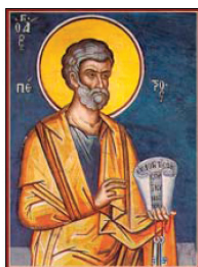




■ On the Occasion of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (29 June)



A Most Timely Question:

Witness to the Ethos of Orthodoxy Or Syncretistic Coexistence?*

*Having your way of life upright among the nations,
that they may, having witnessed your good works, glorify God."*

(I Peter 2:12)

IN our days, we are reexperiencing in our lives and are faced, as Christians, with an *historic challenge*, a social phenomenon, which had been intensely experienced by early Christianity: a *globalized environment*.

Peoples, races, and languages, civilizations, nations, and religions all make up the multiform context in which the pious by now daily move, and they are developing a *dialogue of life*, in practice, with the heterodox and those of other religions and nations.

The ecumenists, who are alienated from the Orthodox, no less than the worldly-minded politicians and intellectuals, attempt in various ways to impose their own *rules*, in order for this unavoidable *dialogue of life* to succeed.

Their endeavor is always made with the prospect of a peaceful coexistence and an unhindered share in the goods of an earthly *chiliastic paradise*; but—and why not?—also with the prospect of a convergence and a *syncretistic synthesis*, whereupon our attitude towards the Truth and our relation to it would ultimately be such that no one would be *bothered*.

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Pious Orthodox Christians, however, “walking in the Spirit,”¹ have, as steady guides in their earthly journey towards the **Eighth Day**, not the shepherds who are turning the Church into a mere religion, but rather the divinized members of the Body of Christ, the God-bearing and light-bearing Apostles, Fathers, and Teachers.

On this point, the Holy Apostle Peter emphatically exhorts us not to forget a fundamental rule, as we find ourselves among our contemporary “nations” of many kinds and names: a **“right way of life.”**²

The Chief Apostle reminds the pious, who live together with unbelievers, the impious, unorthodox, heretics, and the heterodox,

“to have right behavior in their relations with others and a virtuous life,” and **“to be adorned with evangelical manners and Christian virtues.”**³

This Divinely-blessed **“right way of life”**—that is, Christian dignity and a conscientious behavior and conduct on the part of the Faithful—, as a witness to the **ethos of Orthodoxy**, draws the particular attention of those alienated from the Church and, in consequence, impels them to knowledge of the Truth and the true God.

The Holy Apostle Peter’s exhortation towards a “right way of life” clearly echoes the words of our Savior:

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven.”⁴

This fundamental truth concerning the spiritual and missionary power of a **“right way of life”** was proclaimed by St. John Chrysostomos with particular emphasis:

“No one would be an idolator if we were true Christians: if we kept Christ’s commandments when we are wronged and our property is stolen; if we blessed when we are abused; if we did good when we suffer hardships. No one would be such a brute, that he would not hasten to piety if we kept to this approach.”⁵

* * *

The luminary of Athos, St. Nicodemus, relates the following wondrous, charming, and edifying “story recounted by many

trustworthy people,” and which is a perfect commentary on the aforementioned teaching of the Apostle:

There were two neighboring villages in Asia Minor, one of which was entirely made up of Turks without Christians, while the other was entirely made up of Christians.

Now, these Turks were very brutal and inhuman, and greatly tyrannized the Christians. By Divine wrath, a deadly illness broke out in the Turkish village alone. Almost everyone, young and old, men and women alike, was bedridden.

A most virtuous and God-fearing Christian, then, who was the eldest among them, took compassion on the Turks upon seeing them in such a miserable state. Thus, gathering together all of the Christians, he advised them all to forget the Turkish acts of tyranny against them and to agree to visit them in their illness, thereby keeping the Lord's commandment, which says: "Love your enemies and do good unto them." Advising them in this way, he persuaded them. They all went to the village and, entering the Turks' homes, took care of them and were in attendance on them until they recovered.

Then the Turks, seeing such great kindness and forgiveness on the part of the Christians, marveled that they had such a Faith and such a God that taught them not to return evil for evil. Wherefore, having assembled and discussed the matter, all in common accord were baptized and became Christians.

• Behold how the Christians' "right way of life" convinced an entire village to believe in Christ and, subsequently, to glorify Him."⁶



(*) Source: Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 332 (May-June 2006), pp. 289-290.

1. I St. Peter 2:11.

2. I St. Peter 2:12.

3. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *Commentary on I St. Peter 2:12*.

4. St. Matthew 5:16.

5. St. John Chrysostomos, *First Homily on I St. Timothy*, § 3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXII, col. 551

6. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *Commentary on the Seven General Epistles*, note 2 (Venice: 1806), pp. 99-100.