

NUMBERS MEAN NOTHING: RETREAT TO THE CATACOMBS!!

by

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Signs are continually given to us that the antichrist draws nearer and nearer. People are concerned as perhaps is understandable. Yet, looked at another way, we should gladly accept and revel in the persecution and struggle that is at our doorstep. Christians are at their best when confronted with the worst.

Examples in Church history are many, including the martyred Apostles and early Christians St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp of Smyrna as well as St. Lawrence, just to name a few. The stalwart witness of the saints through Christian history against the treachery of deviants from the True Orthodox Christian Faith testifies forcefully to the kind of Christian all of us should emulate. The millions of Orthodox Christians in the former Soviet Union, who were martyred by Satan's emissaries, Stalin and the Communist leadership, stand as shining examples of the True Faith and for the proposition that the gates of hell cannot prevail against Her. Not the least of these was the martyrdom of Tsar Nicholas the II and his family..

The true believers in the godless Soviet Union retreated to the catacombs where they retained their spiritual continuity for most of the twentieth century. Since the so-called breakup of the Soviet Union, some of these catacomb Christians have surfaced. However, it can be persuasively argued that this surfacing might have been premature because there appears to be a strong 'resovietisation' going on. Perhaps it is time to reconsider matters and return to the catacombs in Russia and for the first time retreat to them in the contemporary United States and Europe.

Martyrs' blood flows in every century and will do so in all. The supply of saints will never dry up because Christ promised He would always be with us:

... and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. [St. Matthew 28:20]

Perhaps there won't be as many of them, particularly in the United States Diaspora through these current times as the chief heresy of all time, ecumenism, rampages on bringing with it the comforting spiritual delusion that nothing is absolutely true, all is relative, so how can anyone hold the illogical position that he possesses the whole spiritual truth? Remember though, our Faith does not come from logic but God's revelation. Logic is not inconsistent with God's revelation; in fact, reason and logic support it.

Numbers Don't Really Matter -

If we *really* believe, we stand together, or individually, as St. Maximos the Confessor and St. Mark of Ephesus did, and proclaim the truth of Christ to all. Christ's position is that numbers are basically irrelevant:

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. [St. Matthew 18:20]

Dr. Alexandre Kalomiros, one of the Church's greatest lay theologians, admirably expressed the Christian truth about numbers and the narrowness of the gate to Christ's Church:

As for how many true Christians there will be, it does not matter, even if they can be counted on *one* (emphasis supplied) hand. They will be the bearers of the Tradition, which they will not simply have learned, but have lived, having had its living experience. Christians live in the Tradition as in an element, as fish live in water.

Let all who truly seek God stop talking about the union of the 'churches'. The Church does not admit of union because she was *never broken*. Men leave her, even if they retain many of her *external* marks. Let all who love God return to the Church and humble themselves that they may enter, because her gate is *narrow and one must bend very low in order to pass through* (all emphases supplied in this paragraph).¹

St. Gregory the Theologian in his Homily 33, Against the Arians, sums up well on the numbers issue [or more to the point - non issue):

And where are those who reproach us for our poverty and are proud of their wealth? They consider great numbers of people to be a sign of the Church, and despise the small flock. They measure the Divinity and they weigh people. They place a high value on grains of sand (that is, the masses) and belittle the luminaries. They gather into their treasure-house simple stones, and disdain pearls.²

Large numbers of parishioners (or attendees) may in fact be signs that Christ's true Church is *not* present! Think about the mega-churches growing like topsy throughout the U.S.A. The largest church in America has over 30,000 members. Its pastor feeds them prosperity food instead of the suffering orthodoxy of Christ's Church. They may feel better when they leave the service, but they are deeply in spiritual delusion.

Christ didn't come to support American capitalism or any other so-called economic theory. He came to save "His own," not ones who choose not to walk with Him:

But Christ did not become man in order to save this world which abides in its wickedness. Rather, He came to save *His own* (emphasis

supplied) from the world, to pull them away from the ranks of the evil one, to unite them to Himself and to deify them by grace, and with them to save the entire groaning creation. The world is walking the way of death. It is following the ruler of this world, the enemy of God. *I do not pray for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me [St. John 9:17].*³

Retreating to the Catacombs -

We need to return to the catacombs in our daily lives. All we need to do is look around and see what is happening to our beloved True Christianity. It is being actively persecuted both in the United States, United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and throughout the world, including the Holy Land. Under the guise of tolerance for others' views, Christianity is persecuted.

On the home front, five years after the deadly terrorism of 9/11, we are less free. We seem incapable of making decisions which will benefit and save our people but more concerned about minorities' positions. Our liberty is at stake, not just secularly in this world but our freedom to express ourselves, previously thought to be protected by our Constitution's Bill of Rights, about what is not of this world, our Faith, is in jeopardy.

We are attacked on many sides. Even well-meaning people lack the guts to 'stand and deliver'. All rights we have fought for and won in the past are in danger from this muddy-headed social engineering, which has at its very root, the greatest heresy the world has ever seen, ecumenism.

In the midst of this ever-increasing persecution by the world, we face a more insidious form of clerical 'terrorism,' a selling out of Orthodoxy to the forces of *this* world. Is your bishop *really* Orthodox? True Orthodox? Or, does he jump on the bandwagon to increase church numbers, modernise services, usually shortening them? Does he participate in ecumenistic joint prayer services and dialogues with the heterodox? Heterodox is now a refined and, of course, socially accepted word to describe a heretic, that way those using it pretend that heresy does not exist when its ugly head is actually in their midst. Is he particularly incensed by the activities of Old Calendarist Orthodox groups that he charges are 'uncanonical'. Does he claim that in order to be Orthodox, jurisdictions have to be in communion with each other and the See of Constantinople? A position not found in the Fathers.

Does he rail against these Old Calendarist groupings and True Orthodox web sites like this one, attacking their Bishops and charging that they are outside the Church? Many times at the same time such fellows are toadying up to ecumenist groups and the heterodox, e.g., the Papacy and Reformation clusterings such as the Anglicans, Lutherans and others. They 'love' these folk but hate their Old Calendarist Orthodox. How utterly modern orthodox, but hardly Christian!

Even in areas which previously were in the Soviet Union the true Church is viciously attacked. The external forces hold the physical church buildings, but they are not the true Church. The external forces' hierarchy is composed of pseudo-bishops, who are to be disobeyed because they preach heresy publicly, particularly in their support for heretical ecumenistic church activities. Those who

refuse to follow such shenanigans are not in schism or heresy. They have a right to wall themselves off from them:

... But as for those persons, on the other hand, who, on account of some heresy condemned by holy Councils, or Fathers, withdrawing themselves from communion with their president, who, that is to say, is preaching the heresy publicly, and teaching it barehead in church, such persons not only are not subject to any canonical penalty on account of their having walled themselves off from any and all communion with the one called a Bishop before any conciliar or synodal verdict has been rendered, but, on the contrary, they shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the honour which befits them among Orthodox Christians. For they have defied, not Bishops, but *pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers*; and they have not sundered the union of the Church with any schism, but, on the contrary, have been *sedulous to rescue the Church from schisms and divisions*. (emphases supplied)

[Canon XV, of the First-And-Second Council, see *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, pp. 470-471.]

How do we wall ourselves off from this world, which is of the devil, not the Lord?

We can start by putting up a “Chinese wall” between ourselves and this world as much as we can. We live and work in this world, but true Christianity requires we live our lives according to what is *not* of this world. In areas of the world where we are under attack, we can retreat to the catacombs, meaning perhaps as a start we use our houses as Churches for prayer and the Divine Liturgy as was done in the Church’s early days. Some Non Orthodox, who nevertheless might be considered “near” to True Orthodoxy, could wall themselves in this way as they ponder whether they will accept the Lord’s invitation to accept Him as their sole Saviour and His way as their sole route to salvation.

Other ‘neo-Christians,’ I will call them for lack of a better word, who are not Orthodox and feel that they are not ready for conversion to the True Orthodox Faith, but still hold spiritual views similar to the true Church in areas such as abortion, female ‘ordination,’ sexual perversion of clerics, practising homosexuals in the Church, same sex ‘marriages’/ceremonies, could, nonetheless, benefit from retreating to their own kind of catacombs. They should separate themselves from the ungodly activities going on, including not financially supporting such decadent outfits.

If some are within an environment where heresy is being preached and the Bishop refuses to do anything about it, retreat to *your* catacombs. This might entail joining a true Orthodox local Church; or, if one is not available in your area, having services in your houses as your catacombs. You can have prayers at home whilst you contact a spiritually-sound local True Orthodox Church, which might be able to provide a priest if only on a periodic basis. In any case, if you were unable to

obtain the periodic services of a True Orthodox Church priest, you would be spiritually better off holding whatever services you are canonically able to do within your own catacombs True Orthodox grouping than to stay within the heresy you are combating.

We pray for those preaching heresy to repent. The Lord offers all of us an opportunity to change. Look at the Apostle Paul, previously a persecutor of the Church. He became Christ's greatest wandering missionary. Christ offers unbelievers, including pseudo-bishops and other such misguided folk who have strayed from the Royal Path and are leading their flocks away from True Christianity, another bite of the apple. All we have to do is choose the Divine Path and take spiritual action to get on, continue and not deviate from it.

Our Lord is crystal clear that His way is the sole route to salvation:

*Jesus saith to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: **no man** cometh unto the Father, **but by Me** (emphases supplied). [St. John 14:6]*

It couldn't be any clearer than that!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Alexandre Kalomiros, *Against False Union* (tr. From the Greek by George Gabriel; Prologue by Photios Kontoglou), St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, Washington, (Second Edition), 1978, (Revised Appendix), 2000, p. 22.

² Cited in Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (translated from the Russian and edited by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose), (Second Edition), Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1994, pp. 236-237.

³ Kalomiros, *op.cit.*, p. 7.