

What is Most Important

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The Tragic Two-sidedness of Our World

FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD we are constantly confronted by the unpleasant fact that the world in which we live is **two-sided** and **contradictory**.

On one hand, it is majestic and beautiful. Nature enchants us with her beauty, her immenseness and her gentleness. Life beckons to us with all its riddles and (so it seems) its boundless possibilities. We sometimes feel within ourselves great energy and ability. We think that everything has been set up for our happiness, our

enjoyment and our progress.

At the same time, we constantly run up against the fact that so much of what is enchanting and beautiful about this world ends in destruction and death. In nature there are storms, earthquakes, drought and epidemics, from which plants and animals suffer and die. In human society we see deception, dissension, robbery, violence and war. In families we see enmity and quarrelling. Even in ourselves we frequently feel discord and disturbances. We are afflicted with doubts; we are affected by unexpected troubles and disappointments; we are deprived of our planned activities by illness. It appears that there is nothing sure and constant in the world. Fame does not endure. Riches slip away between our fingers. Brief moments of happiness are followed by long periods of emptiness and aimlessness. Material things become tiresome. Friends deceive us. Loved ones betray our trust. Dreams do not come true. A few minutes of joy are succeeded by a feeling of barrenness and discontent. Youth is replaced by old age. Death is always waiting for people of every age, waiting to cast down into the dust all human hopes and plans.

What is the reason for these opposite and contradictory perceptions of the world? Why does the world seem to give with one hand, only to take away with the other hand? Why does it build up only to tear down? Is it possible that it gives us times of joy only in order to make our disappointment more bitter later? Does the world allure us only to strike at us? Does it give us the joy of life only that it may later grieve us mercilessly with death?

Furthermore, if the world is by its very nature a duality, like the positive and negative charges of atomic particles, then why is it that we, who are an organic part of it, cannot reconcile ourselves to this duality, but rather long for complete harmony and order? Why do we have within us such a burning thirst for life and endless happiness, when death and dissolution are just as natural as life and development? What is more, no matter how much we tell ourselves that someday we will all have to die, and that death is the natural end of every creature, we have a stubborn subconscious resistance to this thought; we demand the continuation of life, even when it is linked with incredible effort and suffering.

It turns out that the greatest contradiction in this world lies within our very selves. There is some aspect of our nature which does not think and feel according to the laws of the physical world, but according to some other, spiritual, kind of laws. This is why man can never be reconciled with the facts of destruction and death. They will always remain for him things that are unnatural and unacceptable. Everyone, perhaps without thinking about it, would like to live in a world free from contradictions, a world where harmony and justice rule, where joy is not dimmed by sorrow, where life knows no end.

Is it possible that, as asserted by certain philosophers (such as Plato, with his world of ideas), our soul once dwelt in some other and better world, filled with harmony, and that it then fell into this imperfect world against its own will, and therefore it subconsciously longs for the ideal world? Such a possibility is fascinating, and it could partially explain the general dissatisfaction felt by mankind, but isn't it just a dream?

Belief in the existence of God, in His infinite goodness and power, suggests to us that He made us for happiness. It is He Who gave us an unquenchable thirst for perfection and the attainment of happiness; therefore, there must be another world, one which is better and more perfect than ours. But where is it and how do we reach it?

A clear and precise answer to this most important and besetting question is provided by Christianity. It unequivocally affirms that there really does exist another and better world, called paradise or the kingdom of heaven, in which the angels and the souls of just dwell. It is a world without the contradictions and injustices of our own; it is free from crime, violence, sickness and death. It is a world where never-ending life and harmony

are the rule, where all rational beings, illumined by the life-giving light of their Creator, ceaselessly contemplate His beauty and rejoice in His incalculable mercies.

Our physical world was also created by God for goodness, life and happiness, but sin has disfigured and corrupted it.

Where Does Evil Come From?

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES explain that the tragedy which overtook the human race had its actual beginnings in the **world of the angels**, perhaps even before the appearance of the physical universe. One of the highest angels which God created, named Lucifer, or the Daystar, became puffed up with pride, so that he thought he was the brightest, mightiest and most beautiful of all the angels, that he had no further need of his Creator and was not obliged to serve Him. Lucifer's goal was to make himself a kind of god, an object of veneration for other angels. To this end he raised a rebellion in heaven and won over to his side a certain segment of the angelic world. Thus Lucifer, who was later called Satan, or the devil (meaning a slanderer), was the initiator of the very worst of sins, **pride** and **self-satisfaction**, which serve as the basis for all other sins and vices. Lucifer planned to found a kingdom of "free" and "independent" spirits, separated from God. But this kingdom, founded on the principles of sin, was a clear failure, and came to be known as **hell** or the abyss. Instead of a promised paradise, it became a place of impenetrable darkness and unending misery. It became so terrible that the fallen angels themselves, the demons or devils, fear it, and wish to escape from it, as from a prison (Luke 8:31).

The devil was not content with having caused a tragedy in the world of pure spirits, with having founded his own kingdom. Because he hated God and all that God had created, he decided to bring evil to the crown of God's creation, the first man. For this purpose he assumed the form of a serpent and tempted Adam and Eve to break God's commandment by eating of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3). He was a skilful seducer; he convinced them that, if they ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they would become all-knowing and mighty, like God. He deceived them with the same idea with which he had once deceived himself: the possibility of becoming godlike easily and all at once, without the Creator, even in opposition to the Creator. And so, man was ruined by the same sins which had already ruined Lucifer: pride and self-love.

In this way, the tragedy of sin was passed down from the world of angels to our physical world, and as a result our earthly life was filled with contradictions, sorrows and corruption. In consequence of the Fall, the first human beings lost their relationship with God; they were deprived of their life in paradise and became mortal. Worst of all, the contagion of sin, like a liquid flowing from a contaminated fountain, was passed on to their descendants, so that all people would henceforth be born with a damaged nature. The descendants of Adam and Eve, being predisposed to sin, took the line of least resistance and began to commit all sorts of evil acts, hurting, cheating and even killing one another. This sinful way of life caused man's consciousness to become more and more darkened, so that in time he lost a true conception of his Maker and started to worship his own handiwork, in the form of various idols, both literal and figurative (such as greed, worldly goods, luxury, earthly fame and all kinds of fleshly pleasures).

The more mankind wallowed in wickedness, the stronger the devil became, and soon that originator of evil came to exercise a cruel mastery over man. Thus, as time went on, our beautiful world, created by God, and

represented by His highest creatures, men made in His own image, sank into a state of evil, ruled by enmity, lies, injustice, suffering and death. What was even worse, mankind in its wretchedness proved to be completely **helpless**, unable to cast off the shackles of sin and turn back to God. The infernal serpent wished to make this once-beautiful, God-created world into a copy of hell, by skilfully manipulating human weaknesses and passions.

The only one who could rescue mankind from this desperate state of affairs was the Creator, our loving **heavenly Father**. When people were fully convinced of their own helplessness, and when they were spiritually mature enough to receive a Saviour, He sent into the world His Son, Who, while always remaining one God with the Father, by the descent of the Holy Spirit took flesh of the very purest and fairest of the daughters of man, the Ever-Virgin Mary. He became a Man, like us in everything but sin.

The purpose of His coming among us was to **liberate** man from the tyranny of Satan and from the oppression of sin, and to put him on the path to spiritual renewal, which would lead back to God and eternal blessedness.

There is Salvation

Only in Christ

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14: 6).

Christ Is the Way

At a moment in mankind's history which had been determined by God and foretold by prophets, about 2000 years ago, in the ancient nation of Israel, the Saviour of the world was born - Jesus Christ, the **Messiah** Who had been foretold by the ancient prophets.

At His Incarnation a great and unfathomable mystery came to pass. In the **one Person** of the Son of God there were united **two natures**: His Divinity, Which was before all time, and the humanity Which He assumed, so as to become like us in every way.

Living among men, Jesus Christ taught them by His Words and His own example to believe correctly and to live righteously. His public ministry did not last long, only three and half years, but it was extraordinarily full. His every word and act reflected His infinite wisdom, love and moral perfection. He shone like a brilliant light that had come to us from the ideal world above, a Light Which enlightens, and will continue to enlighten, every person who seeks goodness.

The teachings of Jesus Christ contained everything that people needed to know in order to live rightly; however, man had become morally weakened, so much so that he was unable to attain spiritual renewal by his own efforts alone. Sin had grown its roots too deep in human nature; evil had acquired such immense strength in all aspects of human life that men could not throw off its yoke by their own unaided efforts.

Therefore, out of unfathomable compassion for us sinners, and moved by His immeasurable love, the Righteous One took upon Himself the sins of all men - **the sins of each one of us** - and on their account offered a **redemptive sacrifice** on the Cross. With His most pure Blood He washed away our guilt before God; by His

Death He conquered our death. Then, descending into the depths of hell, He, as Almighty God, freed and led out the souls of all those who wished to return to God and to live rightly. He took away Satan's power over men and set the day of his final condemnation in fiery Gehenna.

Why was it necessary to have such a terrible sacrifice as the shameful and excruciatingly painful death on the Cross of Christ, the God-Man? Was there not any other way for God to bring about man's salvation? These are mysteries which we cannot comprehend. We only know that Christ's redemptive sufferings, together with His glorious Resurrection from the dead, contain a power by which we can be **born again**. Through this great power, which overcomes all obstacles, any sinner, no matter how deeply he has sunk in the mire of vice, can undergo a complete spiritual renewal; he can become a righteous person, and even a great saint.

Forty days after His Resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, where He now abides as the God-Man. He is the Head of the Church, and together with the Father and the Holy Spirit He governs the world. On the fiftieth day after His Resurrection, Jesus Christ sent down the Holy Spirit on His Apostles and disciples and founded the Church, to which He entrusted everything needed for the salvation of believers.

If the Son of God Himself undertook to perform such extraordinary acts, coming down to the earth, taking on Himself human nature, suffering and dying the shameful and exceedingly painful death of the Cross, it is clear that there cannot be any way to salvation other than that which is offered to us by Jesus Christ.

Thanks to all that our Lord Jesus Christ did, everyone is now able to be freed from sins, to throw off the burden of passions, to be spiritually renewed and to start to live rightly, with the help of His grace. Anyone who wishes can now attain eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. The devil cannot stop us, unless we fall away from Christ through our own carelessness or lack of seriousness.

Thus, thanks to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, immortality and the bliss of paradise are not the dream of poets or the fantasy of philosophers, but a **reality accessible to all**. Everyone who wishes can reach the kingdom of heaven by following the path indicated by the Saviour, and by imitating Him as much as possible. He is the **ideal of moral perfection, the supreme criterion of truth, the infallible spiritual authority and the inexhaustible source of inspiration**.

Truly, He is our **Way, Truth and Life!** All other "great teachers" of mankind (such as Confucius, Zoroaster, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, and including the founders of today's totalitarian cults) turn out to be poor parodies if they are set up in opposition to Christ, or if they are used in an effort to "correct" or "improve" what He said and did.

Christ Is the Truth

God the Father foreordained that men should find salvation through His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. All that Jesus Christ did and said is contained in the New Testament portion of the Bible, in what are called the **Gospels**, of which there are four. The Old Testament portion of the Bible contains the writings of the prophets who lived before the time of Christ. Their purpose was to prepare the human race to receive Christ as the **Messiah**, that is, the Saviour anointed by God. The books of the New Testament were written by the disciples of Christ, the Apostles, and set forth the teachings of Jesus Christ more fully and in greater detail.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, teaches that everything visible and invisible was created by God from nothing. First God made the invisible world of the angels (heaven), and then our visible or material world (earth).

To crown His creation of the material world, God made man, adorning him with His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). The physical world was made by God not all at once, but in **stages**, which are called in the Bible "days." God did not make the world out of any necessity or need for it, but because of His all-good desire that other beings, created by Him, should enjoy the gift of life.

Being infinitely good, God made everything **good, beautiful** and **pure**. Just as the angels were, man was also predestined for eternal life and everlasting blessedness in a union of grace with His Creator. The Creator was pleased to honour man with His most precious gift, **free will**, in order that man might grow towards perfection in the moral life. By this gift God gave rational beings a **dignity** incomparably greater than the rest of irrational nature, but at the same time it was a **test**. Being a boundless ocean of love (1 John 4:8-12), God wanted us all to **love Him** with the purest and most selfless kind of love, as tender children love their caring father. It was His desire that we should run to Him because we ourselves wanted to do so, and that we should grow steadily towards perfection by imitating Him to the best of our ability.

In order for us to get to know Him more fully, God revealed to us that He is not simply Oneness (a monad), but **Three-in-Oneness**, or Trinity. This means that in God there is one divine nature or essence, but three free and rational Persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - Who dwell in perfect harmony and love with one another. In the Deity, God the Father is the source of the divine nature which is common to all three; this is His hypostatic characteristic (*what characterizes Him as a distinct Person*). The Son was "begotten" from the Father before all time; the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father before all time; these are their hypostatic characteristics. The words "begotten" and "proceeds," however, do not carry any connotation of time. God was always the Trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Since God is three in Persons, but **One** in essence, He desired that the human race which He created should also reflect His three-in-oneness to a certain degree. In other words, He desired men to live, not as isolated individuals, solitary "I's," but as "**we**," as an **integral** and **cohesive society**, held together by love, in which each one takes the joys or sorrows of his neighbour as his very own. This, of course, was the ideal intended by the Creator. This all-encompassing unity was not meant, however, to suppress the personalities of rational beings. On the contrary, just as in the Creator Himself each Person possesses His own personal qualities, which are beyond our comprehension, so too in human society each distinct person was meant to preserve his own **individual** and **unique** characteristics, his particular talents. This **unity in multiplicity** was the type of existence that man was called to live, first of all in family life, then in society and finally on the level of the whole human race.

As we have already said, sin did great damage to human nature. As a result, mankind was not only torn away from its Maker, but it was also broken into a multitude of individuals, who were mutually jealous and at odds. Jesus Christ intended to bring men back to the path of unity with their Maker and closeness with one another; therefore, He began His preaching with the **good** news, or glad **tidings** (which is the meaning of the Greek word Evangelion, or "Gospel"), that "*the Kingdom of God is at hand.*" God is ready to forgive each one of us and to accept him as His son, on condition that a man believe in the Saviour Whom God has sent, accept His divine teachings and begin to live rightly. Everything that Jesus Christ did and said had the purpose of teaching people and inspiring them to start to live for God, for the good, for inner renewal. The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ had to begin **within** believers, in hearts made new by love.

After His glorious Resurrection from the dead, and shortly before His Ascension into heaven, Jesus Christ revealed that He will come to the earth **again** before the end of the world. This Second Coming of Christ will not

be like the first, when He came in the form of an ordinary man, as the merciful and compassionate Saviour. He lived in poverty and meekly endured all the reproaches of sinners. Before the end of the world He will come in His heavenly glory, as the terrible and **just Judge**, surrounded by a multitude of angels and saints, and He will give each one the reward of his deeds. Immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ the worldwide miracle of the **resurrection** of the dead will take place at His almighty command. The bodies of all the people who have ever lived on the earth will rise up out of the dust in the twinkling of an eye and will be reunited with their souls. At that time every man will be restored in his bipartite nature, in which soul and body form a single human being.

Let us recall that man was created for eternal life. Death, in the sense of complete annihilation or reduction to non-being, simply does not exist. What we call death is only the temporary separation of the soul and the body. When the body loses its life-giving principle, which is the soul, the body decomposes into the elements of which it was made up. The soul, the very personality of man, in a fully conscious and aware state, crosses over into some sphere of existence which is unknown to us, where it remains until the day of Christ's Last Judgement. At His Second Coming Christ will resurrect us in our twofold nature.

With the Second Coming of Christ the history of the human race will come to an end. The earth and everything on it, matter and the whole cosmos, will be subjected to fiery flame. Yet this fiery furnace will not be the destruction of the material world, but rather its **transfiguration**, as if in a smelter that removes all impurities. The physical world will be transformed into *"a new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-2).

Christ will pass judgement not only on men, but also on the **devil** and his **demons**. This judgement will decide the **eternal fate** of every rational creature. All who did not wish to respond to God's love with love, all who did evil and spread falsehood, will be condemned to fiery Gehenna. This will be a *"second death,"* which will not be annihilation, but rather complete **separation from God** in unending and fruitless sufferings.

On the *"new earth,"* under the *"new heaven,"* in the *"new Jerusalem,"* a new life will begin, the happy and endless life which God foreordained from all eternity for those who love Him. There will be that true **salvation**, for which each man thirsts, thought not always knowingly. The purpose for which God in His boundless love created us will finally be realized.

Christ is the Life

The goal, then, of our earthly life is to inherit **eternal life** in the kingdom of heaven. To reach it our loving Creator requires of us only that we respond to Him with the kind of sincere, pure and selfless **love** with which He loves us.

Such love is a spring which flows from this temporal life into the beauty of eternal life. The reason for man's life is to become more and more like God and to draw nearer and nearer to Him. The substance of our life should be the continuous upholding of everything in us that furthers nearness to God and rejection of everything that takes us away from Him.

How can the fire of such love and such striving be kindled in the soul? Once it is lit, how can it be guarded, so that it is not allowed to go out, but rather, as much as possible, it is turned into the flame of salvation, which burns up all impurity in the heart? Man cannot do this by his own power, no matter how sincerely he desires it. The winds and waves of the passions are too strong, and they come from sources hostile to man: the world which lies

in sin, the flesh which loves sin and the devil, the originator of all evil.

For salvation, therefore, it is necessary to **cling** to Christ with all one's strength, to become **one** with Him. Then His divine power and His love will fill our souls. They will protect, sanctify and strengthen us; they will lead us on the sure but narrow path to eternal life. Christ speaks thus about the necessity of staying with Him: *"I am the Vine, ye are the branches. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine"* (John 15:5). In other words, authentic spiritual life, which brings forth good fruit, is impossible unless one is united in the closest possible way with the Source of spiritual strength - Christ.

The Need for the Church

The mystery of the Church, the kingdom of God - a mystery which is great and wise, surpassing our understanding - was brought into being by Christ in the following way. First, when He was baptized by John in the Jordan, at the moment when the Holy Spirit came down and the voice of the Father was heard, He **sanctified the nature of water**. By this act the water of Baptism became a conduit of God's grace, which gives a man new birth. Christ taught that a man is spiritually born and becomes a member of the Church only by being *"born of water and of the Spirit"* in the sacrament of **Baptism** (John 3:5).

Just as a newborn infant requires nourishment in order to grow, so also one who is born anew in the mystery of Baptism requires spiritual nourishment, which the Lord gives us in the sacrament of **Holy Communion**, of which He says: *"I am that bread of life. ... The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. ... He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me"* (John 6:48-57).

At His Mystical Supper, the evening before He suffered on the Cross, Christ Himself first changed bread into His true Flesh and wine into His true Blood and gave Them in communion to His disciples, thereby showing them how the Sacrament of Holy Communion should be observed.

From that time on, the sacrament of Holy Communion has been celebrated at a divine service, called the **Liturgy**. Believers receive the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ and are thereby united with Him, and not in a purely abstract or mystical sense, but **really** and **truly**! The whole being of a man, spiritual and physical, partakes of the spiritual and physical life of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. Love opens a path to spiritual closeness; moreover, in Holy Communion, while people are united with Christ, they are united with one another at the same time, and in Christ they become a **single whole, a living organism**, called the Church. This is why the Apostle Paul called the Church the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24).

Just as the Incarnation of the Son of God was accomplished by the descent of the **Holy Spirit** on the Virgin Mary, so also the Church was founded on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus Christ sent from the Father to the Apostles on the fiftieth day after His Resurrection. Since that day the Holy Spirit has remained with the Church constantly, giving it life, illuminating it and cultivating it as a single living organism of the Body of Christ, consisting of many "members," faithful Christians.

There is something which must not be forgotten, especially in our times when Christianity is being split up into more and more churches and "jurisdictions." Man is called to be saved not by a mere mental acknowledgement of the truth of Christianity, and not merely by his own best efforts, but by **belonging organically** to the living body of the Church. Only in the Church, in this mystical Body of Christ, does the believer find correct spiritual

guidance and the strength necessary for an authentically Christian life.

The True Church, One and Indivisible

SINCE ITS BIRTH IN THE DAYS of the Apostles, the Church of Christ has absorbed into itself people from many nations along its historical path. It has gradually grown from strength to strength *"unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13). As a mighty tree grows from a little seed, or as a mature adult develops from an infant, so the Church of Christ, which once consisted of twelve fishermen, has at the present reached its full flowering. It has become a beautiful tree, covered with many branches and leaves (Matt. 13:32), with a developed doctrine, liturgics, symbolism, and rules, or canons, which embrace all aspects of its life and the life of each individual member. The canons of the Church are the laws necessary for its life and activity, just as there are laws which govern the living organism of the human body.

Christ cannot have several "bodies"; similarly, there can only be **one** Church of Christ.

The realities of contemporary life bring us face to face with the existence of a multitude of Christian denominations, all claiming the title of "Church." Both Catholics and Protestants of various kinds - Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals and even the followers of the most fanatical cults -all insist on the truth of their teachings.

One of reasons for the divisions in Christianity, as in any other original idea, can be found in the Second Law of Thermodynamics, according to which every physical system tends toward a maximum of entropy, i.e., towards maximum disorder. But inasmuch as Christ founded the Church for man's salvation, it is certain that the **leading** and **most active** role in the division of Christianity has at all times been played by the **devil**, that age-old enemy of God and man.

When Christ called the devil *"a liar and the father of lies"* (John 8:44). He indicated the chief method used by the devil, namely, lying. In order to tear as many people as possible away from the Church, the devil first of all tries to put into their minds false ideas about religion, or heresies. When someone is then captivated by some new idea, taking it for a divine revelation, he imagines himself to be God's messenger, and begins to spread his pernicious doctrine with the greatest zeal and self-sacrifice. Everything he does is directed (so he thinks) toward "improving," "purifying" or "completing" the Christian religion. When the Church rejects some new heresy, the self-styled prophets separate themselves from it. They lead away some of the faithful and found new churches, which they declare to be the true Church, while they say that Christ's Church has gone astray and does not understand His teaching.

In this way all sorts of heresies have sprung up and continue to do so, from apostolic times until the present. First came Arianism, Monophysitism and Iconoclasm. Later, Roman Catholicism departed from the true Church. From it came the churches of the Reformation, the Protestants, and from them, as from a veritable horn of plenty, flowed countless contemporary sects. These new sects are basically a repetition of heresies which were long ago condemned by Councils; they are just dressed up in new words.

As for those people who adhere steadfastly to the true teaching of Christ, the devil attempts to tear them away from the Church by means of schisms and parish strife. Once again, he cleverly suggests to people seemingly good reasons for correcting some deficiency or improving some existing situation. The trouble lies not so much with some particular customs or external activities, which may not be the best, and may be in need of correction; the real trouble is that people start **quarrelling among themselves** and then split into hostile groups.

How can a simple believer see his way clear amidst the confusing array of a multitude of churches, denominations and cults?

In order to find the answer to this question, we must understand that the true Church has to be one that has an unbroken continuity with apostolic times, so that it preserves the Apostles' teaching, their traditions and an unbroken line of apostolic succession, which runs from one bishop to the next. As a living organism, the Church grows and develops, but at the same time it must maintain the **unity** and **identity** of its own theanthropic nature.

In the Symbol of Faith, the Creed, we say, "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." Such belief assumes the **oneness of the Church**, as the unity of a living organism, in which everything is closely linked together; this means unity in faith and doctrine, in liturgical life and in canonical order. All these things serve to guarantee that believers will be able to share in what is most important: in the sacrament of Holy Communion and in prayer. The various ancient Orthodox Churches were thus united in this communion; they formed, in essence, one Church, which was, as it were, a reflection of the Trinity and Unity of the one Divine Essence in diverse persons.

Some people put forward a theory which supposes that the Church of Christ was once one but was later "divided" into parts, including the Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, etc.; each of these parts is a "Christian Church," containing pieces of the truth; each is a sort of fragment of the once-united Apostolic Church. All of them, therefore, should now join together, first in a "dialogue of love," and then in prayer, and finally in the Eucharist. At the same time, each of these "churches" will retain its own teachings - in other words, its heresies. Such an approach to the question of unity ignores the fact that the true Church, the one founded by the Apostles, already **exists** in our own day, and according to Christ's promise it will exist until the end of the world (Matt. 16:18). Since this is so, the right thing to do would be for those who have fallen away to **return** to it. The Church is not some human organization; it is the Body of Christ! If the discussion was simply about cooperation among people on the practical, earthly level, it would be natural for people to join together by mutual agreement. But since we are talking about uniting with the Church, all that is purely human must be set aside. What is necessary is to come back to Christ fully, to accept His teachings in their fullness, without any amendments or modernizations. It is necessary to rehabilitate that structure of the Church which was set up by Christ's Apostles.

Christ cannot have several "bodies"; likewise, there cannot be several parallel true Churches, because the Church is the Body of Christ, which, like every living organism, is indivisible. Therefore, there have never been, and by rights there cannot be, divisions of the Church. There were, and still are, **heresies and schisms**, which have fallen away from the Church. For this reason the ancient canons (rules) of the Church strictly forbid any kind of communion in prayer with those who have fallen away, i.e., with heretics, until they return to the Church by repentance.

Every man can find the salvation intended for him only in Orthodoxy, in the true Body of Christ. One who truly loves God will surely desire to be united with Him. In this love lies the essence of Christianity! Those who sincerely love Christ should be drawn by this love into the true Church!

If certain present-day "wise men" assert, that there are various paths leading to God, just as various trails lead to the summit of a mountain, it must be kept in mind that He Who offered Himself as the sole Way, Truth and Life is the Son of God, the God-Man. Those who teach anything else, or who lead men by other paths, are *"thieves and robbers"* (John 10:8).

Conclusion

THE REASON FOR OUR INTERNAL DISHARMONY, for all the difficulties and all the calamities in the world, is sin. Christ revealed to man the path to salvation from sins. We are called to salvation not in isolation, as if on little canoes scattered over a stormy sea, but rather in the great "ship" of the Church, captained by Christ.

There is one God, glorified in the Trinity, and His truth is one. There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, and His Church is one. There is one Communion, and there are no other "paths" or "churches" but the one, authentic, Orthodox Church, which has preserved and cultivated that which she received and continues to receive from Christ her Head and the Holy Spirit, Who lives and acts in her.

In our times the Church is not very great in numbers. Still, the word of God applies to her: *"Fear not, little flock. I have overcome the world"* (Luke 12:32; John 16:33). He says, moreover: *"Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"* (Rev. 3:8-10).

What is most important in our journey through this temporal life is to hold fast to the Truth, the Way and the Life - our Lord Jesus Christ, Who ever abides in His Church.

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