

The Problem of Conservative New Calendarism

A talk delivered by Fr. Maximus (Maretta) to the Inter-Orthodox Conference "Orthodoxy and Modern Ecumenism," University of Chicago, March 5/18, 2007.

Your Grace, Fathers and Brethren, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to speak to you today about the problem of conservative New Calendarism. By conservative New Calendarists I mean those who consider the institution of the Gregorian calendar and involvement in the ecumenical movement to be misguided, unfortunate, or even to some degree heretical, but nevertheless remain in churches which follow the New Calendar and foster Ecumenism. While conservative New Calendarists rightly consider Orthodoxy to be the one and only true Church of Christ and adhere to Orthodox doctrines and practices with admirable zeal, they find themselves under bishops who deny those doctrines and shun traditional piety. Although this situation is certainly uncomfortable for them, they are obligated to justify it, and to this end employ the following argument:

the participation of our bishops in the ecumenical movement is wrong, but it is only an abuse, not a heresy; and if it even descends to the level of heresy, it occurs only on a personal, not an official, level.

Thus the church as a whole is not implicated in the heresy, and one may in good conscience continue in communion with the bishops in question. This line of reasoning underlies virtually all serious attempts to justify remaining in the New Calendarist, or Ecumenist church, and not returning to the Old Calendarist, or traditional Orthodox Church.

The argument in itself begs the question of what constitutes an official act; yet actually, the distinction between a heresy official and one unofficial was never made by the Fathers. Church history bears witness that when a bishop proclaimed a heresy while preaching in church, his hearers would immediately break communion with him, while the other bishops of the Church would sever communion as soon as they had ascertained whether he truly did hold such opinions, and had given him an opportunity to recant. This was precisely the case with Nestorius, for example. Nonetheless, I will take up the challenge, and demonstrate that the New Calendar church has unquestionably espoused heretical teachings in the most official capacity possible: that of public proclamation by a Patriarch, and approval of the proclamation by the Synod of the Church.

In 1948 the World Council of Churches was created, a worldwide organization whose sole purpose for existing is to promote Ecumenism and the non-Orthodox ecclesiological principles upon which Ecumenism is based. The Patriarchate of Constantinople and a number of other Orthodox Churches were founding members, and thus showed that they wholeheartedly espouse the Council's goals and beliefs: indeed, they helped formulate those goals and beliefs. The charter of the Council states:

The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic

fellowship...In seeking koinonia in faith and life, witness and service, the churches through the council will:

** Promote the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through theological dialogue, and the sharing of human, spiritual, and material resources with one another;*

** Facilitate common witness in each place and in all places, and support each other in their work for mission and evangelism;*

** Nurture the growth of an ecumenical consciousness through processes of education and a vision of life in community rooted in each particular cultural context;*

** Assist one another in their relationships to and with people of other faith communities;*

** Foster renewal and growth in unity, worship, mission and service.*

In order to foster the one ecumenical movement, the Council will:

** Nurture relations with and among churches, especially within, but also beyond its membership;*

** Establish and maintain relations with national councils, regional conferences of churches, organizations of Christian World Communions, and other ecumenical bodies;*

** Support ecumenical initiatives at regional, national, and local levels;*

** Facilitate the creation of networks among ecumenical organizations;*

** Work towards maintaining the coherence of the one ecumenical movement in its diverse manifestations.*

These principles are totally unacceptable for a person with an Orthodox understanding of the Church. They illustrate that the heresy the Orthodox are confronting is not simply union with this or that heretical church (which has not yet happened except in the case of the Monophysites). Rather, the heresy is the idea that heretical groups outside the Church are indeed somehow part of the Church, and that the Orthodox Church is part of a larger whole comprised of both the Orthodox and the heterodox. Now, any statement which gives any ecclesial standing whatsoever to a body outside the Church is a heretical statement, because the Orthodox Church is the entirety of the Church. The other so-called churches are not churches at all, but false assemblies set up in opposition to the one, true Church. They are anti-churches. The charter and mission—even the very name — of the World Council of Churches cuts at the root of Orthodox doctrine by placing all “churches” on the same ontological level. Moreover, the World Council of Churches expressly recognizes only one ecumenical movement; that is, its own. It does not leave any room for a valid “Orthodox Ecumenism” which would seek to convert the heterodox. No one can claim that the purpose of Orthodox involvement in Ecumenism is to witness to Orthodoxy, since the only side of “Orthodoxy” being presented is precisely whatever can be brought into seeming conformity with the principles set out in the World Council of Churches’ charter, a document which, as we have seen, denies the Orthodox teaching on the Church. Ecumenism is the exact opposite of evangelization.

Any church which joins the World Council of Churches thereby embraces the ecclesiological concepts upon which the Council is founded. These concepts become part of the beliefs of the individual church in question. The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the other New Calendarist Churches not only accepted these principles and helped formulate them, but have proven their

continued adherence to them in a variety of ways over the past 60 years. Thus, there can be no doubt that the official doctrine of the New Calendarist churches is one of heretical Ecumenism, regardless of the fact that many of the New Calendarist faithful personally disagree with their Churches' position.

Once the New Calendar churches had espoused the principles of Ecumenism, they were not slow to act upon them in concrete ways. One of the very first major steps which put into practice the ecclesiological teaching of Ecumenism was the lifting of the anathemas of 1054 against the Roman Catholic Church. Patriarch Athenagoras and the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople took this action December, 1965. In a joint statement with Pope Paul VI, they declared that:

** They regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which on both sides have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period;*

** They likewise regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication which followed these events, the memory of which has influenced actions up to our day and has hindered closer relations in charity; and they commit these excommunications to oblivion;*

** Through the action of the Holy Spirit those differences will be overcome through regret for historical wrongs and through an efficacious determination to arrive at a common understanding and expression of the faith of the Apostles and its demands.*

The meaning of this official document is clear: the Orthodox condemnation of Latin heresies is “without foundation” and must be obliterated from memory; and we do not yet understand the faith of the Apostles.

In September, 1990, official delegates from all the New Calendarist churches met in Chambesy, Switzerland with official representatives of the Monophysite Churches. They restated those points of Christology on which the Orthodox and Monophysites have always agreed, they ignored or dismissed as semantical misunderstandings those points on which they disagree, and then they declared:

In the light of our agreed statement on Christology as well as of the above common affirmations, we have now clearly understood that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they have used Christological terms in different ways. It is this common faith and continuous loyalty to the Apostolic Tradition that should be the basis for our unity and communion.

Both families agree that all the anathemas and condemnations of the past which now divide us should be lifted by the Churches in order that the last obstacle to the full unity and communion of our two families can be removed by the grace and power of God. Both families agree that the lifting of anathemas and condemnations will be consummated on the basis that the Councils and Fathers previously anathematized or condemned are not heretical.

The Chambesy agreement is an open espousal of the ancient heresy of Monophysitism. Its acceptance by the Orthodox has been made possible by the modern heresy of Ecumenism, which allows two mutually exclusive doctrines to co-exist, while pretending that the truth is either the

mean between the two, or the lowest common denominator of the two, or something to be discovered in the future, or simply irrelevant if we all profess love for one another.

Some conservative New Calendarists pretend that the Chambesy agreement is not an official declaration of faith, but rather a series of recommendations by individual theologians, which the Churches are free to accept or reject. The superficiality of this notion, however, is contradicted by the so-called “Pastoral Agreement between the Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Alexandria,” which was signed in 2001. This document announces:

The Holy Synods of both the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa have already accepted the outcome of the official dialogue on Christology between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, including the two official agreements: the first on Christology signed in June 1989 in Egypt and the second also on Christology and on the lifting of anathemas and restoration of full communion signed in Geneva 1990 [that is, in Chambesy], in which it is stated that “in the light of our agreed statement on Christology...we have now clearly understood that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of Apostolic tradition.” It was agreed to have mutual recognition of the sacrament of Baptism, based on what St. Paul wrote, One Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5).

The document further states:

The Holy Synods of both Patriarchates have agreed to accept the sacrament of marriage when it is conducted for two partners not belonging to the same Patriarchate... Each of the two Patriarchates shall also accept to perform all of its other sacraments to that new family of mixed Christian marriage.

This declaration shows clearly that the Patriarchate of Alexandria regards the Chambesy agreement as an official statement of doctrine, and not simply the private judgment of individuals. Moreover, the Patriarchate has officially recognized the Monophysites as constituting a Church as valid and legitimate as the Orthodox Church; indeed, it states that the Orthodox are of “one faith” with the Monophysites.

Even more troubling is the decision of the Holy Synod of Antioch under Patriarch Ignatius IV, which was made in June 1991. With respect to its relations with the Syrian Monophysites, the Antiochian Church announced that the following measures would be observed:

* “The complete and mutual respect between the two churches for their rituals, spirituality, heritage and holy fathers.

* The incorporation of the fathers of both churches and their heritage in general in the Christian education curriculum and theological teaching.

* The refraining of accepting members of one church in the membership of the other whatever the reasons might be.

* Organizing meetings of both Synods whenever need and necessity might arise.

* If two bishops of the two different churches meet for a spiritual service the one with the majority of people will preside.

* If one priest of either church happens to be in a certain area he will serve the divine mysteries for the members of both churches, including the divine liturgy and the sacrament of holy matrimony.

* If two priests of both churches happen to be in a certain community they will take turns, and in case they concelebrate, the one with the majority of people will preside.

* If a bishop of one church and a priest from the sister church happen to concelebrate presiding naturally belongs to the bishop.”

In other words, the Patriarchate of Antioch has entirely abandoned the Orthodox Church and is in full communion with the Monophysites. The Patriarchate has decided that the ecumenical councils — which embody the Church’s definitive expressions of belief — are optional, and that it is not necessary to adhere to them to be part of the Orthodox Church.

Thus, we see the heresy of Ecumenism operating on two levels. On the one hand, the New Calendar Churches accept the basic idea that other Christian bodies are part of the Church, and that the Church is not exclusively synonymous with Orthodoxy. This is Ecumenism in theory. On the other hand, they recognize that specific heretical bodies, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Monophysite Churches, are in fact Orthodox in doctrine; and they have even entered into communion with the Monophysites. This is Ecumenism in practice.

Both of these forms of Ecumenism are operating in the New Calendar Churches on the most official level possible. They have been publicly proclaimed by a Patriarch and ratified by the Holy Synod. It is not possible for them to be any more official than they already are. Moreover, these official actions must not be considered in isolation, but in the context of Ecumenism’s overall effect on the Church. Innumerable hierarchs have made blasphemous statements denying virtually every dogma of Orthodoxy, joint prayers are conducted with heretics on a regular basis, communion is freely given to Roman Catholics and other heterodox, and agreements such as the so-called Balamaand union and the recent appalling statement of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches are concluded by official delegates from the New Calendarist Churches. These statements affirm the Branch Theory and a host of other errors.

The heresy of Ecumenism has infected not one of the local Orthodox Churches, but all of them. Each of the Patriarchates has contributed in its own way to perverting the Orthodox faith: Constantinople by lifting the anathemas which the holy Fathers laid on the Roman Catholic Church, Alexandria by accepting the Monophysites as Orthodox, Antioch by partaking of the same chalice as the Monophysites, and all the ecumenist Churches collectively by participating in the World Council of Churches and abolishing the Patristic understanding of the Church. All of the ecumenist Churches are in full communion with one another and share the same ecumenist faith: the beliefs of one are the beliefs of all, and each of the Patriarchates supports and encourages the ecumenical gestures of the others.

Our primary question at this point ought to be, what are the faithful to do when their bishops are in heresy? The patristic answer is clear: break communion immediately, because those bishops no longer represent the Church, but a foreign body. It is impossible for Orthodox Christians to hold communion with heretical bishops, inasmuch as a common Eucharistic cup denotes a common faith. St. Cyril of Alexandria states that “the Body of Christ binds us into unity” and “there is no division of belief among the faithful.” And the Apostle Paul asks, “What communion hath light with darkness? Or what concord hath Christ with Belial?”

When the Monothelete bishop Theodosius asked St. Maximus the Confessor why he had cut himself off from communion with see of Constantinople, the saint replied,

In the sixth indiction of the last cycle, Cyrus, Patriarch of Alexandria, published the Nine Chapters [stating that Christ had but a single energy,] which were approved by the see of Constantinople. Soon the novelties proposed in that

document were followed by others, overturning the definitions of holy councils. These innovations were devised by primates of the Church of Constantinople: Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul, as all the other Churches know very well. This is the reason I, your servant, am not in communion with the throne of Constantinople. Let the offenses introduced by those men be rejected and the abettors deposed; then the way to salvation will be cleared, and you will walk the smooth path of the Gospel unhindered by heresy. When I see the Church of Constantinople walking as she was formerly, I shall enter into communion with her uncompelled, but as long as the scandal of heresy persists in her and her bishops are miscreants, no argument or persecution will win me over to your side.

On another occasion the Eparch of Constantinople asked St. Maximus, “Will you enter into communion with our Church, or not?”

“I will not,” said the saint.

“Why?” asked the Eparch.

“Because it has rejected the rulings of Orthodox councils,” said Maximus.

The Eparch continued, “If that be so, how is it that the fathers of those councils remain in the diptychs of our Church?”

“How do you profit by commemorating them, when you renounce their doctrines?” countered the saint.

Examples such as these could be multiplied almost indefinitely. Suffice to say that the most basic criterion of Orthodox ecclesiology is to refrain from communion with heretical bishops. This applies even before such bishops are condemned by an ecumenical council, as we see from the case of St. Maximus, who broke communion decades before the condemnation of Monoenergism and Monothelitism by the 6th Ecumenical Council.

The sound application of these principles to the present-day situation should be obvious. Anyone who considers himself to be an Orthodox Christian should sever communion with any bishop who preaches, participates in, or furthers Ecumenism directly or indirectly; and he should join himself to those Orthodox Christians who already have ceased ecclesiastical contact with such bishops. Those Christians are precisely the Old Calendarists, or True Orthodox Christians, who rejected the heresy of Ecumenism the moment it appeared, and in no way allowed themselves to be defiled by communion with bishops who alter the faith of the Apostles. When the conservative New Calendarists take this same step, they will be following the path of the Holy Fathers; they will have separated themselves from the heretics, and joined themselves to the assembly of the Orthodox.