



Bishop Youssef

COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES



The Unity of Heart that is of Love, May it take Root in Us

A dangerous and strange teaching has begun to circulate in the Orthodox Church, and it can be summarized as follows:

- The claim that there is a difference between unity of doctrine (dogma) and unity of love.
- That achieving unity of doctrine (dogma) will take a long period of time, and may potentially never be reached; thus, we should practice unity of love as we pray in the Divine Liturgy “Unity of the heart that is of Love, may it take root in us”.
- That the Holy Bible calls for unity of love for ‘diversity’ (1 Corinthians 12) and unity of submission.
- That the unity of ‘diversity’ is in fact unity of ‘diverse doctrine’.
- That unity cannot occur if we desire to diminish that doctrinal discrepancies first; however, let us practice *love* which will in turn diminish these doctrinal discrepancies and barriers.
- That we can practice unity, while the Orthodox are Orthodox, the Protestant are Protestant and the Catholic are Catholic.
- That anyone, irrespective of his/her denomination, may unite with God and in God we shall all be united.
- That the three denominations “Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant” are an icon of the Holy Trinity, and as the Holy Trinity is one in essence, so are the three denominations one in essence – “A true form of unity, not an apparent one for the sake of photographs and television” and that we cannot present our faith in the Holy Trinity nor can we understand it unless we believe that the three denominations are truly united through the unity of love.
- That those who believe in the unity of ‘diversity’ are from God and those who do not believe in the unity of ‘diverse doctrine’ are fanatics, blind and are not from God but from the *devil*.
- This summarizes the new erroneous teaching.

Is this not in fact typical *non-denominationalism*? The danger of this teaching is that it offers candy coated poison. Extensive discourse about ‘unity’ and ‘abandoning the blind spirit of fanaticism’ is as sweet as honey, but the talk of abandoning sound doctrine is the poison that is easily implanted within.

Didn’t our teacher St. Paul instruct us saying:

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be



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accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-10).

And furthermore, he instructs us:

*“Now I urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.** For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and **by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple**” (Romans 16:17-18).*

Is our teacher St. Paul misinformed for not learning about the unity of love or the unity of ‘diversity’? Let us contemplate upon the teachings of St. Paul the apostle, and affirm the following truths:

- This teaching about the ‘unity of diversity’ will not establish unity but on the contrary, will establish schisms and offenses.
- These individuals do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ
- They are misleading and deceptive
- We must expose them

In order to respond to these novel heresies which have crept into the Church, let us ask the following question:

Firstly, is it possible to pursue spiritual life without religious doctrine?

This new heresy claims that every individual from any denomination may unite with God and that we all shall unite together in him. Is it possible to unite with God and have a spiritual life while with deviant doctrine, not knowing the “truth shall make you [me] free” (John 8:32)? And here we shall say that sound doctrine ensures the soundness of one’s spiritual life, and if one’s doctrine is erroneous, so shall his spiritual life be.

St. Paul teaches us:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward” (1 Corinthians 3:10-14).

Thus, Christianity is based on this foundation which is the one faith in Christ “which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us Love equates to keeping his commandments:



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“If you love Me, keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’...If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love...You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 14:15,21,23; John 15:10,14).

Since the *commandments* encompass sound doctrine, no true Love towards God or neighbor can be found through erroneous doctrine.

St. John teaches us:

“But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (1 John 2:5; 2 John 1:6).

We can even say that it is *impossible* to pursue an upright spiritual life in the absence of a foundation of upright faith and sound doctrine. It is impossible to have ‘the unity of heart that is of love’ without fulfilling the commandments of God which encompass those of faith and doctrine.

Secondly, what is the meaning of “The unity of heart that is of love, may it take root in us”?

The Lord commanded us to love everybody including our enemies, Christians, non-Christians, atheists, Jehovah witnesses, Mormons, Jews and Buddhists i.e. to love everybody without discrimination. Are we in real profound unity with those people? Why do we apply the unity of love on the three Christian denominations only? Don’t we love others?

Someone may answer saying, because these denominations have the same basic Christian principles like for example the divinity of Jesus Christ and the dogma of crucifixion and resurrection. Now I ask, what about the other dogmas like the church Sacraments and the role of praxis in salvation...etc. Are these dogmas important and necessary or they can be ignored? Are taking communion (John 6), Baptism (John 3, Romans 6) and spiritual struggle (James 2) necessary for salvation or not?

We pray in the divine liturgy saying, *“Make us all worthy, O our Master, to partake of Your Holies, unto the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits that we may become one body and one spirit, and may have a share and inheritance with all the saints”*



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Therefore, unity is achieved through partaking of the one body of Jesus Christ and our fellowship in Him, *“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? **For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread**”* (1 Corinthians 10: 16-17). How can we talk about true profound unity with those who do not believe in the Sacrament of the Eucharist?

Then what is love? If I see my brethren who I really love ill with an illness that would lead him to death, is it out of love to leave him as he is or to seek his treatment? If I see my brethren whom I really love taking a wrong path that takes him away from his purpose, salvation and eternity, is it love to leave him taking that wrong path or to seek guiding him to the right path? Didn't the Holy Bible warn us saying, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Proverbs 16:25)? Is it love to see my brethren taking this path, that seems right in his eyes and accept him as he is without guiding him to the way of life?

O poor love! Many people are talking on your behalf deceiving the simple leading them to perish!

Therefore, we can say that when we talk about love, we are then talking about real profound love to all people whether Christians or non-Christians *“For God so loved the world”* (John 3:16). Because we really and profoundly love them, we must then guide them to the path of the right faith and orthodox dogma. When we talk about real profound unity, we are then talking about the unity of faith, dogma and love in the same time.

Thirdly, what is the unity in diversity that St. Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 12?

In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul does not talk about the diversity of dogmas but the diversity of gifts, ministries and activities. In the first verse he says, *“Now concerning the spiritual gifts”* and in verses 4-6 he says, *“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all”*. But he talks about dogma, he says in verse 13, *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit”*.

Also, in Ephesians 4 where he talked about gifts in verse 11, he emphasized the importance of the one faith saying, *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Ephesians 4:3-6).

And he said in verses 12 and 13 that God granted gifts *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith”*.



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This means that the diverse talents were granted to the church that we may all come to the one faith and to the unity of faith. How can we then proclaim real profound unity without acquiring the unity of faith?

It is a deception to say that St. Paul talked about the unity of the diversity of dogma and to liken the different dogmas with the various strings in the one harp and to confuse the diversity of talents with the difference in dogmas.

Diversity in the Holy Trinity is a diversity in the hypostatic attributes. The Father begets the Son and sends the Holy Spirit, the Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. There is also a diversity in acts. For example, the Father has put the times and seasons in His own authority, and all judgement was given to the Son as the Father judges no one. Therefore, it is a huge mistake to liken the three denominations, who have essential differences in dogmas related to the Holy Trinity, to the Holy Trinity.

Fourthly, how to become a new creation in Jesus Christ?

A father was asked if the Protestant would enter heavens? He answered without hesitation saying, “The Protestants will not enter heavens” then he continued saying, “nor the Catholics” and after a moment of silence he added “nor orthodox but whoever is a new creation in Jesus Christ will enter heavens”. This answer was explained that whoever acquires this new creation, regardless of his denomination, will inherit the heavenly kingdom.

Here we ask how to become a new creation in Jesus Christ?

St. Paul says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). How can we then be in Christ?

- (1) We must believe in Him, “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36). Believing in Jesus Christ is an essential prerequisite to become this **new creation** in Him. Believing here means to accept Christ as a redeemer. It also means the sound dogma and trusting the Lord.
- (2) The life of repentance and purity followed by confessing sins to get forgiveness is a must, “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). How can we unite with Jesus Christ, be in Him and become a **new creation** while we are sinners? Sins must be forgiven through repentance and confession in order for unity to occur, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all*



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- unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Therefore, for forgiveness to be completed, we must repent sin and confess it before God in the presence of His stewards, the priests, who got the authority to forgive sins on earth, *“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23).*
- (3) Baptism through which we get purified from our sins and we get a second birth from the Holy Spirit. Thus, we become sanctified, unite with Jesus Christ and become a **new creation**, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).* Also, St. Paul clarifies the work of baptism in purification saying, *“that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).* St. Paul experienced the effectiveness of baptism in purification and washing sins away when he was baptized, and Ananias said to him, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).* This is also emphasized by St. Peter when he said about baptism, *“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).*
- (4) The ointment of the Holy Spirit renews man and makes him a **new creation**, a temple of God, *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).* We get this ointment by Chrismation (1 John 2:20-27), putting hands (Acts 8:17) and the holy breath (John 20:22) in the holy sacrament of Myron.
- (5) Partaking in the holy communion like what Jesus Christ said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:53-58).* There is no steadfastness in Jesus Christ without taking Communion and there is no a **new creation** without taking Communion.
- (6) Being conducted by the Holy Spirit as a **new creation** in Jesus Christ, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).* Also, *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led*



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by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:13-14). He also emphasises the importance of walking in the Holy Spirit saying, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16,24-25).

It is clear in all this that sound dogma, faith, practice of church Sacraments and spiritual conduct and struggle are prerequisites to become a new creation inheriting the heavenly kingdom. How can the one who does not believe in all these things become a new creation?

Fifthly, who are the sons of God and the sons of the devil?

Do we ask, after all this, who is the son of God and who is the son of the devil? Jesus Christ says, “*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it*” (John 8:44). Therefore, whoever does not stand in the truth, teaches a lie and deceives people is the son of the devil.

Now, you must choose either to walk in truth, be steadfast in Him and gives testimony about Him, therefore become a new creation and a son of God, or to follow lies, believe in delusions and live in deception, thus becoming a son of Satan.

Our Holy God, we supplicate You to open the eyes of our hearts and to enlighten our minds in order for us to know the truth and therefore be freed and become Your sons, new creation steadfast in You forever, Amen.