

In the end, are we wrong about life? (Fr. Andreas Agathokleous)

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It's certainly difficult to get rid of the mistaken assumptions about interpersonal relationships, our connection to God and also our view of our self when we've been fed these from childhood. Because the soul of a child soaks up whatever 'lessons' are offered as blotting-paper does ink. It keeps them, absorbs them and lives with them.

Of course, as we grow up, we come across other concepts which, if we're to accept them, require us to wrestle with them, to think hard about them, to be receptive to something new. But how do you make sure that the something new is also what's right?

The outlook that 'I have to be sure that what I'm doing is right' is, I think, mistaken. In the end, what do right and wrong mean? By what criteria do we define right and wrong?



For Christians, the criterion is the will of God concerning the particular person at the particular time. The sacred canons adopted by the holy Fathers at the Ecumenical Synods aren't laws, such we have in states, but pointers to Life, to real Life. In other words, the canons exist in the Church to show us how we should live, but the manner in which we actually put them into practice varies, depending on each person's circumstances, gifts and potential. This is why we each need a spiritual guide who won't be 'the guardian of the sacred canons', but someone who'll help us discover the beauty and joy of observing them, since they're medication which heals and signposts which lead to the Life of God.

It should be noted that, on the basis of Orthodox tradition, a spiritual guide isn't in our life to direct it by taking away our freedom, but to accompany us, showing us the perils of going in the wrong direction and indicating the way of the Lord, insofar as we want this.

What's important is that we should be on the path, even if we fall. Because while mistakes and transgressions hurt, they also make us more mature. The spiritual guide's there to help us mature, in other words to develop a natural relationship with Christ, loving Him and feeling His love, which leads to that love which, according to Saint Isaac the Syrian, is 'above all creation'.

Then, maturely and simply, we'll be able most of the time to understand what the will of God is for us at that particular point in our life. This is a will that consoles us, because at bottom it doesn't conflict with what we ourselves want.

We can then enjoy our relationships with other people and with our self, because we'll be enjoying our relationship with the real Person, with Christ, who, according to Saint Maximos loves and is loved as a person, converses, is silent, talks- in other words, lives.

Then any erroneous assumptions will fall away and we'll enjoy the beauty of a relationship with the living God and won't merely observe the canons 'in order to do the right thing'.