature, we see the coordination of things are there but not to the moment of perfection. The strive of Roman Catholics for perfection in both buildings and general organization is therefore I think not in consonance with the natural life as God created it. Also the lack of such "strict" organization in the Orthodox Church is an evidence of people's free will and unique identity.

4. The many people attending Holy Mass (people have faith)

Another thing I very much liked is the Roman Catholic Church was mostly full with people including a lot of young people under 30 years old. Maybe 1/6 of all people in the Church was from 15 to 30, 35 years. I don't know if the Sunday 1 of December 2012, when I attended the Church it was a big feast for Roman Catholics as I'm not aware of their Gregorian Church calendar, however it seems like a normal Sunday and still there were plenty of people attending, meaning people had faith. Sadly as of time of writting in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, one can very rarely see people under 40 or 50, most of people attending Church services are over 50, though sometimes young enter our Churches to light up a candle and for private prayer.

Conclusion

I will close this post with a video, I've searched on the Internet aiming to explain Roman Catholicism. It is not a critical but made by Roman Catholics, still the info it presents is interesting and partly what is said of symbols discussed is valid for Orthodox Christians priesthood too. After all the Roman Catholic Church though it has went away from the source is still preserving some general patterns of original true Christian faith kept and preserved in the Orthodox Church through the centuries.

With all said I pray and Hope God will turn back Roman Catholics to the True One Holy Apostolic Church - The Orthodox Church, but I realize for this happen it will be very difficult if not impossible. But

wondrous are the deeds of the Lord

Roman Catholic Mass explained

The video is probably taken from a Roman Catholic Monastery and probably served under the old Roman Catholic Rite, this is the reason why the priest and the "server" (The Ipodiaconus) is all the time praying and headed to the Holy Alter. The Roman Catholic Holy Mass has nothing to do with what is on the video. Probably in Roman Catholic monasteries the Spiritual life is in a much higher state than in the regular country Churches. Notice on the video, where the Dove (bird) symbol of The Descending of the Holy Spirit is placed it is on the level of the knees of the priest, just like I saw the Last Support in the Roman Catholic Church in Arnhem, it seems this error is repeated is in many if in not all Roman Catholic Churches.

As a conclusion I should say, I'm glad the Roman Catholic Church is existent here in the West. After all Roman Catholics do pray the Lord's prayer and surely there are people among them who are trying to live a true Christian life. I've noticed many Roman Catholic Churches has an Orthodox Icon or some kind of copy of an Orthodox icon. Being out on the street and walking, it is good to see the sign of the cross on a Church building, even if this building is not orthodox. Also all Roman Catholic Churches just like us Orthodox do embed a particle of a saint inside the Church alter. With the reason the Eastern and Western Church was one in the past it is likely big number of the Roman Catholic Churches has a saint Relic particles in their alter and by this the whole building is sanctified. Also it is not rare to find a an Eastern Orthodox Church saint Holy Relics somewhere kept across Roman Catholic Churches. Though we the Orthodox Christians are prohibited to pray together and take communion in an Roman Catholic Church it is always nice to enter a Roman Catholic Church and experience few minutes of silence and see a Cross and images reminding us for Christ, Virgin mary the Martyrs, the eucharist and God's greatness.