

Dedicated to our new calendar friends.

I AM A MAN UNDER AUTHORITY
or
The Bigger the Boys, the Bigger the Toys
Part Two

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

The representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch addressed Saint Maximus: "Will you enter into communion with our Church, or not?"

"No, I will not enter into communion," replied the Saint.

"Why?" inquired the representative.

"Because she has rejected the rulings of the Orthodox councils," replied the Saint.

"But if our Church has renounced the councils," objected the representative, "then how is it that they are inscribed in the diptychs?"

"What profit is there in naming them and recalling them, if the dogmas of these councils are rejected?" was the Saint's reply.

"Can you demonstrate clearly," asked the representative, "that the present Church at Constantinople has rejected the dogmas of the former councils?"

"If you refrain from anger, and command me to do so, I can demonstrate it easily," replied the Saint.

(From the *Life of St. Maximus the Confessor*)*

"You are outside of the Church!" That is what one "World Orthodoxy" bishop told one of our faithful when he told the bishop that he was under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston.

Of course, before anyone can say that sort of thing, he has to be sure that he himself is *in* the Church, to begin with. After all, "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," right?

How can we tell if we are in or out of the Church? Surely, there must be some criteria. To whom can we turn to find the solution to this important question? For those of us who are Orthodox Christians, the answer to that is easy. As the Definition of the Fourth Ecumenical Council says: "We follow in the footsteps of the Holy Fathers." So, as always, we must turn to our Holy Fathers to learn how we can determine whether we are in or out of the Church.

**The Life of Our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, translated by Fr. Christopher Birchall (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass., 1982), pp. 43-44.

To begin with, I assume that we all agree that to be a member of the Holy Orthodox Church of Christ, we have to be *Orthodox*. (Trust me, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that one out! I think even a licensed theologian *might* be able to understand that issue...)

Number Two: To qualify as an Orthodox Christian in the Church, our believer should also be in communion with a bishop who is *canonical*. That is to say, the bishop in question should have "Apostolic Succession" and he should acknowledge the authority of the holy canons of the Church, the decisions of the Ecumenical and Local Councils, and all the things given to us in Holy Tradition. After all, when "World Orthodoxy" people want to cast reproach on us, the first thing they say is, "You are uncanonical." That means, presumably, that they accept the authority of the holy canons — yes?

Very well, then. Let us now examine this matter carefully in a calm and objective manner, as befits Christians, in the light of the Holy Fathers' teachings and the holy canons.

The first thing we should examine, of course, is if the bishops of these various jurisdictions of "World Orthodoxy" are Orthodox in faith. This is easy: do they always teach the Orthodox Faith? Or, do they teach it sometimes, and at other times teach wrong things? Is their teaching in agreement with the Holy Fathers when they interpret the Holy Scriptures, or is it their own, personal interpretations that they teach? Is their teaching in agreement with the Decisions of the Seven Holy Ecumenical Councils? Have they kept the Three Vows they made publically when they were ordained bishops?

As you can see, there are many criteria. Bishops are not china dolls, or the "princes of the Church," as some have been heard to say (shades of the "Latin Captivity"!); nor are they spoiled little brats that can get away with anything. They are "men under authority," just like everyone else. They are answerable to: 1] God; 2] the Holy Synod and 3] the Orthodox people of God.

So, in light of all that we have written above, let us examine what some "Orthodox" bishops have been saying and doing.

The late Patriarch Athenagoras boasted that he gave communion to both Roman Catholics and Protestants (see *Orthodox Typos*, July 13, 1979). Bishop Kallistos Ware, by his own admission, has given communion to people who refuse to accept the authority of the last four Ecumenical Councils (just ask him). The Moscow Patriarchate gave communion to Roman Catholics "when no church of their own was nearby" (*New York Times*, February 21, 1970). In his book, *The Thyateira Confession*, Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis, with the official approval of the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios and his Synod, wrote that it is permitted for Roman Catholics and Anglicans to receive communion from the Orthodox, and vice versa. In its book, *A Pastoral Guide to the Holy Mysteries*, the Patriarchate of Antioch says that, in "exceptional situations," the Orthodox may receive communion in non-Orthodox churches.

The matter of giving Holy Communion *only* to those who are of our Faith is *very* important and *very* ancient in the Church. For example, Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher (+167) describes the Christian Eucharist in his *First Apology*, which he wrote for the Roman emperor Titus and the Roman Senate, and he says:

This Food is called among us *Eucharistía* (*The Giving of Thanks to God*), of which no one is allowed to partake, except the one who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration (*Holy Baptism*), and who is so living as Christ has commanded. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the Food which is blessed by the prayer of His word...is the Flesh and Blood of that Jesus Who was made flesh.....and He gave it to [the disciples] *alone*.

(chap. 65)

It should be obvious to all that the above-mentioned bishops do not qualify as *Orthodox* bishops, since they quite openly have violated the Three Vows they made when they were consecrated as bishops and, therefore, cannot be *in* the Church.

What do the Holy Fathers (whose footsteps we are determined to follow, remember?) have to say about this?

According to the rules (i.e., the holy canons)*, these bishops should be "fired," as they say in the world of commerce.

This is what should be done if we were to follow the rules *strictly*. Is there any wiggle room? Yes. Since the Church is the Body of Christ, and not, say, Chrysler Corporation, the bishops — the C. E. O.'s of the Church — do have some wiggle room, with certain conditions.

*Originally, in Greek, a *kanón* was a rule, a measuring stick, a plumb-line that bricklayers used to determine if the wall they were building were straight. It is a guide-line. So, if a brick is a *little* off, it will not necessarily throw the wall down. In making these rules for the Church, the Holy Fathers did not use the word *nómos*, which means "law," which implies more rigidity. Since we are dealing with human beings, and not bricks, we need some flexibility. As Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain says, this is why the Church uses "two hands" in governing her affairs: strictness and *economia* — for the good and proper administration of the Household of God. In a sense, the collection of the holy canons is like a tool box. The tools are *all* needed, but not at the same place and at the same time. So, you don't throw the tools away, but you use them appropriately. Neither are they all of equal value. Nonetheless, *all are needed* at one point or another.

The conditions are: the bishop, like anyone else who is an Orthodox Christian, must repent of the un-Orthodox things he is doing and teaching. He must promise that he will not do or teach these un-Orthodox practices or teachings again. If he keeps his promise, then we are once again, one, big, happy family.

But some people tell us: "Our bishops are too proud to do that." Well, how did they become bishops in the first place?

If they are really too proud to say that they are sorry and promise not to do it again, in that case, they will have to be given a penance like everyone else, to help them straighten out.

If the bishops had been bad little boys who misbehaved, they would have been spanked and sent to their rooms for a time. Or, perhaps, if they were in school, they would have had to stand in the corner and wear a dunce cap.

But now, presumably, they have grown up and should know how to behave themselves. After all, everybody else is expected to behave themselves when they grow up, so why should it be otherwise for bishops?

If the first tactic doesn't work for a bratty little boy, what do we do next? We take away his toys.

We have all heard the saying: "The bigger the boys, the bigger the toys."

If he persists in misbehaving, then even his toys — his *dikiri-trikiri*, his mitre, his eagle rug, his staff, etc. — *all* get taken away. In other words, he is "fired," "de-commissioned," "de-fused," "deposed."

Simple, isn't it?

You see, the Church, like every well-functioning family, knows how to take care of its problems. Its guidelines (that is the *real* meaning of the word "canon") are clear. But if you do not have guidelines, or if you consider the guidelines "old fashioned," or "antiquated," well, then your bishops will begin to act like juvenile delinquents.

But if your bishop is Orthodox in his faith, and teaches this Faith to others, and if he follows the Church's guidelines to the best of his ability, then you must honor, and treasure, and cherish him as though he were a loving father who is a good provider for his family. People like him must be looked up to and revered. Such men are hard to find.

I write these words with fear, my beloved, knowing that — although I strive to be an Orthodox Christian bishop — I am a man unworthy of the priesthood, and I remember the words spoken by Saint Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, when he was explaining the Gospel of Saint Matthew (22:2-14) concerning the master who sent his servants to invite the guests to the wedding feast.

Many things have been written about this particular parable. We have learned the meaning of the term "the wedding feast," and Who the master is. We have been instructed about the friends who refused the invitation, and who are those who finally came, and what is the significance of the wedding garment. But no one has told us about the *servants* who were sent with the invitations. Pope Saint Gregory the Great answers this question:

We should perceive that the servants sent with invitations by the Master of the household represent the preachers of the Church. Being one of them, although unworthy and oppressed by the weight of my sins, nevertheless when I speak for your instruction, I also am a servant of the Master. When I exhort you to despise this world, I come to invite you to God's feast... Let no one despise me, then, for my personal defects: for although I am unworthy, the joys I promise are immense. It often happens, brethren, that a powerful person has a contemptible servant, and when he sends a message by him to relations or to strangers ... those who hear him do not think of the person who speaks, but only of the message he brings and the person whose message it is ... and if perhaps you consider us preachers unworthy, nevertheless venerate God Who calls you through us...

So, since we bishops are only servants, this is all the more reason why we must be certain that the message we bring is true and unaltered.

Otherwise, we will *not* be esteemed faithful stewards.