

## **SYNDESMOS and Orthodox Unity**

### **Catholicity: the basis of the Orthodox unity.**

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The original meaning of the word orthodoxy is, to think right; to be able to see the reality of things: God, the world and life. That means that an orthodox is the one who can see the whole world and the life of the world in a catholic (integral) way. So, it is obvious that the content of the term Orthodoxy is catholicity as it has to do with one's ability of seeing Truth; in this case the meaning of the word Truth is used with the meaning of the Hebrew word *emeth*, the inner essence and the real substance of things, and not with its Greek abstract and intellectual meaning, the objective Truth, the idea. Thus the saying in the Bible: "I am the Truth"; "I am the real Being".

The person of Jesus Christ is the centre of the Scripture and of the Church. In him there is the whole truth concentrated; everything is summed up in Him, the whole man, the whole matter, the Creation and at the same time the whole God. The dogma of the fourth ecumenical synod at Chalcedon, according to which Christ is perfect God and perfect Man is the kernel of the Orthodox faith. So, an Orthodox is the one who in an absolute way insists to unite himself with God and who insists also on the Creation's acceptance of the whole God on its fulfilment transfiguration and deification through life of God. By saying Creation we mean every single aspect of life, every human act, everything except human sin.

It is obvious that Orthodoxy concerns immediately and essentially the whole world, the whole inhabited earth. Its nature is ecumenical and catholic. Christianity appeared on earth showing the same ecumenical and catholic dimensions. The kerygma of the Apostles was the overcoming of every division and restraint. It provided the elimination and the overcoming of all political, religious, social or any other kind of establishment.

The Gospel brought a new catholic look of life. Christians saw men in a new and different way. Until then, men were "neighbours" or "foreigners", Greeks or barbarians, Romans or non-Romans, free men or slaves, men or women. It was the first time in the history of mankind that man saw his fellowman simply and profoundly as a human being. And he understood that every other man is his "brother". So, agape, charity, common life were not duties. They did not mean obedience to a more perfect law-religion, but they were the offspring of this new look of life. The whole ecumene became a family. Christians brought another great message to the world. It was the message of the overcoming of Death, the radical hope and optimism, the complete affirmation in life. It was the first time that such a message was heard on earth. It is about the union of mortal with the immortal, of man with God, about the real catholicity. In this way man's soul and body, matter and spirit, are united. No dualism exists.

This "new" and "right" apprehension of life, catholicity, is the real freedom of man (the liberation from any convention, from any restriction, from any

establishment), it is his authenticity, his real health. In scriptural terms it is called man's salvation. Thus the "catholic" Christian churches in Corinth, in Rome etc., were established. Every local church is catholic as it has the whole God, the whole Truth, life and salvation. In each of them and in all of them everything is one.

- The laymen and the clergy are one.

The different charismas consist the one Spirit. Real alliloperichorisis (existence in each other) between all the members of a Church, but also in the work (liturgia) of each individual member. Real alliloperichorisis and coexistence and common life among all the local churches. Alliloperichorisis in the various dimensions of life so that:

- Truth and life = one.

- Dogma and ethics = one.

- Freedom and discipline = one.

- One's personal life and one's participation in the social body = one .

This is the real catholicity, the *sobornost* of Orthodoxy.

The whole earth truly and really present and the Whole God equally, truly and really historically present. Man and God = one. The whole world which is offered to God. And the whole God who comes truly and really into the world and in the same way truly and really, historically, transfigures the world.

This is the catholic, the only complete and right truth the Apostles preached, for which the martyrs died; the truth which the Saints revealed; finally for the preservation and manifestation of that Truth, which is the integrity, the catholicity and the health of the world, the prophets have struggled occasionally in the Church.

#### Contemporary declines of Catholicity.

Now, let us think about the General Assembly of Synodesmos. It has to do about a community of young people who want to live with responsibility in their faith today.

I have the impression that Orthodox young people who are assembled assuming full responsibility for their belief cannot start from two basic and crucial points:

a) They have to become conscious of the true and real nature of Orthodoxy, of its catholic and ecumenical mission.

b) They must be aware of, and must declare some tragic misinterpretations and perversions of the catholicity of Orthodoxy that can be noticed and tend to be permanent nowadays.

A meeting of young men, today, does not make any sense if it is not a prophetic event. If the young men who held it cannot find and criticize these perversions.

In general young people nowadays protest and rebel against the establishment which is very near to drown them. Christian young men should join this protest in their own way. Orthodoxy is God in history, in the historical movements; the historical movements which are raised before God and are solved by Him. It is

possible for Orthodox young people, far away from protestings to provide the solution of the problems as they are the only ones who can raise their problems before God .

*In brief*, I think that the assembly must determine some perversions of the Orthodox ethos, some basic declines of the Orthodox catholicity and after their declaration as being inadmissible by the Orthodox conscience, a program of study should be made, which will help us to overcome these difficulties.

For example, a decline of the catholicity is sterile conservatism. Orthodoxy which is life, is reduced to a formalism, to a Talmud. It loses its universal mission, it keeps itself out of the history of mankind, it goes out of interest and it is reduced to a faction.

Another decline of catholicity is secularism, that is the state of one's being influenced by the contemporary currents, the adapting of theology, and of the life of the Church to fashion. The danger rests upon the world's assimilation of the Church and upon the Churchs being carried away by the physical cycle of decay. This sort of decline is worse than the first one.

It is necessary that these two problems should be faced with responsibility because so long as both parties are in conflict with each other, the gap in the Church becomes more and more tragic.

Another distortion which must be abolished is the decline of the Orthodox ethos which is a catholic ethos. (the Orthodox ethos which includes the whole life becomes an exterior objective moralism) The decline of the Orthodox ethos is man's return to the B.C. era. This brings man back to the Jewish law. The decline of the catholic ethos (the combination of freedom and ascesis, the coexistence of the Resurrection and the Cross) to a free morality, which is but a secular morality and a return to the pre-Christian, Hellenistic and gnostic era by another way, is equally tragic.

Another decline of catholicity is the confinement of the Church which is the revelation of God's love to the world, a continuous Pentecost and Theophaneia, to a simple administrative machine. The breakdown of communication between the Church and the World. The so-called "official" Church with its official functions is very often a narrow and closed organization, a sort of ghetto, consisted of persons not elected by the people but appointed from above. So it becomes a problem the extent to which these appointees are real representatives of their "laos", and not of other interests at the international meetings.

Something relative to the decline of the catholicity to an administrative organization is the decline of theology from "martyria" and revelation of the mystery of faith, to a simple science with technical terms, to a narrow system.

I would rather accentuate in particular the greatest decline and diversion that has been the plague and the greatest sin of Orthodox Christians for centuries. This is about the identification of local catholic churches with the distinct states in which they are established, as well as their usual submission to them. This is the original and greatest sin of all of us. As a result proceeding from this sin is the outspreading

confusion among the Orthodox from the canonical point of view. Twenty different Orthodox churches exist in New-York. Russians who are under Moscow, Russians who are under the Patriarch of Constantinople, Russians who are under nobody. There are also the Greeks, the Arabs, the Serbs, etc. The Orthodox Church has been devoured by the national groups because it helps us to maintain our nationality. But this is a complete fall. Only God's forbearance and the prayers of our Saints prevent our destruction.

The problem of diaspora is due to this original one. Paul, the Apostle, established churches everywhere and transfigured the whole world in the body of Jesus Christ. Methodius and Cyril did the same thing as well as the whole Orthodox mission. But, today, we are completely unable to find a solution to the problems of American Orthodoxy. We are so weak that many a good man who would do good, they do it in such a bad way, that they become the cause of greater problems and difficulties.

The same question of diaspora exists in the interior of most Orthodox churches. The problem is about the local schisms, which we are accustomed with and among which we live quiet as if they did not exist, while we know how anxious the Fathers of the Church were, when facing even the imminence of the danger of any schism. In Russia there are the old believers and many others, in Serbia there is the new church of South Slavia, in Greece there are the old calendars, and the micro-schisms in the various Christian movements. And recently the new schism of Metropolia, which is pseudo-theological, has appeared.

If we want to be honest we have to declare simply and explicitly that all this is unacceptable. Only where the young Orthodox declare their opposition, only when they call upon those who occupy official positions in the Church to stop wasting their strength in vain and start working on these important problems, but above all only when they themselves undertake a responsible study of these problems and coordinate work, can their meeting be worthwhile.

#### Inter-Orthodox Ecumenism and Ecumenical Mission of Orthodoxy

If the positions we held in the two previous paragraphs are true, the aim and the main path of the work of Syndesmos for the next period is apparent. All efforts and programmes must focus to an inter orthodox ecumenism which must aim at the renewal of Orthodoxy and the opening of our mentality as far as the boundaries set us by the apostolic and catholic faith.

Nowadays Orthodoxy must achieve the ortho-doxia (the right faith) and integral and catholic perceiving at contemporary life. The faith end the kerygma, must shine again as an ecumenical event, as something which concerns the world today. And when Orthodoxy becomes catholic again, it will be revealed and offered to man as the right interpretation of today's life, as the health and the authenticity of the modern man and civilization, as *the* salvation. This is the true orthodox ecumenism and the real offering of Orthodoxy to the "ecumenical" movement. Every other kind of ecumenism becomes nothing but "anacyclisis" (making or playing again and again the circle) of decay. It is an external political convention, pharisaism that means another form of establishment. And we all know that there is no worse establishment

than that which is dressed with the purple of vanguard and that the most resolute and dangerous exploiters are the pseudo-prophets the ones who profess the disposition of "charisma".

I think that an *inter-orthodox ecumenism of basis* should be the aim concentrating all the activities of Syndesmos in the next period. We should pay serious attention to the exchange of students among the theological schools, to the granting of scholarships, to the arrangement of inter-orthodox excursion, of lesser inter-orthodox theological or other meetings as well as to the arrangement of congresses and of inter-orthodox campings. Of course all this is done to a certain degree, and we do not forget in every assembly to set up programs. But the new point we suggest here is that *we should become conscious that this is and no other is the real purpose of Syndesmos*. It is towards this direction that the Executive Committee should act during these next three years. Translations and inter-orthodox publications must be made; the individual experience of every Orthodox Church must be injected into the other Churches. It is necessary to make the periodical informative publications of Syndesmos more frequent. It would be splendid to publish an informative theological bulletin.

#### Committees of Study

It would be useful for Syndesmos to appoint three permanent committees of work, the members of which working alone but attending meetings among them regularly. The result of the researches could be notified to the hierarchies of the Churches through the informative bulletin and to the orthodox public through the press. The committees might be the following:

a) *Committee of theological study and preparation for the synod*

It is unthinkable that the young orthodox will not set out to a hard preparatory work, while Orthodoxy intend to sit a Pan-Orthodox Conference. The synod is concerned with the rising generation. But this is not self-evident. The young people must work so that the Council might be their event. A committee of Syndesmos will be able to discuss *from the beginning* this subject. *What is the importance of the Council?* A real Council of the Church cannot be a narrow event aiming at the solution of a few internal problems. A true Council is ecumenical; it is concerned with the whole world. It is a historical event and marks a whole era. It reveals God and God's love to the world. It is a Theophaneia and a Pentecost.

This appears also in the points *discussed in a synod*. And it is now common theological conscience that the issues discussed at Rhodes do not express the Orthodox reality and problems authentically. It is necessary to study all these points as long as there is time left. If this fails there will be nothing left but an unfruitful controversy. And the next generation will put under question ourselves and this very General Assembly.

b) *Committee concerned with the study of the problems of modern youth*

If the young members of Syndesmos belong to the modern youth and believe in God they must study and see what their Christian faith says about the problems of the youth of our time. If faith is not simply an objective truth and thus is not only

concerned with the religious aspect of life, but has to do with life as a whole, then it has certainly something to tell to the youth.

In other words, if the General Assembly of Syndesmos held in 1971 at Boston is not related and is not concerned with the young people of Woodstock and of other international youth meetings, I do not think it has any real reason of existence.

c) *Committee concerned with the study of the problem of modern Catechism*

By the term catechism we do not mean education in general or the teaching of some basic Christian truths to the children, but we mean mainly the problem of theology nowadays the new methods of interpretation of faith, required today, the new air and terminology of preaching. If the young people in Europe and America demand to participate in the methods of teaching and in the determination of syllabuses, the youth of Syndesmos do not exaggerate when asking in the name of all young people of their time, who do not understand the Church, to work for the accomplishment of a renewal of Theology.

After all, creative distrust at the contemporary ecclesiastical establishment, that means of every compromise and convention with sin, from the one hand, and from the other the planning of a serious work to renew the Church. Directed by the true source of life, which is Tradition, these are the two requirements which can justify a meeting of Orthodox youth nowadays. Today, a General Assembly of Syndesmos is meaningless unless it represents in the Church a prophetic event.