

The Unity of Dogma and Love

*From Misguided Zeal to the Cesspool of Heresy**

“There is no opposition between dogma and love.”

WE DEEM IT WORTHWHILE, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Third Holy Œcumenical Synod in Ephesus (September 9), to return to the ever-timely subject of our proper attitude and behavior towards heretics and, in general, those who have differences of opinion with us.

We must become profoundly conscious of the fact that, if the attitude of Orthodox towards those in error is not in harmony with the Tradition of the Fathers, it entails many dangers and leads to negative results.



A. Patriarch Nestorios of Constantinople is an eternal example of a fervent champion of the Orthodox Faith who—on account of his misguided zealotry and unbridled fanaticism—was led to his notorious and blasphemous Christological heresy and was, moreover, responsible for the Monophysite controversy, with all of its ruinous consequences.

1. No sooner had Nestorios, who came from Antioch, been Consecrated a Bishop in the Imperial City, than he showed himself—according to the historian Socrates—to be an “ardent persecutor” of heretics and one who “acted contrary to the usual way of the Church,”¹ ceasing not to quarrel with and plot violence against heresies; in this way he came to be hated and “single-handedly turned the city upside down.”^{2a}

2. First and foremost, he became immediately known “for his unrestrained (loquacious, insolent) tongue.”^{2b} At his Consecration (April 10, 428), “he promptly uttered those famous” and arrogant “words: ‘Give me, O Emperor, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you Heaven as a recompense. Assist me in destroying the heretics, and I will assist you in vanquishing the Persians!’”^{3a}

All of those who had a loathing for heretics, as Socrates makes clear, “gladly accepted” these words; however, “neither the frivolous mind nor the violent (wrathful, irascible) temperament” of Nestorios escaped those of “upright disposition.”^{3b}

3. On the fifth day after his Consecration, Nestorios turned with fury against the Arians, attempting to demolish their church. In their despair, the Arians set fire to the church; the fire spread to the adjacent houses, the city was thrown into disorder, and the heretics made preparations to defend themselves.”^{4a}

Hereafter, everyone called Nestorios the “firebrand” (the “incendiary”); “and it was not only the heretics who did this, but also those of his own faith.”^{4b}

4. After this, he turned against the Novatians, “but the ruling authorities, by their admonitions, checked his fury.”^{5a}

5. Next, he ruthlessly persecuted the Quartodecimans; and when strife broke out, “multitudes perished...around Miletus and Sardis.”^{5b}

6. Thereafter, he began to attack the Macedonians, whom he severely tormented with the aid of Bishop Anthony, who was of like mind with him; thereupon the heretics, “unable any longer to bear his harsh treatment,” “assassinated him [Anthony]”!⁶

7. Finally, however, Nestorios, having striven in a fanatic and un-Christian manner to persecute others, “was himself expelled from the Church”;⁷ when he began to support those who called the All-Holy Mother of our Savior, not the *Theotokos* (the “Bearer of God”), but *Christotokos* (the “bearer of Christ”) or *anthropotokos* (“man-bearer”), and to proclaim his heresy, he came into conflict with his own Faithful and turned his persecutory fervor against them.

8. The clergy who broke communion with Nestorios endured “what was done not even among the barbarian nations”:⁸ arrests, imprisonment, exile, public ridicule, beatings, scourgings, starvation, etc.

“They pilloried us, flung us down, and kicked us, naked and bound as we were,” the victims recounted; “what people would not endure even in secular trials as laymen—much less clergy, Archimandrites, and monastics—, we suffered unlawfully in the Church at the hands of this transgressor.”⁹

9. In his indiscretion, the fanatic Nestorios showed no respect even for the most holy Archbishop Cyril of Alexandria, who in anguish advised the “firebrand” to correct his heretical preaching, “so as to bring a worldwide scandal to an end.”¹⁰

Nestorios responded very discourteously, looking at the concern shown by St. Cyril as deriving from “his Egyptian origins” and character-

izing his epistles as “insults” that would “try the patience of a physician,” since they were supposedly filled with “obscure and indigestible long-windedness” and provoked “nausea.”¹¹

10. Ultimately, the wretched Nestorios’ crudity was directed against the Third Holy Ecumenical Synod, which, meeting in Ephesus in June of 431, summoned the Hierarchy of the Imperial City by proper protocol—three times in writing, through Episcopal emissaries—and, indeed, entreatingly (“we beseech you to come”¹²) “to attend this Holy Synod.”¹³

Nestorios, who was in Ephesus, ordered “a throng of soldiers with cudgels” to stand at the threshold of his place of residence, “so as to allow no one from the Synod to enter”!¹⁴

Nestorios did not go to the Holy Synod; the Holy Fathers passed judgment on him *in absentia*: “*Shedding many tears*,” they declared that “the same Nestorios be excluded from the Episcopal rank and from all Priestly association.”¹⁵

B. On the basis of the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that Nestorios suffered a most grievous fall, because he did not follow the Tradition of the Fathers in his attitude towards heretics; he ignored in word and deed the crystal-clear teaching of his great predecessor in Constantinople, the most holy John Chrysostomos, as well as that of another predecessor, St. Gregory the Theologian....

1. Although he of Golden Discourse was distinguished as an anti-heretical pastor of uncommon power, he never taught or did anything like Nestorios, regarding love as the most important weapon of the Orthodox against heretics.

The goal of our struggle is not the extermination of heretics or their forcible subjugation to the Church, for such measures would show that our Faith does not “work by love.”¹⁶ According to St. John, “to believe is not all that is required, but also to abide in love.”¹⁷

2. In addressing ourselves to those in error, St. John of Golden Word teaches us that we should not forget the following:

a) “we do not speak in enmity, but so as to correct them”;¹⁸

b) our purpose is not “to strike our adversaries down, but to lift them up when they have fallen down”;¹⁹

c) the power of our words “does not inflict wounds, but heals wounds”;^{20a}

d) we should not “be angry with them, nor make a show of our wrath, but we should converse with them gently; for nothing is stronger than gentleness and mildness.”^{20b}

3. Likewise, let it not escape us that we express our genuine love for heretics not only in words, written and spoken, but also in fervent prayer:

“Let us leave everything to prayer,” says St. John Chrysostomos; “the more impious they are, the more [we should] beseech and entreat on their behalf that they might at some point back away from their madness... Let us not cease making supplications for them.”²¹

4. Our persistence in the task of showing love for those in error should be unflinching; and even if heretics insult us and treat us inhumanly, we should not retreat, but “weep,”²² “lament,”²³ and “mourn”^{24a} for their spiritual infirmity. “Lamentation...is a varied remedy, and of great efficacy in admonition.”^{24b}

5. And one final assurance: if heretics do not repent, it is due largely to the absence among the Faithful of a “radiant life,” a saintly way of life, the chief mark of which is love.

If we want our anti-heretical assertions to have credibility, let us make sure that we are first and foremost distinguished by our orthopraxy, the lack of which, according to St. John Chrysostomos, “has defamed the seemly things of our Faith; this has turned everything upside down.”²⁵

6. One who most genuinely continued the teaching of St. John Chrysostomos, and of the Fathers in general, with regard to our attitude towards heretics, was the humble and meek Saint of Aegina, Nectarios of Pentapolis:



“Dogmatic differences, reduced to an issue of faith, leave the matter of love free and unchallenged; dogma does not set itself against love... Christian love is constant, and for this reason the deformed faith of the heretodox cannot change our feelings of love towards them... Issues of faith must in no way diminish the feeling of love.”²⁶

Misguided zealotry and unbridled fanaticism, in our days, have become a violent and perilous current, which, like Nestorios’ indiscretion, even when it does not give rise to *new* heresies in our struggle against the panheresy of ecumenism, nonetheless renders a genuine anti-ecumenist witness ineffective and devalues its saving message: “...this has turned everything upside down.”

“Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear!”

Notes

1. *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXVII, col. 808A.

2a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 805A.

3a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 804B.

4a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 804C.

5a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 805A.

6. *Ibid.*, col. 808AB.

7. *Ibid.*, col. 808C.

8. *Proceedings of the Holy Œcumenical Synods* [in Greek], ed. Spyridon Melia (Holy Mountain: Kalyve of the Venerable Forerunner, 1981), Vol. I, p. 462b.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 463a.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 436a; see also, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXXVII, col. 41.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 438a.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 470a.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 469b.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 470-471.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 490a (*emphasis ours*).

16. Galatians 5:6.

17. *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXI, col. 666.

18. *Ibid.*, Vol. XLVIII, col. 742.

19. *Ibid.*, col. 707.

20a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 708.

21. *Ibid.*, col. 743.

22. *Ibid.*, col. 718.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. LXI, col. 666.

24a,b. *Ibid.*, col. 661.

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. LX, col. 331.

26. *Pastoral Theology* [in Greek], p. 192.

* Translated from the Greek by Hieromonk Patapios from the periodical *Ἅγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 280 (September-October 1997), pp. 265, 278-279, 282.