

A PASTORAL ENCYCLICAL
of
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

My beloved Orthodox Christians:

Recent events in our Church have saddened all of us. Families have been divided; people who have not read the materials of issue, or even the most elementary religious sources, expound their personal opinions as if they were speaking with divine authority. It is a grievous situation that reminds us of St. Basil the Great's description of the Church in his own chaotic times.

Archbishop Auxentius of blessed memory used to tell us that all these divisions, and the misinformation that accompanies such disputes, are a wound in the Body of Christ. However, His Beatitude told us yet another thing: although divisions and disputes bring grief and separation — especially when it involves those who have been together for a long time — God is above and sees all things. He discerns the hearts of men, and knows what is true and what is false; who is guilty and who is the innocent victim.

This is why I am grieved, but not overwhelmed, by recent events in our Church, because so many good things may emerge from this tribulation. From the pangs of childbirth, a new child is brought into the world. After a natural disaster, a new resolve is born to re-build and to do things better and to make them stronger. Those who are discerning learn to profit from the reverses of life.

As Orthodox Christian bishops, we are duty-bound to strive primarily for the unity of the faithful entrusted to us in the true confession of the Faith. Secondly, it is our obligation to seek this unity with all the Orthodox Christian faithful throughout the world. It is in this spirit that our Holy Synod resolved last year, in the meeting held in October, along with the knowledge and consent of our Clergy Synaxis, to extend a hand of friendship to one of the Synods of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece, the Kallinikos Synod. As the events following revealed, and as subsequent documentation concerning the state of ecclesiastical affairs in Greece confirmed, our gesture of good will was premature. The majority of our bishops and clergy had *repeatedly* expressed their desire by vote and voice to proceed in this matter with caution and patience. But some clergy refused to listen to the voice of the majority.

It is important to note also that such negotiations with other Churches must always be carried out in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Once that

trust has been violated, however, it is only with difficulty that it can be restored.

In the course of our discussions, I addressed some specific questions concerning doctrinal issues to two bishops of the aforesaid Greek Synod – questions that were vital to the establishment of solid foundations in the quest for further co-operation. In one case, the first bishop of the Greek Synod promised to provide answers, but never did so. The second bishop provided an answer that, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, was completely inadequate and which could just as easily have been uttered by a bishop of the "Cyprian of Fili" jurisdiction, or by an ecumenist. The question pertained to the giving of holy communion to new calendarists (who, in turn, now give communion to non-Orthodox).

It is important to understand that the questions asked of these two Greek old calendar bishops do not pertain to secondary, but nonetheless important, issues regarding, say, the frequency of the reception of Holy Communion, the depiction of the "icon" of the Holy Trinity, the reception of Holy Communion on Sundays, or the rules of fasting. No, the questions asked of these bishops pertain to vital matters dealing with the doctrinal integrity of the Church.

As I mentioned above, the answers from the two aforesaid bishops of the Greek Synod were either not forthcoming or flawed.

This, in addition to subsequent, well-documented information that has come our way – and which has never been refuted by the aforementioned bishops – has caused us to pause and to reconsider our stance *vis-à-vis* the various old calendar Synods in Greece.

Perhaps in the future, ecclesiastical matters in Greece will clarify themselves. We must all hope and pray for this.

In the meantime, we here in North America must all apply ourselves to the progress and spiritual cultivation of our parishes, to the growth and organization of our dioceses, and to the general spiritual welfare of our clergy and faithful. There is a great deal of work to be done on this side of the Atlantic. And now, thanks to the generosity of some benefactors, we have a new, much larger diocesan home for our Metropolis headquarters and our Academy of Saint Symeon the New Theologian; this opens many possibilities and opportunities to us as a local Church in North America.

My beloved, we are a young Church, but we have strong and ancient roots. This should be a formula for a sound and healthy growth, if the Lord so wills. We have received many, many blessings from God.

Now, with His help, let us apply ourselves to the task that He has given us, and prove ourselves worthy of His gifts. Amen.

Your fervent suppliant unto the Lord,

✠ Ephraim, metropolitan

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