

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ORTHODOXY

**taken from History of the Greek Community of Winnipeg by Rev. Fr. A. Mavromaras (1980)*

In order to understand the significance of many of the events taking place in our community, one should first understand the meaning of Orthodoxy and its place in the life of a faithful Orthodox parishioner.

What is Orthodoxy? For many people, this word is synonymous of an old church, an ancient Cross or an Icon of some old and half-forgotten saint, half effaced by time and the smoke of candles. But are these things really Orthodoxy?

A careful examination of facts will show that Orthodoxy in its essence is the TRUTH, the truth about God, man and the world, as it has been revealed to us in the teaching, the life and the redeeming sacrifice of God made man as it has been formulated by the divinely inspired mind and heart of St. Paul; as it has been lived by St. John, the “disciple that Jesus loved”, and the other Apostles and evangelists under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Orthodoxy is the admirable synthesis of life and dogma, of practice and theory that the Orthodox Fathers with their wisdom and sanctity, their sacrifices and struggles, have handed down to us. The deposit of right faith and life, that priceless pearl of Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is also the official definitions and decisions of the Great Councils, the gatherings of representatives of Christ's whole Church militant here on earth. In these Councils, the God-fearing Fathers (having used all the science of the spirit and having been in conference with the Holy Ghost Himself) have shown us the solutions to the problems that really interest every spiritual man and, at the same time, have laid down the foundations of culture and civilization.

Orthodoxy has been sealed by the precious blood of the martyrs of every age. The noble army of martyrs and confessors, men and women, old and young, that fought in the Roman amphitheatres or died in the Russian concentration camps, is the best proof that Christianity is not simply a beautiful theory but, it is life and truth, the "good fight", the victory that overcomes cruel force and sheer material power, the triumph and the reign of the Spirit.

Orthodoxy has found its expression in the worship of the Church with its beautiful poetry and inspired hymnography, that wonderful combination of "the earthly and the heavenly, the natural and the supernatural, the individual and the social, the familiar and the awful, the accessible and the inaccessible." In such an atmosphere of uplift and sacredness, is celebrated the Holy Eucharist, the sacramental representation of the redeeming sacrifice of the God-man, into which all the faithful are called to partake. In such an atmosphere, too, are praised and magnified the great men and women of faith; the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the

confessors, the virgins and above all the blessed Mother of God, the Source of Light and Life. In

such an atmosphere finally is taught the Orthodox dogma as a revealed truth but also as the means of satisfying all the fundamental needs of human nature.

But Orthodoxy has been also the ideal of the monastic and ascetical life. Many scholars maintain that the Orthodox monks have been the spiritual army that fought for the freedom of the Spirit and the perfection of man. Their aim was “to transform and transfigure the whole life by the renovation of the spirit.” Their ascetical practices, says Werner Jaeger, were “the Olympic games of the Spirit,” and had one purpose: to enable man to live the life of “true philosophy,” of true and integral friendship with the incarnate wisdom of God, Christ, and thus be truly deified.

For Orthodoxy, social assistance is above all, “philanthropia” love or friendship for man; not sheer almsgiving but a true and sincere affection for man. Social assistance is not a discovery of the last centuries; it is in full operation in Jerusalem in the years that followed the Resurrection of our Lord. It was there that first communal meals were organized under the supervision of the seven first deacons of the Church; and the Apostle of the Gentiles was not only the omnipresent messenger of the Good News but also the first social worker. Together with the Gospel, he brought everywhere the idea of

collecting alms and gifts for the poorer churches. The bishops, the successors of the Apostles, were social workers, too. It is not true that the great Fathers of the Church were absorbed in dogmatic discussions and theological speculations in such a way as to ignore the welfare of the poorer members of the Church. In the days when the great Councils met, “Basiliad”, was built in Caesarea, communal meals for seven thousand people in need were in function in Byzantium and the first maternity homes were founded in Alexandria. Not only the bishops, but also the Kings and even the monks from the far off monasteries were competing in this “good fight” of neighbourly love. For all of them “orthodoxia”, right believing, was another word for “orthopraxia” right or rather well doing.

Another feature of Orthodoxy - constant throughout its history - is heroism. Orthodoxy has always had its martyrs that bore witness to Christ by shedding their blood. But the sacrifice of blood was not the only expression of Orthodox heroism. For the Orthodox faithful have always resisted with boldness and strength against any kind of injustice or arbitrariness whether it came from Julian the Apostate or the Arians, the monophysite or the iconoclast emperors.

Another constant feature of Orthodoxy is missionary work among the non-Christians. In the old days this work was a combination of spreading the Gospel and, at the same time, spreading civilization and culture. The Orthodox Church has proved for many peoples not only the mother of supernatural

faith and life but also the mistress of letters and of national and social life.

Orthodoxy has always been a royal way to the Gospel. It has kept whole and intact the spirit of Christianity against the dark mysticism of Eastern heresies, against the overcentralization of the Latin Church, against the rationalistic subjectiveness of the Protestants. Its ideal has always been the measure and harmony. Orthodoxy never overlooked man or underestimated human science, the nature of the art. It has never been “inhuman” but it sanctified everything. “It has shown the true nature of things and has embellished the life of man.”

Orthodoxy is the march of the whole man towards his Creator, towards deification. It leads man to the fullness of existence in Christ and for Christ. It is not only true theology; it also is true psychology, true humanism, the right art of living alone and in society. It is like a many-faced diamond where every face reflects a different aspect of the one Truth. For Orthodoxy is not a kind of museum, a history of days past and gone by; it is life, a source of life, a continual creation, a living and life-giving spirit.