

The Pressing Actuality of the Message of the Heads of the Local Orthodox Churches at the Beginning of the Third Christian Millennium

Although it was drafted and published around the turn of the century, from the 20th to the 21st century, this Message¹ is extremely relevant, and it recently shows more and more its pressing topicality. This is because this Pan-Orthodox document has been well thought out and drafted, highlighting the foundations of Pan-Orthodox cooperation, which under no circumstances lose their validity and relevance. Therefore, I believe that the reaffirmation of the content of this document can help to overcome the impasses and challenges, with which the Pleroma of Orthodoxy is faced today. Specifically, it is about the management of the relations between the Local Orthodox Churches, which should be based on the ethos of Orthodoxy, which does not change according to the circumstances, but it always maintains its freshness and virtualities.

This Pastoral Message of the Heads of the Local Orthodox Churches has a pressing topicality, considering the general situation of humanity today, faced with all kinds of suffering and trials, and, not least, with wars, as a result of which the Orthodox from the Middle East faithful greatly suffer, but also following the war launched against Ukraine by Russia. The Orthodox on both sides are terribly suffering, and the pastors of the Church have a pastoral responsibility both towards one and the other.

This Message was possible to be elaborated and disseminated by virtue of the exercise of synodality or conciliarity, expressed in those years in the form of Pan-Orthodox Synaxes. The complication of international relations

¹ See: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, nr. 261, 15th of January 2001

made this fact also influence inter-Orthodox relations. Some wonder, with good reason: what is the solution to get out of a complicated and tense context on an international level, and implicitly, on a pan-Orthodox level?

From a canonical dogmatic point of view, the solution to overcoming the state of tension in the human-ecclesial plane is given by conciliarity or synodality, as a principle of manifestation of Church life.

The message of the Heads of the Local Orthodox Churches is based on some theological-dogmatic and canonical foundations, which must be taken into account by those who are at the head of the speaking flock, which they shepherd on the path of salvation.

First of all, we must start from the fact that God's love is all-encompassing and it was revealed and manifested with power in Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, and it is active and alive in the mystical body of Christ – the Church. This love of Christ must not leave people indifferent and above all the pastors of the Church (Jn 3, 16; I Tim 2, 4).

Secondly, in the Mysteries of the Church, and above all, in the Holy Eucharist, we are mysteriously included, as the Body of Christ, through His Eucharistic Body, by partaking with the Crucified and Risen Christ: "Receive the Body of Christ; taste the fountain of immortality", the Church sings during Communion. Communion in the eucharistic Christ makes his mystical Body a community and communion reconciled with God and with all people; more, with the whole creation. In this ecclesial community and communion, all tensions and misunderstandings between people are overcome.

Thirdly, the ethos of the one and undivided Church of the first Christian millennium was an existing reality, despite some local differences, which, however, did not alter the spirit of communion and unity of the members of the Ecclesial Body. This communion and ecclesial unity were no longer possible in the second Christian millennium, because theological, historical, cultural causes, etc., altered it, leading to the separation of the Christians of the West from those of the East. Overcoming the divisions between Christians is only possible through the "dialogue of truth and love". The model of life in communion and unity of faith in the first millennium should inspire separated Christians living in the third Christian millennium.

Fourthly, the Local Orthodox Churches are not hermetically sealed and self-sufficient ecclesial structures, but are ecclesial units possessing the fullness of faith and grace in full communion with all other Local Churches. Therefore, the one Church exists in the form of several Local Orthodox Churches. In other words, church independence or autonomy is not absolute and sufficient goods per se but refer precisely to the fact of being able to work fully, without constraints, for the salvation of believers.

Finally, the communication deficiencies between the Local Churches must necessarily be overcome by this actualization or real, living, concrete experience of synodality or conciliarity, on an ecclesial level, without which we cannot speak of the confession of our faith in the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”. Here, we believe, is the key to resolving the differences, and misunderstandings existing today, or, also in this way, the one Church will be able to respond to the challenges of secularization and post-modernity.

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