

## Sunday of Orthodoxy

By Bishop George Khodr

Linguistically, the word Orthodoxy does not denote one of the sects of those that are in the Lebanon. It is a Greek word that signifies “the right faith” to those who have embraced Orthodoxy, or the soundness of what they have received from the Fathers. Those who are not sound in their faith would not be the heretics who have diverged from the “right faith”, but they would be the “others”, as we say in Greek also. But those who only use the linguistic term “orthodox” to call themselves with - while they are not - are not called in Greek by what denotes the “Kuffar” (the blasphemers) in Arabic, but we just call them “the others”. So the Christians have perhaps described them, in their ecclesiastical and historical writings, as those who have diverged from the true faith; but in our common church usage of the word, we call them “others”. Perhaps with that there is a respect for those who deny the beliefs which are thought to be sound.

When you describe your faith and the content of your faith as a creed, you mean to say that it is *The Creed* in the absolute; otherwise, you are considered as unserious in your position. By using that expression “*The Creed*”, you would be also considering that other contravening positions are ones of error.

My attention is drawn to how in Lebanon people insist, for a nationalistic reason, to secure all people in their doctrines and “their crosses and churches” as the first Muslims did in respecting the freedom of others. And that is an acknowledgement of their right of freedom, that is even the freedom of staying in error; unless we want to consider all those (religious sects), according to the Quranic expression, as all being the people of Abraham based on the understanding of the Quranic verse “You are the best nation produced for mankind.” . (Al Imran: 110). Maybe that position was established on the understanding that if one were a Jew or a Christian or a Muslim, one would not be different from the other since the children of Abraham are all one. Is this thought of equality within the plurality – using a modern expression - a statement of the Quran?

It bothers me when superficial people or those who are stupidly fanatic, object to our saying that: “This is Orthodox and that is “the others”. My Church has this propriety in not calling the “others” heretic. In the Greek, the word “heretic” does not carry in it a connotation of cursing. What is meant by it is “the others”. Of course you imply that those others do not believe in what I believe in; they are “the others”. I have to embrace them in brotherly love; though they are embraced, yet they are not brothers while the “Orthodox” is what I am according to the saying of some Muslim Sufis: “I am those I love and those I love are I; we are two souls who live in one body”.

Why? Is the above propriety out of place? Cannot I call the others “the others”? Do I have to say we are one and there is no criterion on which our oneness can be acknowledged?

I know that I am one with every human being. And that is love. And we are in disagreement if we say or believe differently. He who undermines the importance of the differences is like saying that the difference is not a difference. And I say to him whom I disagree with that I love him as much as I love him who is one with me in Creed because love is given to him who believes like you and him who differs from you in the faith. In loving, St Paul did not distinguish between him whose belief is like yours and others.

Cannot we understand that we have matured in love so that I do not feel that I have to kill the one who is different? Is it not time yet that I embrace in one embrace, both those who are near and those who are far? Humanity will remain a group of people who are in disagreement as to their creeds, but are able to love one another because they are the ones who remain in their greatness and in their shame.

Do we express our love to people according to their creeds? Why should I express less love to those of a different creed than mine when in fact I am able to love people the same regardless of their physical appearance, languages and political affiliations? But when Jesus of Nazareth said “love your neighbor as yourself”, He meant to say this: “Here I see you before me and that is enough for me to love you without asking you about your religious convictions; that is enough for me to embrace you since what I am embracing is your Lord who is in you.”

Paul said that dissension is inevitable (1Cor. 11: 18). And so you are together in the love that God has poured down on you in the gratuitousness of His love. Differences among people do not result necessarily because of some mal-intention in us. It is the result of the differences in our intellects and logic; and such difference among us is acceptable since we receive ourselves from the Divine mind.

The religions will not get united. They are expressions and are adorned with more expressions; and such differences in expressions among the different religions will not melt one into the other or one finds its reference in the other. Every doctrine exists in itself and is like an independent entity in people’s minds. And minds remain in disagreement or in difference though they get close to each other at times. If you are not of the same opinion as mine, it is enough for you to love God and thus I will join you there in His love. And that is more important than having all agree on one opinion. But in the Church, the opinion is one since the faith (Creed) is one.

The Church in Her councils sought to have one creed expressing the faith because using the same words ensures having the same content (of the doctrine). Confessing one Creed shows the unity in the faith among those who say it. That is

why we are adamant on expressing the faith using the same words thus ensuring the soundness of the faith and doctrine.