

+ A QUESTION OF INTEGRITY +

The representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch addressed St. Maximus: “Will you enter into communion with our Church, or not?”

“No, I will not enter into communion,” replied the Saint.

“Why?” inquired the representative.

“Because she has rejected the rulings of the Orthodox councils,” replied the Saint.

“But if our Church has renounced the councils,” objected the representative, “then how is it that they are inscribed in the diptychs?”

“What profit is there in naming them and recalling them, if the dogmas of these councils are rejected?” was the Saint’s reply.

“Can you demonstrate clearly,” asked the representative, “that the present Church at Constantinople has rejected the dogmas of the former councils?”

“If you refrain from anger, and command me to do so, I can demonstrate it easily,” replied the Saint.

(From the *Life of St. Maximus the Confessor**)

-BASIC TEACHINGS-

Some months ago, an interesting feature article, the “Religious Question Box” appeared in the July 18, 1985 issue of the *Hellenic Chronicle*, a Greek-American newspaper published in Boston, Massachusetts. This feature article is written by the Rev. Dr. Stanley S. Harakas, a faculty member of Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts and former dean of the school.

In many ways, this particular article is highly commendable. In other ways, it is remarkable for what it omits.

We would like to quote some of the more pertinent parts of this article:

Q. A non-Orthodox Christian may not receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church. Why? G.D., Biloxi, Miss.

A. I could answer your question by quoting a number of Church canons. That would formally support the statement which you made. I would rather try to make the position of the Church clear and understandable in terms of the inner logic and rationale of the Church’s self-understanding.

The Nature of the Church

* *The Life of Our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, translated by Fr. Christopher Birchall, Boston, Mass., 1982, pp. 43-4.

We begin by noting the nature of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ. The Orthodox Church has always seen itself as being the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” Church of Christ in all of its fullness. Thus, for an individual Christian to be in communion with the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” Church is an either-or proposition: either you are a member or you are not.

The Chief Signs of Membership in the Church

Acceptance of the teachings of the Church by believers is an important sign of membership. This has never meant that believers had to be theologians, or highly informed regarding the subtleties of the faith. The basic teachings about God, Christ, the Sacraments, the Church and the Last Things are what is meant here. All these are summarized in the Creed. If a believer can repeat the Creed in faith, he or she shares in this “sign of membership.”

It is at this point exactly that Fr. Stanley’s explanation gets sidetracked. When he writes: “Acceptance of the teachings of the Church by believers is an important sign of membership,” Fr. Stanley is absolutely correct. But he is absolutely wrong when he goes on to qualify his statement as follows: “The basic teachings about God, Christ, the Sacraments, the Church and the Last Things are what is meant here.”

Contrary to what Fr. Stanley writes, the Orthodox Church does not make any such distinctions as “basic” or “non-basic” when speaking about her teachings.

In fact, this is exactly the point that was made by the Orthodox delegates at the WCC General Assembly in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954. Here is what the Orthodox delegates said in their *Declaration*:

The whole of the Christian Faith should be regarded as one, indivisible unity. It is not enough to accept just certain, particular doctrines as basic as they may be in themselves, e.g., that Christ is God and Savior. It is necessary that all doctrines as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils, as well as the totality of the teachings of the Early, Undivided Church should be accepted.

In addition, the Orthodox statement “The Nature of the Unity We Seek” issued at the WCC Faith & Order Study Conference in Oberlin, Ohio in 1957 went on to say:

Any agreement on faith must rest on the authority of the statements of the seven Ecumenical Councils which represent the mind of the one undivided Church of antiquity and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church.

As Fr. Stanley writes, our membership in the Church has nothing to do with whether or not we are “theologians” or “highly informed concerning the subtleties of the faith.” But, contrary to what Fr. Stanley says, our membership in the Body of Christ certainly does depend on whether or not we accept and uphold *all* of the Church’s teachings with faith and to the best of our ability.

For example, how many of us understand or can explain the manner in which the bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist are changed into the very Body and Blood of our Saviour? No one, of course. Nonetheless, this mystery is a “basic” tenet of the Christian Faith, and we are duty-bound to accept it and defend it — even though no mention whatsoever is made of it in the Creed.

There are many such “basic” tenets of our Orthodox Faith which are not mentioned in the Creed, e.g. “Theotokos,” the sign of the cross, the holy icons. Can one be even “basically” Orthodox without accepting these? And what of the *Synodicon* of Orthodoxy Sunday which condemns the heresies of the Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, and even many heretical teachings which are now taught by Roman Catholics and Protestants? The *Synodicon* also is a basic statement of the Orthodox Faith.

When we define the “chief signs of membership in the Church” as the acceptance of “basic” teachings, all of which, according to Fr. Stanley, “are summarized in the Creed,” then we shall find ourselves sharing “a common cup” with a very wide spectrum of “fellow-believers.”

For example, the Uniates recite the Nicene Creed — presumably “with faith”. Is this a sign that they are members of the Orthodox Church and may receive communion with us? On occasion, the Pope of Rome also has been known to recite the original Nicene Creed without the “Filioque” clause. Does this mean that we may give him communion on those particular occasions? Sometimes the Anglicans and even some conservative Protestant bodies do the same as an “ecumenical gesture” towards their “Orthodox brethren.” Under those circumstances, may the Orthodox Christian receive the “consecrated bread and wine” from the hands of an Anglican priest or priestess?

Then again, could this “basic” Faith also be the reason why Bishop Kallistos Ware of England (with whom Fr. Stanley is in communion) has given communion to Monophysites, who have no difficulty in reciting the Nicene Creed “in faith”? At the same time, however, the Monophysites obdurately refuse to obey the decrees of the last four Ecumenical Councils. But, according to the criterion provided by Fr. Stanley in his article, the matters those Ecumenical Councils dealt with are not included in what is “basic” to the Orthodox Faith.*

Finally, we note that even the Unitarians recite the Nicene Creed once a year “for historical reasons.”

How quickly our church membership expands when we get down to the “basics”!

Indeed, were we to make only one or two very slight alterations in the Creed, we could begin giving communion to Moslems also!

A Freemason’s dream come true!

* One is tempted to ask: if Fr. Stanley does believe that the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils are binding — and we prefer to believe that he does — then why is he in communion with a bishop who gives communion to individuals who disdain and even anathematize the last four Ecumenical Councils?

Needless to say, however, Fr. Stanley is completely in error in his definition of the “signs of church membership.” In contrast, the Orthodox statements at Evanston and Oberlin — which we quoted above — provide us with the true criterion of membership in the Body of Christ:

It is necessary that *all* doctrines as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils...should be accepted.

And:

Any agreement on faith must rest on the authority of the enactments of the *seven Ecumenical Councils*... and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church.

-A CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOP-

This brings us to the next section of Fr. Stanley’s article. Fr. Stanley writes:

In addition to orthodoxy of belief, is communion with a canonical Bishop, that is, membership in a local church body which is in communion with all of the other canonical Orthodox churches in the world. Being under the canonical and spiritual care of a Bishop who is in communion with all the other canonical Orthodox churches is a “sign of membership” which is extremely important. It not only unites us with all other Orthodox throughout the world today, but it also unites us with the historical body of the Church through the centuries. Today’s Orthodox are one with the Church of Christ, the Apostles, the Fathers of every age and place and with the Church Triumphant of the saints.

What Fr. Stanley has written here is absolutely correct, and no Orthodox Christian could object to what he has said. When he writes that a “sign of membership in the Church” is “communion with a canonical bishop, that is, membership in a local church body which is in communion with all the other canonical Orthodox churches in the world,” the two key words here, obviously, are “canonical” and “Orthodox”. Fr. Stanley emphasizes that communion with a “canonical Orthodox” bishop is “extremely important.”

Now an “extremely important” question arises: Is a bishop canonical or Orthodox when — contrary to every holy canon and in defiance of all Orthodox Christian doctrine — he participates in joint-prayer services with the non-Orthodox under ecumenical auspices, or gives communion to non-Orthodox?

Of course not.

How can one be canonical while, at the same time, trampling the holy canons underfoot? And how can a bishop be Orthodox while, contrary to Orthodox doctrine, he gives communion to those who do not believe what the Orthodox Church believes?

Fr. Stanley himself refers to the importance of the holy canons in the very beginning of his article, when he writes: “I could answer your question by quoting a number of Church canons. That would formally support the statement which you made [regarding the fact that a non-Orthodox may not receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church].”

Such being the case, Fr. Stanley has just placed himself in the unenviable position of having condemned his own bishops for being both uncanonical and un-Orthodox!

The holy canons strictly forbid joint-prayer services with non-Orthodox. Yet, in total defiance of the canons, every bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate — including Patriarch Demetrios and Archbishop Iakovos — and all the other “canonical Orthodox” jurisdictions which are members of the World Council of Churches repeatedly participate in these joint-prayer services.

So much for the canonicity of Fr. Stanley’s “canonical” hierarchy....*

As for the question of Orthodoxy, we are sure that Fr. Stanley would agree that one cannot be Orthodox if he is in communion with the non-Orthodox. For example, St. Mark of Ephesus tells us: “All the teachers of the Church, all the Councils, and all the Sacred Scriptures admonish the faithful to flee from those that teach heresy, and they forbid them to have communion with them.” And St. Theodore the Studite adds, “St. John Chrysostom addressed as enemies of God not only the heretics, but also those who are in communion with them.”

Now the question arises: are the Roman Catholics Orthodox? Of course not. They are members of a denomination encumbered with all the innovations and heresies that are part and parcel of the Papacy. Are then the Protestants Orthodox? No, there is no way that they are Orthodox. What of the Monophysites? Are they Orthodox? Insofar as they stubbornly refuse to accept “the enactments of the seven Ecumenical Councils..., and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church,” no, they too cannot be considered Orthodox, even though they are the closest to us in their beliefs and ethos.

If this is the case, how then can Fr. Stanley justify the fact that he is in submission to bishops who give communion to Roman Catholics, Protestants and Monophysites? The late Patriarch Athenagoras boasted that he gave communion to both Roman Catholics and Protestants.** In England, Archbishop Methodios, who is under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has done the same. Bishop Kallistos Ware, by his own admission, has given communion to the Monophysites. Within the Soviet Union, the Moscow Patriarchate gives communion to Roman Catholics “when no church of their own is nearby.” In his book, *The Thyateira Confession*, Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis, with the *official* approval of Patriarch Demetrios and his Synod, writes that it is permitted for Roman Catholics to receive communion from the Orthodox, and vice versa.

* On one occasion, a Greek Archdiocese priest was speaking with a priest of our jurisdiction. The Greek priest remonstrated with our priest: “You people are always accusing us of breaking the canons. Well, the canons also forbid a priest to dispense communion with a spoon. So you’re breaking the canons too.” To which our priest replied, “I’ll tell you what. Lets make an agreement. I’ll agree to stop giving communion with a spoon, if you agree to stop praying with heretics!” Unfortunately, the Greek priest did not agree to this “contract.” Needless to say, however, these two canons are quite dissimilar in their import and purpose. The first has to do with the church’s inner discipline, whereas the other — regarding prayers with non-Orthodox — has to do with the Church’s doctrinal integrity. This is precisely what the Orthodox statement, “The Nature of the Unity We Seek,” pointed out: “In order to safeguard the unity of the faith and the integrity of the liturgical and spiritual life of the Orthodox Church, abstinence from inter-denominational activities is encouraged on a local level.”

** See “Judged By Their Own Words”, (*Orthodox Christian Witness*, March 18/31, 1983).

So much for the Orthodoxy of Fr. Stanley's "Orthodox" hierarchy....*

Fr. Stanley is correct. It is "extremely important" that we be in communion with a "canonical Orthodox bishop," for this "unites us with the historical body of the Church through the centuries." And he continues, "Today's Orthodox are one with the Church of Christ, the Apostles, the Fathers of every age and place."

The only problem for Fr. Stanley, and with those who are in communion with his hierarchy, is that his jurisdiction — thanks to its ecumenistic ecclesiology and to declarations such as *The Thyateira Confession* — is no longer representative of "today's Orthodox," for the "Fathers of every age and place" did not pray with and give communion to the non-Orthodox as Fr. Stanley's hierarchs do — by their own admission.

It is not enough to be in communion with a "historical see," because even "historical sees" have had their un-Orthodox periods at some point in the past. Rome, too, was a "historical see" — but this is of no avail to her today. Constantinople also has had her staunchly heretical days. For three and a half years, Nestorios ruled as Patriarch of Constantinople until he was condemned for heresy and deposed by the Third Ecumenical Council in 431. In the seventh century, during the Monothelite controversy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was in the camp of the non-Orthodox for almost eighty years. Finally, in 681, the Sixth Ecumenical Council was convened and condemned four Patriarchs of Constantinople, one Patriarch of Alexandria, two Patriarchs of Antioch, a multitude of other Metropolitans, Archbishop, Bishops, clergymen, and also one Pope of Rome for heresy. Again, in the eighth century, during the Iconoclast controversy, for the better part of the century, Constantinople was again in heresy and not an Orthodox church.

When the Monothelite heresy was raging, St. Maximus the Confessor was Orthodoxy's foremost champion. Here is what the Saint said then about the Ecumenical Patriarchate:

* Recently, in December of 1983, Patriarch Demetrios issued an encyclical stating that it was not permitted to give communion to non-Orthodox "on the basis of the Encyclical of March 14, 1967." However, in 1971, Patriarch Athenagoras, who issued the aforementioned Encyclical of 1967, admitted with pride that he gave communion to both Roman Catholics and Protestants. This means either one of two things: 1) On the basis of his own Encyclical, Patriarch Athenagoras should have been suspended or defrocked — as the canons specify; or, 2) Despite the fact that he issued it, Patriarch Athenagoras did not attach any importance to this particular Encyclical.

Since Patriarch Athenagoras was not defrocked, or even reprimanded, we are forced to conclude that the second instance must be true. Our conclusion in this matter is fortified by the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has not officially condemned the book *The Thyateira Confession*, which it officially recommended in 1975, and which openly permits "inter-communion" between Roman Catholics and Orthodox. If it is a violation of the Orthodox Faith to give communion to non-Orthodox, then what can we say regarding all those years (1975-1983) when the Ecumenical Patriarchate was supporting "inter-communion" officially? On an un-official basis, Patriarch Athenagoras — by his own admission — was practicing inter-communion at least as early as 1971, and the Moscow Patriarchate has been doing so officially since 1969.

If Patriarch Demetrios' Encyclical of 1983 is to be taken as a serious and official statement (and one can only hope that it is taken seriously — at least, more seriously than the Encyclical of 1967), then we must ask: Have the bishops who were responsible for the former policy been suspended or defrocked, as the canons specify? Have they, at least, made a public apology? If nothing else, were they reprimanded and given an *epitimion*?

None of these has occurred.

Surely, if the Ecumenical Patriarchate wishes to be recognized as a "canonical Orthodox church," then it has to make some effort to abide by the canons and the doctrines of the Orthodox Church.

When I see the Church of Constantinople as she was formerly, then I will enter into communion with her without any exhortation on the part of men. But when there are heretical temptations in her, and while heretics are her bishops, no word or deed will convince me ever to enter into communion with her.*

In a parallel case today, Orthodox Christians are often reproached for isolating themselves from “official” Patriarchates, from “World Orthodoxy” (such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate to which Fr. Stanley belongs), as if not being in communion with them were itself a sign that these Orthodox Christians are not canonical or Orthodox.

There is only one problem with this argument: *nowhere* do the holy canons state that one has to be in communion with any of the aforementioned Patriarchates in order for one to be Orthodox! Fr. Stanley could not quote any canons to support this “extremely important” point of his article simply because there are no such canons!

But let us permit St. Maximus the Confessor to provide us with truly “canonical Orthodox” guidelines for responding to these reproaches which our Orthodox Christians sometimes hear.

The Saint was asked by his inquisitors (who belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate):

To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all of these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once.... Yesterday, indeed, two delegates arrived from Rome, and tomorrow, the Lord’s day, they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Ecumenical Patriarch.**

To this, St. Maximus replied as follows to the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (and to all those who present themselves as the spokesmen of “official” Orthodoxy):

Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communicate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: the Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.

The “new teaching” of St. Maximus’ day was Monothelism. The “new teaching” of our own times is Ecumenism. Today’s Ecumenism — and its ecclesiological and theological prop, the Branch Theory — is what permits the bishops and clergy of “World Orthodoxy” to have joint-prayer services with and give communion to non-Orthodox — which is, of course, not Orthodox.

Unfortunately for the proponents of Ecumenism, however, the heresies of the Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Monophysites have been condemned repeatedly in the decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, in the *Synodicon* of Orthodoxy Sunday, and in many other subsequent local Orthodox councils. Hence, no matter how much the ecumenically-minded

* *The Life of Our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor* op.cit., p. 20.

** *The Life of Our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, op.cit., pp. 14,38.

Orthodox try to re-interpret Orthodox ecclesiology, the fact remains that they are in communion and pray with clergymen who are adherents of condemned heresies.

As Fr. Stanley says at the end of his article:

Now you see why a non-Orthodox may not receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church. It is a question of integrity. The integrity of faith, church order, lifestyle and sacramental life.

This is precisely what Orthodox Christians have been saying for some twenty years to those Orthodox who are of an ecumenical turn of mind: It is a question of integrity. Hence, when ecumenistic “Orthodox” bishops and clergy have joint-prayer services with the heterodox and give them communion, they are being neither “canonical” nor “Orthodox.” Under such circumstances, surely, they lose their “integrity of faith, church order, lifestyle and sacramental life.”

In this, Fr. Stanley is absolutely correct.