

THE SYNODICON

An Introduction

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

All our Fathers in the Spirit have repeated that exhortation of Saint Paul, "Watch ye, stand fast in the Faith."¹ The apostolic and patristic teaching incessantly bids the Christians to keep "the Faith which was once delivered unto the saints"² as a pearl of great price. The Faith justifies us and gives us access to Christ, our salvation; thus whether Christians keep the Faith is the determinant of eternal life and eternal death.

The true hierarchs of the Church were vigilant in preserving the revelation of Christ, to "keep that good thing which was committed unto" them.³ They watched over their spiritual flocks lest the wolf of strange doctrine enter the fold of truth. holding "fast to the form of sound words"⁴ which they had heard from both the Apostles and their successors, they were quick to single out any teaching alien to the household of the Faith. Any doctrine or system of thought arising in the Church, which failed to measure up to apostolic tradition was labelled a heresy by the bishop. *Heresy* is a transliteration of the Greek word *αἵρεσις*, which connotes a choosing, a choice, a philosophical principle or system, a sect. In Christian use, the word signifies a departure from the doctrines of the Church, both of the dissenting doctrine and those who hold it. Since there is one Christ and one Faith, adherents of dissenting opinion are separated from the Church. Consequently, when an Orthodox bishop or council of bishops declared a teaching to be heresy, it was incumbent upon all Christians, if they wished to avoid alienation from the mind of the Church, to abandon and avoid that opinion and to adhere to the apostolic doctrines.

If, however, the adherents of a heresy refused to recant their opinion, a council of bishops, in order to safeguard the flock, separated the diseased sheep and proclaimed that dissenting doctrine and all those who believed it to be anathema. The word *anathema* is a transliteration of the Greek word *αναθεμα*, meaning "separated." At times, the word has the positive

¹ I Cor. 16:13

² Jude 3

³ II Tim. 1:14

⁴ II Tim. 1:13

connotation of being separated from the world and evil, that is, dedicated to God. However, when anathema means separated from the Church, the ark of salvation, it can only have a negative significance.

The anathema is pronounced against a doctrine, thereby informing the faithful that this doctrine is erroneous and eternally condemned, alienating its adherents from the Church. Such an anathema remains forever. If a doctrine be wrong (that is, contrary to apostolic teaching), it can never become right (that is, in conformity with the apostolic teaching). Even though the number of adherents to a given heresy may wax and wane, or even dwindle to nothing, if that heresy should ever regain followers, the Church need not discuss or deliberate a doctrine once found heretical by our Fathers, for it remains so forever. The false doctrine remains anathema no matter how many its advocates. History reveals many such instances: for example, many Protestants recapitulate the errors of Iconoclasm, Arianism, and Nestorianism. Although these Protestant groups might not have been labeled heretical by any council or Father, they advocate doctrine previously condemned by the Church, thus making superfluous the need for a council to be summoned to declare them separated and foreign to the Church.

Often, in conjunction with the anathema of a certain doctrine, an anathema is pronounced upon the originators or leaders of a heresy. Although the Church fights the heresy and not the heretic, such anathemas have been necessary since heresiarchs, in order to gain followers, frequently disguise their teachings and thus instill gradually the venom of their heresy. The anathema, however, expose to the faithful Christians the perfidy of the heresiarch's specious teachings. Anathemas of persons, in contradistinction to the anathemas of a doctrine, can be lifted if the heretic renounces his heresy and seeks admission to the Church.

An illustration of when anathemas can or cannot be lifted is found in the solemn lifting of the anathema on both the doctrine of the *filioque* and the papacy by Patriarch Athenagoras and the Synod of Constantinople in 1965. Is the *filioque* now become part of the apostolic and patristic tradition, and is it in complete harmony with Orthodox theology? Has the papacy ceased to advocate the *filioque* and renounced its other errors, such as papal supremacy and infallibility, created grace, merits, and rationalism? In both instances, the answer is no. The anathema of the *filioque*, as well as the anathema of the other errors of the Latins, can never be lifted. Since the papacy and its followers have neither acknowledged that those anathemas were justified nor embraced Orthodoxy, the anathema upon them also cannot be lifted. All who espouse the beliefs of the Latins, or who prefer

those beliefs to the doctrine of the Church, or who consider that the Church has erred in condemning those beliefs, fall under the same anathema; certainly, lifting the anathema indicates a belief that the Church has erred in imposing it. Only when they return to the Lord, as a group or individually, can that anathema be lifted from them. The anathema is simply the declaration of the Church to the faithful that these men are separated from the Church.

Although each bishop has the charge of guarding Orthodoxy and of teaching the Faith in his diocese, it has become customary to have anathemas published by a council of bishops. Deliberating in council, the bishops follow in the path of the Apostles who were gathered together in assembly when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Being thus taught by God how to seek inspiration, the Apostles first gathered in council at Jerusalem, as described in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, in order to resolve certain questions. So too, the bishops, if gathered together in meekness and Christian love, will have the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In such a gathering, each bishop can supplement a lack in another, and they provide, in common, a check against human error. Each bishop can speak only for his diocese, though he be articulating universal truths to be followed by all believers. However, when a synod of bishops distinguishes and validates the true teaching, it is accepted that what the synod of bishops proclaims as heirs of the Apostles has universal application. Thus, there can be no accusation that an opinion solemnly agreed to by all is the personal view of any one bishop. For this reason, the pronouncements of the Ecumenical Councils and of the councils with ecumenical authority are unshakable pillars, agreed on by the body of the Church with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Both the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*⁵ and the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit* make little mention of the decisions of the first six Ecumenical Councils, which are considered to be the accepted foundation of definitive decisions and final solutions and thus require no further proof or proclamation. The *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* restates and reaffirms the

⁵ The term *synodicon* is applied to an official definition promulgated by a synod or council, or to a statement which has synodical origin or conciliar authority. The present synodicon was approved and issued by the Council of 843 which restored the worship of icons, i.e., it upheld and re-imposed the authority of the Seventh Ecumenical Council which had fallen into abeyance during the intervening second period of Iconoclasm (815-842). In the manuscripts, the titles are various: *The Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, *The Synodicon Confirming Orthodoxy Read on the First Sunday of Great Lent*, *The Synodicon Confirming Orthodoxy*, *The Synodicon Against All Heresy*, and different combinations of all the above. In the printed *Triodia*, the synodicon is titled *The Synodicon of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council for Orthodoxy*. Although not entirely correct, we have retained it because the Council of 843 did not form any new definitions, but was concerned to proclaim again the authority of the Seventh Council and to re-establish the definition of the Faith propounded there.

Seventh Ecumenical Council, with occasional references to the others. The *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit* reaffirms the Seven Ecumenical Councils and addresses the problem of the *filioque*.

As we previously stated, the solemn pronouncement of an anathema upon a doctrine is a safeguard for the Church and preserves the true teaching of the Church for the faithful. It sometimes happens that those possessing authority in either the Church or the state originate a heresy, or propagate an old one, or they reveal an erroneous opinion which they have hypocritically concealed. On such occasions, the faithful, defended and guarded by the pronouncements of the Church, can maintain the true way with assurance. Any contravention or change in the received teaching or lifting of anathemas indicates a change in faith, which is to be avoided. Once the mind is established firmly in the truth, it can brave the rigours of confessing Orthodoxy incumbent upon every Christian when an attempt is made to force his consent to a different faith. When those in authority meet resistance to the promotion and propagation of their own erroneous beliefs, oppression and persecution of the Christians will not be far behind.

No Christian, however, should be awed by the titles or high rank of those who make innovations in the Faith. He who confesses Orthodoxy, no matter how humble he be, is the true pastor and leader. He who confesses some heretical belief, no matter how exalted his station, whether patriarch, bishop, presbyter, or king, is less than any layman in the Church and is unworthy of credence. "But, though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema."⁶

Confession of the truth is a requisite of salvation, according to the Scripture which says: "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I deny before My Father which is in heaven."⁷ In order to forewarn us that the confession of truth will not be easy but rather arduous and full of strife, our Saviour appends the words: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household."⁸

⁶ Gal. 1:8

⁷ Matt. 10:32-33

⁸ Matt. 10:34-36

More than a warning, our Saviour's statement is a commandment that we must confess the truth without reckoning the ensuing contention. "He that loveth father or mother...and son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."⁹ To proffer an excuse that we do not make a bold confession because we, as Christians, wish to avoid quarrels, or choose not to offend someone, or are afraid, is condemned here by those same Scriptures in which peace and love for our fellow man are preached.

When it is required of him, each Christian must confess the Faith and truth of Christ: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"¹⁰ even if the requiring be by torture and the penalty be death. Christians cannot rationalize their cowardice by claiming meekness. Of course, an obvious prerequisite is knowledge and possession of the truth. Truth is equated with salvation, following the words of our Lord, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"¹¹ and can exist only in the Faith.

When the circumstances require it, every Christian must openly confess before men the Faith and the truth of Christ. This confession is a witness to his conviction of the truth and is the seal and confirmation of a Christian. This confession, however, is a consummation of a life witnessing to Christ's truth. For example, every Christian confesses the Truth by partaking of the divine Eucharist with the conviction that therein is the Body of Christ thus demonstrating his belief in the Lord's words "Take, eat, this is My Body."¹² Thus, every Christian knows the truth, if he be alive. "In Him was life: and the light was the light of men."¹³ "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life."¹⁴ Again the Saviour says, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."¹⁵

The question of heresy, then, is at the core of eternal life or death for each Christian. Everyone must give apology before God for his own deeds. One cannot ignore the problem by claiming, in a guise of humility, not to understand such matters, or by leaving it to the bishops for solution. Just as one would not ignore the lack of food, water, or air, but would urgently seek them to survive, so must one seek with equal urgency for the bread of

⁹ Matt. 10:37

¹⁰ I Pet. 3:15

¹¹ John 14:6

¹² St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*

¹³ John 1:4

¹⁴ John 5:24

¹⁵ John 8:12

heaven, the living water, the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, even more necessary to one's survival. Assuredly, a diligent search for the truth coupled with trust in God will bring an answer from God appropriate to every Christian. Our Lord proclaimed: "For one is your teacher, even Christ,"¹⁶ and "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find."¹⁷ Christ is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."¹⁸

Throughout the history of the Church, the disposition and faith of the Christians were tested. "For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."¹⁹ However, the confusion arising from Iconoclasm and its ecclesiological ramifications was unprecedented. Previous heresies had dealt either with the Trinity or the person of Christ. The importance of one's definition of God was unarguable to the ancient Christians; when controversy or heresy arose, the Christian might be uncertain which definition was true, but he never doubted that a true one did exist. No compromise of the truth could be allowed, since in the truth is the only hope for salvation. Although this frame of mind was also prevalent during the period of Iconoclasm, the controversy over the icons might have appeared to the simple person to be a quarrel concerning accidentals: the ornamentation of the temples. Ostensibly, the doctrine of the Faith concerning the Holy Trinity and redemption were left inviolate by the Iconoclasts; their reformation was aimed at supposedly peripheral matters: how the Church prayed rather than what it believed.

The first period of Iconoclasm began in 730 with the deposition of Patriarch Germanus by Emperor Leo the Isaurian and extended to the convocation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787. The second period began in 815 with the accession of Leo the Armenian to the throne and lasted until the death of Emperor Theophilus in 842. Rather than analyzing and classifying historically the doctrines of Iconoclasm, we will present the opinions of the Iconoclasts collectively, though they represent a period spanning the eighth century and half of the ninth.

The Iconoclasts, who accepted and acknowledged all definitions legislated by the Fathers concerning the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Church, transgressed no defined doctrine of the Faith. They attacked areas which, for the most part, had been left to unwritten law and tradition, to the domain of piety and devotion. Herein lay the crux of the difficulty for the faithful. The Orthodox could not simply cite the Iconoclasts for the

¹⁶ Matt. 23:10

¹⁷ Matt. 7:7

¹⁸ John 1:9

¹⁹ I Cor. 11:19

violation of such-and-such a canon or conciliar decision, or that they had contravened Scripture. Indeed, the Iconoclasts claimed that they were zealots for the Scriptures and quoted the second Commandment: "Thou shalt not make to thyself an idol, nor likeness of anything, whatever things are in the heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not worship them nor serve them; for I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God."²⁰ Many more such strictures against idols from the Old Testament were applied by the Iconoclasts to the Orthodox use of icons in prayer.

Saints John Damascene, Nicephorus, and Theodore the Studite, however, demonstrated in their treatises on the holy icons that the Iconoclasts were not motivated by zeal for fidelity to the Scriptures, for the Scriptures themselves refuted them. These holy Fathers responded that while God, in leading the Hebrews from the abyss of idolatry, had forbidden the worship of graven images, He had also commanded images and symbols to be made which did not detract from the worship of the uncreated Godhead: for example, the cherubim, the bronze serpent, the lamp stand, the ark, and the tabernacle itself with all its accoutrements.

By their quoting of biblical and patristic texts, the Iconoclasts laid claim to a speciously Christian authority, but "by their fruits ye shall know them."²¹ Their vicious persecution of the Orthodox was obviously motivated by convictions and emotions separate from the truth and love of Christ. In their pride, they thought of themselves as being more spiritual than the Orthodox because they abolished material images on the premise that "God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."²² This so-called spiritualization, which engendered such unspiritual bloodshed, reveals the major traits of Iconoclasm.

Their vaunting pride, which kept them from accepting peacefully the clear Church tradition demonstrated by the icons in the temples and by the histories of the saints is the most evident trait. They disputed the fact that icons existed in the Church from the most ancient times. Modern archaeology, however, has vindicated the Orthodox with the incontrovertible evidence discovered in the catacombs of Rome and in the church (and even in the synagogue) of Dura-Europos. The Iconoclasts could directly deny neither the icon made without hands, the Holy Napkin of Edessa, nor the miracle-working statue of Christ erected by Saint Berenice in the first

²⁰ Exod. 20:4-5

²¹ Matt. 7:20

²² John 4:24

century which Eusebius mentioned in his history; thus, in denying or ignoring the witness of tradition and of the histories, the Iconoclasts also had to distort the patristic witness. They quoted Saint Epiphanius' writings against icons as positive proof, despite the fact that these writings were most likely spurious since Saint Epiphanius' immediate disciple Sabinus built a church in the saint's honour and adorned it with icons. Another of his disciples, Leontius, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, reported that Saint Epiphanius was steadfast in his adherence to the holy icons. But even if these writings attributed to Saint Epiphanius were genuine, they represent the opinion of one man only, while the consensus of the Saints supports the holy icons. Interestingly enough, the Iconoclasts dared not attempt to deny the worship, deeply rooted in Christian tradition, of the Cross and of the Gospels. Heresy is always thus: inconsistent and divided against itself.

Consequently, if the Iconoclasts considered themselves more spiritual because they did not permit the holy icons in the worship of the Church, they displayed an anthropology having more in common with pagan philosophy than with the Gospels, an anthropology characterized by a dualistic disdain of matter and of material adjuncts to worship, as if only the spirit were important, as if the body were dross and had no share in salvation, and could be ignored. The Church Fathers replied that God created man from the dust of the earth; man possessed a material nature and was part of the material creation, and it was good in God's sight. At Christ's Second Coming, man will be resurrected with his material body to live eternally in either bliss or torment. Certainly, in denying the material creation, one denies the work of God and man's nature as revealed in the Scriptures. In denying the holy icons, the Iconoclasts rejected the Christian doctrine of man and the fact that man's flesh could be deified. The holy Fathers insisted that if the Iconoclasts considered it the whole purpose of man to cast off the body and to become immaterial, then they had demeaned the significance of Christ's Incarnation. Christ could impart life and deification to the household of faith, which participates in the Mysteries only if His flesh were deified and life-giving. We can participate in the divinity only because Christ deified human nature in His flesh, which is become our salvation. "God became man that we might become God," according to Saint Athanasius the Great;²³ that is, the divinity with which Christ imbued His flesh, the flesh which He incorporated into the Godhead, is imparted to all who partake thereof. Can that which is divine pass away and become non-existent? The Fathers accused the Iconoclasts of annulling the

²³ *On the Incarnation*, LIV, and, in slightly different words, *Letter 60, to Adelphius*, chap. 4.

work of the Incarnation. This accusation was not mere polemics, for many Iconoclasts rejected not only images of the Saints but even their existence or their invocation. A further consequence of this heretical belief was that the Iconoclasts rejected the veneration of holy relics. To the Iconoclasts, God became transcendent. As Plato and the other pagan philosophers asserted, the material creation could not be sanctified, and salvation was a release of the spirit from the prison of the body.

A subsidiary argument of the Iconoclasts held that because Christ was uncircumscribable according to His divinity, He could not be truly depicted; for the divinity can not be depicted. So when venerating the icon of Christ, one worshipped a man and not God since it shows only the human nature and not the divine. Saint Theodore the Studite comprehensively answered the Iconoclasts in his *Refutation of the Iconoclasts* by stating that if Christ's human nature is uncircumscribable and indepictable, then the human nature is necessarily swallowed up by the divinity and lost, with the result that there is only one nature in Christ, the divine, which cannot be depicted. However, the Orthodox reject such a Monophysite tenet and maintain that Christ's human nature is not swallowed up by the divinity; therefore the human nature, which retains its attributes, remains depictable. Thus Saint Theodore demonstrates that Iconoclasm is Monophysitism in disguise.

Many scholars who have attempted to find the roots of Iconoclasm have favoured the theory of a revival of the Jewish roots of Christianity rising in revolt against the supposed over-Hellenization of the Church. Some have traced the roots back to Moslem influence, while others have searched for the origin among the various Monophysite groups, such as the Jacobites or Armenians.²⁴ After all, Emperor Leo the Armenian inaugurated the second period of Iconoclasm in which the Christological arguments were at the fore. In any case, the confusion and inconsistency of this heresy make it difficult to trace with accuracy the genesis of its beliefs or to unravel the strands of its arguments. It is sufficient to know that the actual progenitor of these affairs is the father of lies himself.

Another tenet of the Iconoclasts, which had far-reaching consequence was the authority they gave to the emperor. They subordinated the Church to the state, even in doctrinal matters, an action which reflected their devaluation of Christ's Incarnation. It was easy to secularize His body, the Church, and subordinate it to the state since all things material were of no account. It is interesting to note how most of the Protestant reformers, such

²⁴ If note total and true Monophysites in the classical sense, these groups are definitely Monothelite in their Christology.

as Calvin, Zwingli, Luther, and Cranmer, who did not believe in icons, in saints, or in relics (in short, in the sanctification of the material world), also had no qualms in subjecting their churches to the state. Emperor Constantine Copronymus²⁵ was even declared to have delivered the Christians from the deception of the idols, although never had anyone, no matter how exalted, been described thus except Christ, the Light of the world. The *Synodicon* makes an explicit condemnation of this splintering of our redemption.²⁶

Despite official persecution, the Orthodox remained staunch. The list of Martyrs and Confessors during that time contains many great heroes and Fathers who inspired those of lesser stature with the love of Orthodoxy which enlightened them to find means, even by subterfuge, to remain Orthodox. They understood that the great violence and hatred with which the Iconoclasts persecuted the Church had its origin in the devil, the enemy of our race; certainly, if the holy icons could arouse such fury in the devil and his adherents, they must be important for our salvation and could not be dispensed with.

An amusing anecdote concerning the Empress Theodora, consort of the Emperor Theophilus, the last of the Iconoclast emperors, exemplifies those Orthodox who retained their Faith in difficult circumstances through subterfuge. They may not have made an open confession of the Faith, yet they never denied or renounced it. The Empress had kept holy icons in a locked chest in her apartments. Once, when she was privately venerating them, the court jester (a lack-wit dwarf called Denderis, or Benderis, who had the freedom of the palace) came running in. Upon seeing the icons, he asked, "Mommy, what's that?" The Empress quickly answered, "My dollies." Denderis then went running off to find the Emperor, who was eating a meal at the time. Theophilus jokingly questioned Denderis about how he had passed his day. Denderis said he had seen "mommy" (the Empress) playing with her dolls "like so"; then he brought his hand to his lips and gave it a smacking kiss. Theophilus was enraged, suspecting that his wife was worshipping the holy icons. He arose immediately from the table and stormed into her quarters exclaiming, "Are you not a Christian? Why then do you worship idols?"

²⁵ Emperor Constantine V, who reigned from 741-75, was the son of Leo the Isaurian, who reigned from 717-41. When the infant Constantine was being baptized by the Ecumenical Patriarch St. Germanus, he fouled the baptismal font by defecating into it. St. Germanus then prophetically said that this child will bring many woes upon the Church of God. On account of this incident, he received the cognomen *Copronymus*, i.e., "dung-name."

²⁶ See *The True Vine*, double-Issue 27 & 28, pp. 61-62.

Theodora calmed him and asked why he was angry. After he had explained what he had heard from Denderis, she laughed gaily and said, "O Augustus, I was combing my hair before the mirror as Denderis entered. When he saw the reflection and asked what it was, I kissed it and said it was my doll." Mollified by the explanation, Theophilus did not press the matter.

Soon after Theophilus was in his grave,²⁷ Theodora, along with her brother, the Caesar Bardas, issued an edict dated March 11, 842, granting amnesty to the Orthodox and recalling the exiles in the name of Emperor Michael III, her five-and-a-half year old son. Saint Methodius was elected to the Patriarchal throne and the synod, which issued the present *Synodicon* was convened. The solemn pronouncement of the *Synodicon*, commemorating the re-possession of the churches by the Orthodox and re-installation of the holy icons took place on the first Sunday of the Great Lent, March 11, 843.

Every year thereafter, a commemoration of these events in the Church was decreed on every first Sunday of Lent, in order that the Faithful might be reminded of the struggles of the Confessors. It was decreed that the *Synodicon* be read also for the learning of true doctrine and for guarding against heresy. The *Synodicon* was titled "the Triumph of Orthodoxy" or υπερ Ορθοδοξιας, that is, "in behalf of Orthodoxy" or "advocating Orthodoxy," referring specifically to the struggle of the Church with the Iconoclasts. Although the original form of the *Synodicon* written by Saint Methodius was principally concerned with the Iconoclasts and the confirmation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, it also referred to past heresies and heresiarchs. As time passed, however, and Iconoclasm fell into abeyance, the title began to acquire a wider meaning. The festival became an occasion to re-affirm one's faith and one's Orthodoxy; consequently, when new disputes and heresies arose, new articles were inserted into the *Synodicon*. Its reading presented an opportunity for instruction, and the proclaimed anathemas or blessings were a publicly evident part of the chain of Orthodox teaching from the beginning to the present. Additionally, each regional Church would often enter articles of particular importance to it, because of either the recrudescence of an old heresy or the appearance of a new one. Moreover, names of the local proponents of a heresy would be added in order to apply to local needs. Following this tradition, the Synod of Russian Bishops Abroad, Metropolitan Philaret presiding, convened in full council at the Skete of the Transfiguration in Mansonville, Quebec, Canada, from July 21/August 3 to July 30/August 12, 1983, and approved the insertion into the

²⁷ Jan. 842

Synodicon of an anathema upon the heresy of Ecumenism. The anathema upon this nebulous and multiform heresy is found in *The True Vine*, double-Issue 27 & 28, Page 71. It also became the universal custom to have a procession of icons on the first Sunday of Lent as a reminder of the origins of the *Synodicon* in the Triumph of Orthodoxy over the Iconoclasts.

A further development in the *Synodicon*, as various portions were added, is seen in the diptychs of the living bishops and rulers. At first, everything was in good order with all those who had fallen asleep being commemorated, and then the living. First to be commemorated among the living were the Emperor Michael and his mother, Theodora. After their deaths, their names were written in the diptychs of the reposed, but their names were never removed from the original position.²⁸ When the chapters of John Italus were added in the eleventh century, those on "the Father is greater than I" and some others in the twelfth, and those condemning Barlaam and Acindynus in the fourteenth, the anathemas and blessings put upon the men connected with those chapters were added on to what already existed. Furthermore, regional churches would substitute or add their own diptychs of the local succession of bishops or rulers.

Thus the texts of the *Synodicon* preserved and read in Antioch or Crete or Cyprus or Athens or Corinth or Sicily or Patras would differ somewhat from the one read in Constantinople; they would differ in the insertion of articles of regional interest or of local diptychs. The printed *Triodia*²⁹ have resolved this problem, since all those listed in the diptychs have gone to their rest; therefore, a place is provided at the end for the commemoration of living hierarchs and rulers.

The present translation is based on the text printed in the *Triodion*, with reference to the critical text edited by Jean Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie: Edition et Commentaire" and published by the Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation Byzantines in their annual *Travaux et Memoires*, Volume II (Paris, 1967), pages 1-316. Many local variants found in the critical text were excluded since the *Triodion* text is based principally on Constantinopolitan usage, which is sufficiently comprehensive so that some tenet of practically every heretical sect is cited for anathema. In any case, local bishops or synods have had the authority from ancient times to insert names or articles pertaining to problems of faith agitating their

²⁸ This duplication has been omitted in our text.

²⁹ The *Triodion* (plural: *Triodia*, literally, "Book of the Three Odes") is the liturgical book which contains the variable portions of the services for Great Lent, Holy Week, and the 3 weeks preceding Lent. The hymns emphasize compunction, repentance, and conversion. The book takes its name from its characteristic canons which have only 3 odes instead of the usual 8.

dioceses. A few anathemas, which in the printed *Triodion* had been misplaced, are here returned to their proper chronological and topical sequence.

The feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy has developed in a new direction under the tutelage of the ecumenists. In most "Orthodox" churches, only a very curtailed version of the *Synodicon* is read, if at all, preceded or followed by a procession of icons in which representatives of various denominations, and even Jews, participate. Of course, these representatives are not there to profess the majesty of Orthodoxy. Preachers are heard saying, "We are not celebrating the triumph of one faith over another." Do they not read the captions of the *Synodicon* in the books open before them? Certainly, they would not dare to read publicly the whole *Synodicon* for fear lest someone might understand it and question their activities and pronouncements. Instead of Orthodoxy, they exalt and celebrate a vague, undirected faith or human-centered belief. Their feast is detached from any historical reference and does not commemorate any historical event. It is merely an occasion to express a blindly humanistic sentiment.

One major subject not covered in the *Synodicon* is the *filioque*. Although Saint Photius the Great early recognized it as a great heresy and as its foremost polemist, especially in his crowning labour, the *Mystagogia*, and although it was recognized as a "most wicked evil" by Patriarch Peter of Antioch in his correspondence with the Ecumenical Patriarch Michael Cerularius, the majority of the Orthodox had not been involved in this doctrinal dispute, principally because there had been no missionary effort of the West to convert the Orthodox to the *filioque* heresy, and because communications were sporadic, usually only among merchants, diplomats, or high officials of Church and state. The faithful of the Church needed no convincing, there was no question in their mind or any possibility of dispute: the *filioque* was self-evidently heretical, and thus unacceptable.

After the capture of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade,³⁰ the foreign conquerors constrained the Orthodox to join the Papal fold, attempting to justify their violence with proofs of the legitimacy of the *filioque*. Being politically and militarily weak, the Byzantine Empire in exile at Nicaea could not defend the Orthodox against the depredations of the Latins, but the Church hastened to defend the souls of the faithful by instructing them with true doctrines and warning them of the heresy of the *filioque* in the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit*. Written on the model of the *Synodicon of*

³⁰ A.D. 1204

Orthodoxy, this newer *Synodicon* exhaustively elucidates the question of the *filioque* and expounds true Orthodox doctrine. John Eugenicus the Nomophylax, brother of Saint Mark Eugenicus, states in his *Refutation of the Council of Florence* that Saint Germanus the New³¹ wrote the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit*. John's witness must be considered reliable since he had access to the Imperial Archives and Patriarchal Archives of Constantinople before their destruction in the Turkish conquest. The final section of the *Synodicon*, which condemns the writings of Patriarch John Beccus,³² who attempted to enforce the decisions of the Council of Lyons³³ which subjugated the Orthodox Church to the papacy and accepted the Latin theology of the *filioque*, was apparently added later by a different hand. It would indicate that this *Synodicon* had up to that time been read publicly on the Day of the Holy Spirit as prescribed (even though the custom has not endured to our day) and had enjoyed considerable authority, which was used to lend weight to the condemnation of John Beccus. We have appended the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit* in order to supplement the deficiency in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* concerning the *filioque*. A patristic admonishment on this subject is vitally necessary in our day, for too often one hears "Orthodox" ecumenists saying that the *filioque* has never been condemned or that it is a *theologoumenon*.³⁴ Such brazen prevarication is immediately dispelled and shown for the lie that it is by both this *Synodicon* and all other synodical and patristic pronouncements, which condemn both the theology of the *filioque* and its uncanonical addition to the Creed.

The text for the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit*, which for the first time is translated into a modern language, was taken from *Archives De L'Orient Chretien*, no. 16, ed. V. Laurent et J. Darrouzes, "Dossier Grec, De L'Union de Lyons (1273-74)," Institut Francais d'Etudes Byzantines (Paris, 1976).

The shamelessness of the "Orthodox" ecumenists is not limited to the subject of the *filioque*. Ostensibly they accept and acknowledge all the

³¹ Ecumenical Patriarch (1222-40) in Nicaea

³² Ecumenical Patriarch, 1275-82. He is not considered to be legitimately elected and part of the true succession, since he was a Uniate patriarch.

³³ 1274

³⁴ A *theologoumenon* (pl. *theologoumena*), from the Greek word θεολογουμενον, is the belief or explication of one or more Fathers upon a spiritual matter which is not clearly articulated in the Scriptures or formulated in Church dogma. It is a respected belief not contrary to Church dogma and usually accepted, but not one that everyone must subscribe to in order to be saved. The Church dogmatizes with reluctance, and only when the Faith itself is in danger; for the mystery of God and of His creation and economy cannot be circumscribed and defined in words, but only indicated; the dogma transcends its expression. A *theologoumenon* deals with spiritual verities of which the expression or explanation is not clearly defined and fixed because they are not yet fully revealed or are beyond our capacity, e.g., the state of the souls of the dead and the life of the Kingdom. In a different category are "theological opinions" (θεολογικαι γνωμαι), which are human attempts to find answers in the Scriptures and the Fathers for certain questions which are debatable and subject to theological inquiry.

decisions of the councils concerning doctrine, but in practice they are often heard saying that this or that denomination or such-and-such a belief has never been condemned by a council, or that a council must first be summoned in order to decide whether one can call a new group or teaching heretical. They imply by such statements that one may believe what one likes or come to a compromise on various doctrines, or that some denominations can be accepted as being part of the Church of Christ. In short, they have accepted the Branch Theory.

Is it necessary for a council to be called to discuss each new instance of heresy? The answer has been given definitively by the First and Second Council of Constantinople in its fifteenth canon³⁵ which ordains that the Orthodox should separate themselves from any patriarch, archbishop, metropolitan, bishop, or presbyter teaching heresy and not wait until he has been condemned by a council. The Orthodox Church had of old considered this question and arrived at her God-inspired decision. For the faithful Orthodox Christian, there is no problem or question in this matter.

If no council need be summoned, have all the present-day heresies been diagnosed and condemned? Although not by the name of the denomination, every present-day heresy certainly has one or more of its beliefs condemned in the two *Synodicons* published in *The True Vine*, double-Issue 27 & 28. First of all, almost every Protestant group can be included among those who do not worship the holy icons (see the anathemas, *ibid.*, pp. 44-46), or who do not accept the miracles of the Saviour and the Saints (see anathemas, *ibid.*, p.48), or who do not believe in the reality of the Holy Mysteries (see anathemas, *ibid.*, pp. 52 and 54). The Monophysites are condemned in doctrine (see anathema, *ibid.*, p. 56) and by name (in the anathema, *ibid.*, pp. 70-71). The Papists are condemned in the chapters against Barlaam and Acindynus concerning created grace (*ibid.*, p. 63 et. seq.) and the chapters concerning the introduction of pagan philosophy into theology (see *ibid.*, pp. 47-50). Finally, there is the general anathema (see *ibid.*, p. 42) which condemns all innovation and anything enacted outside of the Church tradition and institution of the Holy Fathers, under which anathema come all the modernists and ecumenist "Orthodox"; moreover, in the *Synodicon on the*

³⁵ "But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, i.e., because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion from the so-called bishop before synodiocl clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honour among the Orthodox. For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church." (Canon XV of the First and Second Council of Constantinople, 861 [Often called the council of St. Sophia])

Holy Spirit (*ibid.*, pp. 85-108), the Papists together with the Protestants who sprang from them are condemned because they hold to the *filioque*. At times, some Protestants, notably the Anglicans, are willing to delete the *filioque* addition from the Creed, but they are not willing to abandon its theology.

Hearing the "Orthodox" ecumenists make the irresponsible statements noted above, one can only surmise that these statements spring either from a vast ignorance, an ignorance surpassed only by the arrogance that would make theological pronouncements when there is not even a superficial knowledge of the matter, or from an abyss of falsehood, since we have seen that only a bare-faced lie could explain the statement that the *filioque* and other modern heresies were never condemned. The first position ignores the Scriptures, Fathers, Councils, and Canons, while the second knows but does not honour them. Undoubtedly, both positions consider them to be irrelevant, unimportant, or erroneous; both thus commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, for they do not discern the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Saints and in the Church.

Whenever the modernists and the "Orthodox" ecumenists say such things as, "The Fathers spoke only for their times, and they have little relevance for today" "The Fathers were only men, and since we are also men, we have every right to change their canons and definitions, which, after all, are only human opinion"; they spurn their Fathers and forebearers in the Spirit and attack the Church of those who have won their crowns and gained glory from God and stand with boldness in His presence. Such pronouncements, with many variations, are often heard from these latter-day enemies of Orthodoxy. But when they call the inspiration and workings of the Holy Spirit the actions of men, is it not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit described by our Lord in the Scriptures? Is it not also blasphemy against the Spirit to close our eyes and to refuse to acknowledge what is so plainly stated by our Fathers? Voluntary spiritual blindness is truly the unforgivable sin, for our Lord said, "They seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, 'By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'"³⁶ The pinnacle of their sin and that which seals their

³⁶ Matt. 13:13-15; Esaias 6:9-10

condemnation is that they also presume to teach and to lead others to perdition. "And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said unto them, 'If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, "We see"; therefore your sin remaineth.'"³⁷

The *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* and the *Synodicon on the Holy Spirit* (*ibid.*) are a great heritage to the Church from our holy Fathers. Their true-born children receive it and treasure it, since it is their guide in the confusion of the wisdom of this world, a light in the darkness of heresy, and a discerning counselor in the wordy debates over the Faith. They who treasure and heed the *Synodicons* in every particular are truly sons of faith and light, sons of the one Church of Christ.

Note: The complete Synodicon is available from HOMB in [The True Vine, double-Issue 27 & 28](#). It includes the above "Introduction" as well as the following: What is an Anathema; The Word Anathema and its Meaning; The Synodicon of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council for Orthodoxy; Declaration and Confession of the True Orthodox Christians; and The Synodicon of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ John 9:40-41