

THE CHURCH OF SERBIA AT THE CROSSROADS?

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Not long ago, in our Newsletter #22 (May - June), we noted with sadness that Bishop Christopher of the Serbian Patriarchal Church in America had taken part in the festive celebration of the jubilee of Archbishop Iakovos, Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and prayed in his Greek church with all sorts of heterodox groups, including even a non-Christian -- Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum. Now we have received another, no less sorrowful report.

The Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee, decided to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the parish -- an event held on Wednesday, October 27, of the current year. The pastor of the parish decided to celebrate the jubilee on a large scale and invited many guests and representatives of the press to a special service. Among those who actively participated in the prayer service were: the Rev. Angelo Kasemeotes, pastor of the parish, his assistant, Fr. Joseph Tsourgos, and his colleagues, Frs. Constantine Hallick and Nikiforos Tzendimos; the Serbian Patriarchal Church was represented by Fr. Milan Markovina of the staff of St. Savva's Serbian Orthodox Cathedral; also participating were Rabbi Francis B. Silberg, Catholic Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, Episcopalian Charles T. Gaskell, Lutheran and Baptist pastors, and even a woman minister from the "United Church of Christ." The woman minister read Psalm 100, while the rabbi was permitted to read anything he pleased from the Scriptures -- he selected the Genesis account of Jacob's dream of the ladder, reading it in both Hebrew and English. All participants in the scandalous assembly arrayed themselves in vestments peculiar to their own religions.

Photographs reproduced in the -Milwaukee Sentinel- and the -Milwaukee Journal- leave one quite depressed and, due to the presence at such a prayer service of a Serbian priest, cannot but raise sorrowful suspicions that the Serbian Patriarchal Exarchate in America, following the example of Archbishop Iakovos, is standing on the very slippery path of the betrayal of Orthodoxy.

At the same time, -Glasnik-, the official mouthpiece of the Serbian Patriarchate, in the "Throughout the Christian World" column of its July issue, printed a lengthy article on the pentecostal movement among the Orthodox. Unfortunately, based on the words "the Spirit bloweth where it wisheth" (Jn. 3:8), the survey was written in a tone very sympathetic to this movement. While it mentions Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou, the founder of "Orthodox Pentecostalism" in America, the -Glasnik- does not inform its readers that not very many years ago Stephanou himself printed in his own magazine, -The Logos-, a photostat of an official warning to his flock that he, Archimandrite Eusebius, is a heresiarch and that Orthodox should avoid all contact with him. Not one church in Greece is at his disposal to hold his services in, and the Church of Greece, receiving support from the Greek government, has successfully blocked the organization of his assemblies. Stephanou bitterly complains of all this to his followers.

The author of the survey also does not mention that the "spirit" is blowing on the heterodox to the same degree as on the Orthodox, and it often happens that the "spirit" unexpectedly "descends" upon a Protestant or a Catholic, and an Orthodox person who has become entangled in the movement, sometimes even a priest, will receive the blessing of a "reborn" sectarian. It is quite incomprehensible how Bishop Danilo of Marchana, as the editor-in-chief of the Patriarchate's publication, could allow such an article to slip past him, failing to distinguish between this "spirit" of falsehood and the Holy Spirit Who remains within the Church.

Editorial Note of the Orthodox Christian Witness

The above article was written in 1979. Yet, despite the fact that the heresy of Ecumenism was synodically condemned in 1983 under Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory, and despite the fact that the Serbian Patriarchate has demonstrated an intensified participation in Ecumenical events (see -Orthodox Christian Witness-, Nov. 11/24, 1985; Aug. 18/31, 1986; Nov. 24/Dec. 7, 1986), there are actually hierarchs today who

will insist that the Serbian Patriarchate is not Ecumenistic because it has not officially adopted the "Branch Theory"!

But we know from Church History that a hierarch can fall into error and remove himself from the Church of Christ without any "official" resolutions on his part. In fact, as one can see below, the 15th Canon of the First and Second Council of Constantinople says nothing of official decisions in regard to the matter of teaching heresy:

But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bare head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor 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.

As we all know, Ecumenism is "publicly preached" most especially in its joint-prayer and joint-communion services, while each participating group continues to adhere to its own peculiar religious beliefs. This is what Ecumenism is all about. Ecumenists have no interest in worshipping God "in truth", as the Church has always understood this truth, nor do St. Paul's words "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism" move them. To them, it makes no difference whether you are a Southern Baptist or a whirling dervish. The only important thing for Ecumenists is that "we all celebrate our human 'oneness' with one another by joining in prayer" to some "Infinite Being" -- whoever or whatever this "being" or "force" may be. For this reason alone, no Orthodox Christian can participate in such shenanigans.

For an Ecumenist, truth -- if it exists -- is relative, perhaps even irrelevant. Certainly, in this sense, Ecumenism transcends heterodoxy. It is a blanket denial of all that our Saviour taught us in the Holy Scriptures. It promotes "human oneness" while seeking to override or negate the oneness in truth which we can possess only in the Body of Christ -- the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This is why participation in prayer with Ecumenists *is* Ecumenism, purely and simply. And this precisely is why any nominally Orthodox jurisdiction that takes part in it is not only "at the crossroads," but already "on the very slippery path of the betrayal of Orthodoxy."