

## **No One is Free From Responsibility to Others**

The word used by theologians when speaking about unity among Christians is ecumenism. The Greek Orthodox Church has had a long involvement in the history of what is known as the ecumenical movement. This movement seeks a better understanding of the various Christian interpretations of the Gospel and teachings of the disciples.

A leader in bearing witness to Orthodox involvement in Christian unity has been Fr. Georges Florovsky of blessed memory. He was commissioned by the Ecumenical Patriarch to participate in the formation of the World Council of Church in 1948. (WCC) This organization was founded for dialogue purposes and held no authority to "unite" the Churches.

The Gospel is clear that when it comes to the "Church" it ought to be One because is God is One and not divided against Himself. This was the content of our Lords' prayer for the Church. He said:

"And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one . . ."

"The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me." (John 17:11-22)

The Church has been one and remains one in the Tradition of Orthodoxy. The Church has fulfilled its' calling and retained unity in worship, doctrine, teachings and ethics. Yet, along the historical road many have departed from the Church and have begun new churches - all claiming Jesus to be Lord. The question that the ecumenical movement places before us (Orthodox), what is our obligation (if any) to Christians outside the Orthodox Church?

Fr. Florovsky reflected a great deal about Christian unity and he taught that to seek unity was in fact a Divine imperative. It is something that expresses an authentic Orthodox Christian spirit and mind-set. He writes:

"We must seek unity or reunion not because it might make us more efficient or better equipped in our historical struggle. . . but because unity is a Divine imperative, the Divine purpose and design, because it belongs to the very essence of Christianity. Christian disunity means nothing less than the failure of Christians to be true Christians. In divided Christendom, nobody can be fully Christian, even if one stands in the full truth and is sure of his complete loyalty and obedience to the truth "once delivered to the saints" - for no one is permitted freedom from responsibility to others."

There can be found two extremes in attitudes of Orthodox towards Christian unity. On the one hand, there is the strong "anti-ecumenical" attitude which claims any dialogue as unnecessary. 'We are the true Church . . . we are united . . . let them come to us.' The other attitude is one that sees no divisions among Christians. 'As long as they believe in Jesus, it's all the same God.'" The first neglects a sacred responsibility to declare the Truth, the second compromises the Truth for the sake of unity - both are not Orthodox responses.

Patriarch Athenagoras also understood the Divine Imperative as being based upon our need to share the Truth of Orthodoxy. He wrote:

"Those who accuse me of sacrificing Orthodoxy to blind obsession with love, have a very poor conception of truth. They make it into a system which they possess, which reassures them . . . they have no confidence in the truth. They shut it up, they lock it up . . . But I say, if the truth is the truth, we must not be afraid of it; let us give it, let us share it, let us show it in fullness . . . If we continue in this attitude, the truth will become clear in itself, it will conquer all limitations. . . Let us enlarge our hearts."

Many chose to lock up the truth in hide behind it, yet the truth is a person who does not want to be hid but to be made known. The Truth is Christ who has come into the world in order to save it. Christ's mission cannot be separated from the mission of the Church. The Church must share its' experience of Christ in any way we can. Whatever method we chose, whether it's doing out-reach to the community, sharing ones' faith with a co-worker or even proclaiming our traditions over radio waves - we must make a choice to do something out of love for the Truth who is Christ.

For Greek Orthodox communities to "enlarge their hearts" means having "one mind." Unity in purpose ought to be worked toward by everyone. We need to understand that our children can very easily join the past generations that never experienced the Gospel of Christ. When they came to the Church they were only encouraged by parents to play Basketball, Greek Folk Dance or attend Greek Schools and never challenged to encounter Christ. In many communities we give mixed messages as to the purpose of Church.

Only when we as Orthodox have matured in unity of purpose will we begin to effectively contribute to being "One" with all Christians - the Lord said: become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me

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