

St. Basil and Resistance*

Communion with Heretical Bishops is Inadmissible

Communion is a Matter of Substance and Not of Form

1. In Orthodox tradition, heretical Bishops, even if they are not yet condemned, have always been considered to be excommunicated: outside the communion of the Faith and outside the communion of the Church.

St. Basil the Great believed that communion was not some formality, but a matter of substance: a matter of faith and a matter of salvation. Writing to the people of Euaesae, he prays that he may not fall away from communion with that segment of the Church which abides on the basis of “*sound and unperturbed doctrine*,” for right Faith is the foundation of communion, and communion with the Orthodox is a sign that one is placed in the “*lot*” of the righteous “*in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He shall come to give to every one according to his deeds*” (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XXXII, cols. 937D-940A [Epistle 251: “To the People of Euaesae,” § 4]).

Communion with heretics, according to St. Basil, is inadmissible, since through their rupture with the Orthodox Confession, whether *in toto* or in part, they automatically place themselves outside the communion of the Church.

Already as a Deacon, this Revealer of Heavenly things (*Ouranophantor*) broke communion, in 361, with Bishop Dianios of Cæsarea and fled to the wilderness of Pontos, despite the fact that he deeply loved and revered Dianios and despite the fact that Dianios had Baptized and Ordained him. Why did he “*wall himself off*”? Because Dianios, out of weakness of character, had signed the un-Orthodox confession of faith of the semi-Arian Council of Constantinople [in 360, under the presidency of the “Homœan” Akakios of Cæsarea in Palestine] (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XXXII, cols. 388C-392A [Epistle 51: “To Bishop Bosporios”]).

Later on, this time as a Bishop, he did not hesitate to sever his friendship with the Arian-minded Bishop Efstathios of Sebasteia and to break off all contact with him; explaining his strict stance, he wrote: “However, if we now refuse to follow these [those in the circle of Efstathios] and shun all of like thinking, certainly we deserve to obtain forgiveness, ‘*putting truth and our own firmness in the right Faith before everything*’” (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XXXII, col. 925BC [Epistle 245: “To Bishop Theophilos”]).

2. On June 29, 1995, at the Vatican, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Pope John Paul II signed a “Joint Communiqué.”

Sanctioned in this document, a clearly confessional one, were the theology of “*Sister Churches*”; baptismal theology (the theology of common baptism); the possibility, “*from this time forward, of Catholics and Orthodox offering a common witness of faith*”; the theology of “*common service*”; and the prospects for an interfaith dialogue (see Archimandrite Cyprian Agiokyprianites, *Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement* [Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1997], p. 19).

This action, the culmination of many other similar ecumenical initiatives, indisputably constitutes a fall from the Faith; it endorses and proclaims a new “*Confession of Faith*”: a heretical confession.

How is it possible for Patriarch Bartholomew and his like-minded ecumenist Bishops, who clearly, constantly, *and with conviction*—that is, not out of weakness of character—deny the ecclesiological and soteriological exclusivity of the One (and Only) Church, namely, that of the Orthodox, *to be anything but excommunicated*?

Furthermore, how is it possible for the ecumenists to be “*in communion*” with us, as long as they participate fully in the ecumenical movement and hold membership in its institutional structures, within which we see the manifest cultivation of a dogmatic, canonical, and moral “*minimalism*” that is inimical to Orthodoxy?

- If St. Basil the Great were alive today, would he be in communion with the Orthodox ecumenists? Certainly not; and this is because the principle which he preached is eternally valid: “*putting truth and our own firmness in the right Faith before everything.*”

* Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1999), pp. 9-10.