



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✘ **June 12, 2016** ✘

Postfeast of the Ascension

Fathers of the

First Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 325 AD)

St. Onuphrius the Great (400 AD), St. Peter, first monk of Mt. Athos (734)



➤ Next Sunday – The Feast of Pentecost

✘ Holy Baptism ~ Next Saturday, June 18, 3:00pm ~ Child Peter Rutherford

➤ **Children's Summer Retreat ~ Saturday, June 25:**

The theme will be "Old and New," and will focus on Old Testament stories and how they are fulfilled in the New Testament. In addition, there will be a focus on the Trisagion Prayers, and Vespers that night will feature a Children's Choir and Children as Readers! Helpers are needed. Please contact Dunia Ritchey if your child will attend or if you can help.

✘ Holy Baptism - also Saturday, June 25 - 3:00pm - Child Sophia Ghilan

✘ Holy Baptism – Saturday, July 16 - Child David Johnson

The Ascension

✘ "Brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ is near each one of us, even if unseen. That is why He said to the Apostles when He ascended, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Mt. 28:20). Every day we should stand in awe of Him, as He is with us, and do what is pleasing before Him. If we are unable now to perceive Him with our physical eyes, we can, if we are watchful, see Him continually with the eyes of our understanding, and not just see Him, but reap great benefits from Him. This vision destroys all sin, demolishes all evil, and drives away everything bad. It yields every virtue, gives birth to purity and dispassion, and bestows eternal life and the kingdom without end. As we attend to this joyful sight, gazing with our mind's eye on Christ as though He were present, each of us will say with David, 'Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident' (Ps. 27:3)." ~ **St. Gregory Palamas**

The Unity of the Church ~ St. Cyprian of Carthage

✘ Anyone consider and examine these things, there is no need for lengthened discussion and arguments. There is easy proof for faith in a short summary of the truth. The Lord speaks to Peter, saying, "I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And again to the same He says, after His resurrection, "Feed my sheep." And although to all the Apostles, after His resurrection, He gives an equal power, and says,

{over}

“As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you: Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted unto him; and whosoever sins ye retain, they shall be retained;” yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one.

Assuredly the rest of the Apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity, Which one Church, also, the Holy Spirit in the Song of Songs designated in the person of our Lord, and says, “My dove, my spotless one, is but one. She is the only one of her mother, elect of her that bare her.” Does he who does not hold this unity of the Church think that he holds the faith? Does he who strives against and resists the Church trust that he is in the Church, when moreover the blessed Apostle Paul teaches the same thing, and sets forth the sacrament of unity, saying, “There is one body and one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God?”

And this unity we ought firmly to hold and assert, especially those of us that are bishops who preside in the Church, that we may also prove the episcopate itself to be one and undivided. Let no one deceive the brotherhood by a falsehood: let no one corrupt the truth of the faith by perfidious prevarication. The episcopate is one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole, The Church also is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun, but one light; and many branches of a tree, but one strength based in its tenacious root; and since from one spring flow many streams, although the multiplicity seems diffused in the liberality of an overflowing abundance, yet the unity is still preserved in the source. Separate a ray of the sun from its body of light, its unity does not allow a division of light; break a branch from a tree, when broken, it will not be able to bud; cut off the stream from its fountain, and that which is cut off dries up. Thus also the Church, shone over with the light of the Lord, sheds forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere diffused, nor is the unity of the body separated.

Her fruitful abundance spreads her branches over the whole world. She broadly expands her rivers, liberally flowing, yet her head is one, her source one; and she is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated.

The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous; she is uncorrupted and pure. She knows one home; she guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If any one could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church.

~ from Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 4, Col. 498

Flowers in the Greenhouse

One spiritual father, in describing community life uses the imagery of a greenhouse that is growing flowers. He says that a single flower is lovely, and reflects the glory of God. But if you examine it closely, you will see that it has imperfections. If you take many individual flowers and put them together in one bunch, the resulting arrangement will be even more beautiful, and the flaws less noticeable. We are created to be in community, each supporting the other as we strive to be all that God wants us to be.

The Oberlin Statement: Christian Unity As Viewed by the Orthodox Church

Statement of the Representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church in the USA at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, September 3-10, 1957

As delegates to the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, appointed by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, to represent the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, we want to make the following preliminary statements.

We are glad to take part in a study-conference, devoted to such a basic need of the Christian World as Unity. All Christians should seek Unity. On the other hand, we feel that the whole program of the forthcoming discussion has been framed from a point of view which we cannot conscientiously admit. "The Unity we seek" is for us a given Unity which has never been lost, and, as a Divine gift and an essential mark of Christian existence, could not have been lost. This unity in the Church of Christ is for us a Unity in the Historical Church, in the fullness of faith, in the fullness of continuous sacramental life. For us, this Unity is embodied in the Orthodox Church, which kept, *katolikos* and *analleipos*, both the integrity of the Apostolic Faith and the integrity of the Apostolic Order.

Our share in the study of Christian Unity is determined by our firm conviction that this Unity can be found only in the fellowship of the Historical Church, preserving faithfully the catholic tradition, both in doctrine and in order. We cannot commit ourselves to any discussion of these basic assumptions, as if they were but hypothetical or problematic. We begin with a clear conception of the Church's Unity, which we believe has been embodied and realized in the age-long history of the Orthodox Church, without any change or break since the times when the visible Unity of Christendom was an obvious fact and was attested and witnessed to by an ecumenical unanimity, in the age of the Ecumenical Councils.

We admit, of course, that the Unity of Christendom has been disrupted, that the unity of faith and the integrity of order have been sorely broken. But we do not admit that the Unity of the Church, and precisely of the "visible" and historical Church, has ever been broken or lost, so as to now be a problem of search and discovery. The problem of Unity is for us, therefore, the problem of the return to the fullness of Faith and Order, in full faithfulness to the message of Scripture and Tradition and in the obedience to the will of God: "that all may be one".

Long before the breakup of the unity of Western Christendom, the Orthodox Church has had a keen sense of the essential importance of the oneness of Christian believers and from her very inception she has deplored divisions within the Christian world. As in the past, so in the present, she laments disunity among those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ Whose purpose in the world was to unite all believers into one body. The Orthodox Church feels that, since she has been unassociated with the events related to the breakdown of religious unity in the West, she bears a special responsibility to contribute toward the restoration of the Christian unity which alone can render the message of the Gospel effective in a world troubled by threats of world conflict and general uncertainty over the future.

It is with humility that we voice the conviction that the Orthodox Church can make a special contribution to the cause of Christian unity, because since Pentecost she has possessed the true unity intended by Christ. It is with this conviction that the Orthodox Church is always prepared to meet with Christians of other communions in inter-confessional deliberations. She rejoices over the fact that she is able to join those of other denominations in ecumenical conversations that aim at removing the barriers to Christian unity. However, we feel compelled in all honesty, as

representatives of the Orthodox Church, to confess that we must qualify our participation, as necessitated by the historic faith and practice of our Church, and also state the general position that must be taken at this interdenominational conference.

In considering firstly "the nature of the unity we seek," we wish to begin by making clear that our approach is at variance with that usually advocated and ordinarily expected by participating representatives. The Orthodox Church teaches that the unity of the Church has not been lost, because she is the Body of Christ, and, as such, can never be divided. It is Christ as her head and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that secure the unity of the Church throughout the ages.

The presence of human imperfection among her members is powerless to obliterate the unity, for Christ Himself promised that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church." Satan has always sown tares in the field of the Lord and the forces of disunity have often threatened but have never actually succeeded in dividing the Church. No power can be mightier than the omnipotent will of Christ Who founded one Church only in order to bring men into unity with God. Oneness is an essential mark of the Church.

If it be true that Christ founded the Church as a means of unifying men divided by sin, then it must naturally follow that the unity of the Church was preserved by His divine omnipotence. Unity, therefore, is not just a promise, or a potentiality, but belongs to the very nature of the Church. It is not something which has been lost and which should be recovered, but rather it is a permanent character of the structure of the Church.

Christian love impels us to speak candidly of our conviction that the Orthodox Church has not lost the unity of the Church intended by Christ, for she represents the oneness which in Western Christendom has only been a potentiality. The Orthodox Church teaches that she has no need to search for a "lost unity," because her historic consciousness dictates that she is the Una Sancta and that all Christian groups outside the Orthodox Church can recover their unity only by entering into the bosom of that Church which preserved its identity with early Christianity.

These are claims that arise not from presumptuousness, but from an inner historical awareness of the Orthodox Church. Indeed, this is the special message of Eastern Orthodoxy to a divided Western Christendom.

The Orthodox Church true to her historical consciousness declares that she has maintained an unbroken continuity with the Church of Pentecost by preserving the Apostolic faith and polity unadulterated. She has kept the "faith once delivered unto the saints" free from the distortions of human innovations. Man-made doctrines have never found their way into the Orthodox Church, since she has no necessary association in history with the name of one single father or theologian. She owes the fullness and the guarantee of unity and infallibility to the operation of the Holy Spirit and not to the service of one individual. It is for this reason that she has never felt the need for what is known as "a return to the purity of the Apostolic faith." She maintains the necessary balance between freedom and authority and thus avoids the extremes of absolutism and individualism both of which have done violence to Christian unity.

We re-assert what was declared at Evanston and what has been made known in the past at all interdenominational conferences attended by delegates of the Orthodox Church. It is not due to our personal merit, but to divine condescension that we represent the Orthodox Church and are able to give expression to her claims. We are bound in conscience to state explicitly what is logically inferred; that all other bodies have been directly or indirectly separated from the Orthodox Church. Unity from the Orthodox standpoint means a return of the separated bodies to the historical Orthodox, One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

The unity which Orthodoxy represents rests on identity of faith, order, and worship. All three aspects of the life of the Church are outwardly safeguarded by the reality of the unbroken succession of bishops which is the assurance of the Church's uninterrupted continuity with apostolic origins. This means that the uncompromised fullness of the Church requires the preservation of both its episcopal structure and sacramental life. Adhering tenaciously to her Apostolic heritage, the Orthodox Church holds that no true unity is possible where episcopacy and sacraments are absent, and grieves over the fact that both institutions have either been discarded or distorted in certain quarters of Christendom. Any agreement on faith must rest on the authority of the enactments of the seven Ecumenical Councils which represent the mind of the one undivided Church of antiquity and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church.

We regret that the most vital problem of Ministry and that of the Apostolic Succession, without which to our mind there is neither unity, nor church, were not included in the program of the Conference. All problems of Order seem to be missing in the program. These, in our opinion, are basic for any study of Unity.

Visible unity expressed in organizational union does not destroy the centrality of the spirit among believers, but rather testifies to the reality of the oneness of the Spirit. Where there is the fullness of the Spirit, there too will outward amity be found. From Apostolic times the unity of Christian believers was manifested by a visible, organizational structure. It is the unity in the Holy Spirit that is expressed in a unified visible organization.

The Holy Eucharist, as the chief act of worship, is the outward affirmation of the inner relation rising from unity in the Holy Spirit. But this unity involves a consensus of faith among those participating. Intercommunion, therefore, is possible only when there is agreement of faith. Common worship in every case must presuppose a common faith. The Orthodox Church maintains that worship of any nature cannot be sincere unless there is oneness of faith among those participating. It is with this belief that the Orthodox hesitate to share in Joint prayer services and strictly refrain from attending interdenominational Communion Services.

A common faith and a common worship are inseparable in the historical continuity of the Orthodox Church. However, in isolation neither can be preserved integral and intact. Both must be kept in organic and inner relationship with each other. It is for this reason that Christian unity cannot be realized merely by determining what articles of faith or what creed should be regarded as constituting the basis of unity. In addition to subscribing to certain doctrines of faith, it is necessary to achieve the experience of a common tradition or *communis sensus fidelium* preserved through common worship within the historic framework of the Orthodox Church. There can be no true unanimity of faith unless that faith remains within the life and sacred tradition of the Church which is identical throughout the ages. It is in the experience of worship that we affirm the true faith, and conversely, it is in the recognition of a common faith that we secure the reality of worship in spirit and in truth.

Thus the Orthodox Church in each locality insists on agreement of faith and worship before it will consider sharing in any interdenominational activity. Doctrinal differences constitute an obstacle in the way of unrestricted participation in such activities. In order to safeguard the purity of the faith and the integrity of the liturgical and spiritual life of the Orthodox Church, abstinence from interdenominational activities is encouraged on a local level. There is no phase of the Church's life unrelated to her faith. Intercommunion with another church must be grounded on a consensus of faith and a common understanding of the sacramental life. The Holy Eucharist especially must be the liturgical demonstration of the unity of faith.

We are fully aware of deep divergences which separate Christian denominations from each other, in all fields of Christian life and existence, in the understanding of faith, in the shaping of life, in the habits of worship. We are seeking, accordingly, an unanimity in faith, an identity of order, a fellowship in prayer. But for us all the three are organically linked together. Communion in worship is only possible in the unity of faiths. Communion presupposes Unity. Therefore, the term "Intercommunion" seems to us an epitome of that conception which we are compelled to reject. An "intercommunion" presupposes the existence of several separate and separated denominations, which join occasionally in certain common acts or actions. In the true Unity of Christ's Church there is no room for several "denominations." There is, therefore, no room for "intercommunion." When all are truly united in the Apostolic Faith and Order, there will be all-inclusive Communion and Fellowship in all things.

It has been stated by the Orthodox delegates already in Edinburgh, in 1937, that many problems are presented at Faith and Order Conferences in a manner and in a setting which are utterly uncongenial to the Orthodox. We again must repeat the same statement now. But again, as years ago in Edinburgh, we want to testify our readiness and willingness to participate in study, in order that the Truth of the Gospel and the fullness of the Apostolic Tradition may be brought to the knowledge of all who, truly, unselfishly, and devoutly seek Unity in Our Blessed Lord and His Holy Church, One, Catholic, and Apostolic.

Bishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis, Chairman

Very Rev Georges Florovsky, Very Rev Eusebius A. Stephanou, Rev George Tsoumas, Rev John A. Poulos, Rev John Hondras, Rev George P. Gallos

Erase everything you think you know....

I remember doing a sermon some years back about the "masters of suspicion" (Freud, Durkheim, Nietzsche, et al). These major modern figures who demolished the idea of God. My point was that they were correct. But the "god" they demolished was not the true God at all. To know God, we also have to not know Him first. I sometimes tell inquirers that they may have to become atheists before they can become Orthodox.

One way to do this is to erase everything you think you know about God. Then understand that we only know God as He reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ. Gosh, I just don't see Jesus walking around with the disciples nagging them and pointing out all their faults. God is not our neurosis. That neurotic voice is more like the Lizard on the man's shoulder in Lewis' The Great Divorce. It's more demonic than god-like. It's not even the voice of conscience.

Once someone has an experience that is undeniably God, it becomes much easier to continue to experience Him in all other things. God is constantly available to everyone; touching our lives. Why some see Him and others do not is a mystery. Perhaps the parable of the sower has the answer?

Fr. Stephen Freeman

Nobody's gaze is innocent, because it can create idols. Idolatry is one of humanity's great sins....The human gaze always creates idols. Not it can, but it does, necessarily. And idolatry is humanity's greatest sin. Not one of the greatest, but the greatest, from which nearly all other sin flows.

R.S. Rogers

The Subject of Prayer (Part 2) + Fr. Nicholas Deputatov

When God is in our hearts, then within us, we have the Kingdom of God and there is joy and peace. Prayer not only brings joy and serenity, but even changes misfortunes to good and brings salvation of our soul. "All who call upon the name of Jesus Christ will be saved" (Rom.10:13). God fulfills our requests, if they come from the heart. He bestows on us His blessed help.

A young boy wants to draw a picture and give it to his father on his Name Day, but he cannot draw it by himself, and the father with all his love helps him, putting his hand over his son's and makes correct outlines. And when the picture is ready the son presents it to his father with great delight, who accepts it, even though, in reality, it was drawn by the father who was guiding the son's hand. This is analogous to how our Heavenly Father helps us, who pray to Him. We are weak, but the Almighty Lord, not only helps, but gives strength to strive towards good. At certain times, the Lord gives the opportunity to experience the joy of being with Him and the enjoyment of life. "Wherever Christ the Lord may be, there you will find the Kingdom of God and His divine blessedness" (St. Tihon of Zadonsk). "O Jesus, joy and sweetness of angels and all the saints! Draw me to follow You! — By what means? By Your beautiful and salvific way which You have followed from birth to death, for my sake, an unworthy being. Where did You go? To Your eternal Kingdom. That is where we will hasten and here, on earth, and there, in Your Kingdom, we will live in Your likeness (St. Tihon of Zadonsk).

Choose a concise prayer with forceful words. Repeating it often and over a period of time, you will find in it a great strength. There is no need for wordiness, but with a short prayer pound out of the heart, as if out of flint, blessed sparks. This comes from personal experience. The Church also has lengthy services and prayers. They are all according to the Order (Typica). However, even lengthy services become short through heartfelt, concentrated prayer. The Kingdom of God is there, Paradise is there. There is no concept of time or measuring in Paradise. Our goal is to stand before God, to attend to His presence, to open up our heart and accept from Him, strength and power, so that His will can be effected in us. This is the purpose and object of prayer. When God is central, everything else pales in comparison. Everything that is outside God, has no value or meaning...

A priest was serving in the church. Before Him was a very old icon. Suddenly he felt as if the Virgin Mary on the icon was drawing him to prayer, acting upon his mind and heart. He experienced a real power emanating from the icon. This power filled the whole church with prayer; gathered scattered thoughts, as if the Virgin Mary was physical present. She stands with authority, demanding a response... Thus grows and invisibly comes to fruition, love and closeness to the living God and to the Queen of the Heavens. Therein lies our work of salvation. And in the work of salvation the content of prayer is formed.

Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (325)

The Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council has been celebrated by the Church of Christ from ancient times. We remember the holy God-bearing Fathers of the First Council on the Seventh Sunday of Pascha and on May 29. The Lord Jesus Christ left the Church a great promise, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18). Although the Church of Christ on earth will pass through difficult struggles with the Enemy of salvation, it will emerge victorious. The holy martyrs bore witness to the truth of the Savior's words, enduring suffering and death for confessing Christ, but the persecutor's sword is shattered by the Cross of Christ.

Persecution of Christians ceased during the fourth century, but heresies arose within the Church itself. One of the most pernicious of these heresies was Arianism. Arius, a priest of Alexandria, was a man of immense pride and ambition. In denying the divine nature of Jesus Christ and His equality with God the Father, Arius falsely taught that the Savior is not consubstantial with the Father, but is only a created being.

A local Council, convened with Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria presiding, condemned the false teachings of Arius. However, Arius would not submit to the authority of the Church. He wrote to many bishops, denouncing the decrees of the local Council. He spread his false teaching throughout the East, receiving support from certain Eastern bishops.

Investigating these dissensions, the holy Emperor Constantine (May 21) consulted Bishop Hosius of Cordova (Aug. 27), who assured him that the heresy of Arius was directed against the most fundamental dogma of Christ's Church, and so he decided to convene an Ecumenical Council. In 325, 318 bishops representing Christian Churches from various lands gathered together at Nicea.

Among the assembled bishops were many confessors who had suffered during the persecutions, and who bore the marks of torture upon their bodies. Also participating in the Council were several great luminaries of the Church: St Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (December 6

and May 9), St Spyridon, Bishop of Tremithos (December 12), and others venerated by the Church as holy Fathers.

With Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria came his deacon, Athanasius (who later became Patriarch of Alexandria (May 2 and January 18)). He is called "the Great," for he was a zealous champion for the purity of Orthodoxy. In the Sixth Ode of the Canon for today's Feast, he is referred to as "the thirteenth Apostle."

The Emperor Constantine presided over the sessions of the Council. In his speech, responding to the welcome by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, he said, "God has helped me cast down the impious might of the persecutors, but more distressful for me than any blood spilled in battle is for a soldier, is the internal strife in the Church of God, for it is more ruinous."

Arius, with seventeen bishops among his supporters, remained arrogant, but his teaching was repudiated and he was excommunicated from the Church. In his speech, the holy deacon Athanasius conclusively refuted the blasphemous opinions of Arius. The heresiarch Arius is depicted in iconography sitting on Satan's knees, or in the mouth of the Beast of the Deep (Rev. 13).

The Fathers of the Council declined to accept a Symbol of Faith (Creed) proposed by the Arians. Instead, they affirmed the Orthodox Symbol of Faith. St Constantine asked the Council to insert into the text of the Symbol of Faith the word "consubstantial," which he had heard in the speeches of the bishops. The Fathers of the Council unanimously accepted this suggestion.

In the Nicene Creed, the holy Fathers set forth and confirmed the Apostolic teachings about Christ's divine nature. The heresy of Arius was exposed and repudiated as an error of haughty reason. After resolving this chief dogmatic question, the Council also issued Twelve Canons on questions of churchly administration and discipline. Also decided was the date for the celebration of Holy Pascha. By decision of the Council, Holy Pascha should not be celebrated by Christians on the same day with the Jewish Passover, but on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (which occurred on March 22 in 325).