

## **Ecumenism -**

The ecumenical movement takes the Protestant vision of the Church for its guiding principle. Protestants consider that there is no one truth and one Church, but that every one of the numerous Christian denominations possesses a particle of truth, thanks to which fact it is possible, by way of dialog, to lead these relative truths to one truth and one Church. One of the methods of attaining this unity, in the understanding of the ideologues of the ecumenical movement, is the conducting of joint prayers and divine services with a view toward achieving communion from one chalice (inter-communion) with time.

Orthodoxy cannot in any way accept such an ecclesiology, for it believes and testifies that it is not in need of collecting particles of the truth, for the Orthodox Church is precisely the guardian of the fullness of the Truth given Her on the day of Holy Pentecost.

Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church does not forbid prayer for those who are outside communion with Her. By the prayers of the holy, righteous John of Kronstadt and the blessed Archbishop John (Maximovich), both Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Muslims, and even pagans received healing. But, in acting in accordance with their faith and request, these and our other righteous ones taught them at the same time that the saving Truth is only in Orthodoxy.

For the Orthodox, joint prayer and communion at the Liturgy are the expression of an already existing unity within the confines of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Saint Irenæus of Lyons (second century), laconically formulated this thus: "Our faith is in concordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our faith." The Holy Fathers of the Church teach that the members of the Church build up the Church - the Body of Christ - by the fact that they commune of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Outside the Eucharist and Communion there is no Church. Joint communion would appear to be a recognition that all who are communing belong to the One, Apostolic Church, whereas the realities of Christian history and of our time, unfortunately, point out the profound doctrinal and ecclesiological division of the Christian world.

The representatives of the contemporary ecumenical movement not only do not promote unity, but aggravate the division of the Christian world. They issue a call to go not by the narrow path of salvation in the confession of the one truth, but by the wide path of unification with those who confess various errors, about whom the holy Apostle Peter said that "by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."

Until recently, the basically Protestant World Council of Churches called the Christians of the whole world to unity. Now this organization calls them to unity with pagans. In this sense, the World Council of Churches increasingly approaches the positions of religious syncretism. This position leads to an obliteration of the distinctions between religious confessions with the aim of founding one universal world religion, which would contain in itself something from each religion. A universal world religion implies also a universal world government with one economic order and one world nation - a mixture of all existing nations - with one leader.

If this occurs, the soil will be prepared realistically for the enthronement of Antichrist.

Let us recall the sadly notorious ecumenical prayer assembly, organized a few years ago in Assisi by the Pope of Rome, in which non-Christians participated. To which divinity did the

religious figures who had assembled at that time pray? At that assembly, the Pope of Rome said to the non-Christians that "they believe in the true God." The True God is the Lord Jesus Christ, worshipped in the Triune Trinity. Do the non-Christians believe in the Holy Trinity? May a Christian pray to an indefinite divinity? According to Orthodox teaching, such prayer is heresy. According to the expression of the eminent Orthodox theologian, Archimandrite Justin Pópovich, it is "pan-heresy".

Orthodox participants in the ecumenical movement assert that, by their formal membership in the World Council of Churches, they are witnessing to the truth that lives in the Orthodox Church. But the open violation of the canonical rules witnesses not to a confession of the Truth, but to a trampling of the Church's Sacred Tradition.

How would the pillars of Orthodoxy, the Holy Fathers of the Church, Saints Athanasius the Great, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Mark of Ephesus and others react to the participation of Orthodox in the contemporary ecumenical movement?

Let us turn to hoary antiquity, to the life of Venerable Maximus the Confessor. Shown in it is how an Orthodox Christian ought to behave in the face of apostasy - mass desertion from Christ's truth.

"Wilt thou not enter into communion with the Throne of Constantinople?" the patricians Troilus and Sergius Euphrastes, the chief of the imperial table, asked Venerable Maximus the Confessor.

"No," replied the saint.

"But why?" they asked.

"Because," replied the saint, "the leaders of this church have rejected the enactments of the four Councils...they themselves have excommunicated themselves from the Church many times over and have convicted themselves of incorrect thinking."

"Then thou alone wilt be saved," they retorted to him, "while all others will perish?"

The Saint replied to this:

"When all men were worshipping the golden idol in Babylon, the three holy youths did not condemn anyone to perdition. They were not concerned about what others did, but only about them-selves, lest they fall away from true piety. And Daniel, when cast into the den, in precisely the same way did not condemn any of those who, in fulfilling the law of Darius, did not want to pray to God, but he kept his duty in mind and desired rather to die than to sin and be punished by his conscience for transgressing the Law of God. And may God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone shall be saved. However, I shall sooner agree to die than, having apostatized in some way from the right faith, endure torments of conscience."

"But what wilt thou do," the emissaries said to him, "when the Romans unite with the Byzantines? After all, two apocrisiaries arrived yesterday from Rome, and tomorrow, on the Lord's day, they will commune of the Immaculate Mysteries with the patriarch."

The Venerable one replied:

"If even the whole universe will begin to commune with the patriarch, I will not commune with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul that the Holy Spirit gives even the angels over to anathema, if they begin to preach a different Gospel, introducing something new."

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In confessing ourselves to be Orthodox, we should remember that Orthodoxy is not at all a privilege, not a personal merit and not an occasion for the proud condemnation of others. We ought in every way to spurn such a path. We ought to be open with every-one, in order to help the multitude of heterodox, who are dissatisfied with the spiritual state of their confessions, to find the way to the truth. This means to associate with them, to invite them in, to give them an opportunity to see the unearthly beauty of the ancient Church that is preserved in Orthodoxy.

To confess Orthodoxy means to manifest humbly by one's life the fullness of the Truth in love and righteousness. Orthodoxy ought to conquer only by its radiance, as the Lord Himself, and by no means in arguments and by force. Orthodoxy is darkened by whomever is proud of it.

The truth of Orthodoxy is open for the sake of men's salvation, and not for their condemnation and chastisement. Orthodoxy is the sunlight that falls upon the earth. It shines for all who want to be warmed by its rays.

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Source: <http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/english.htm>