

"WE ALL WORSHIP THE SAME GOD"

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

This article was written some years ago for the benefit of people who belonged to various jurisdictions of "World Orthodoxy," whose bishops and clergy were active participants in Ecumenism and who were teaching their adherents that "we all worship the same God." With some slight editorial modifications, here is the text:

In discussing this issue with friends and acquaintances, the following "parable" might be useful in clarifying our thoughts.

There is, indeed, only one true God, as the Holy Scriptures and our Holy Orthodox Faith affirm, *but not all men worship Him*; nor is it simply a matter of different peoples calling Him by various names, as some suppose. In various passages of the Old and New Testaments, He has described Himself to us, as far as it is possible for us to comprehend; these descriptions exclude many of the attributes which, for example, Hindus and others ascribe to Him. In the holy Prophets of Israel, God has many witnesses who foretold His incarnation and His sojourn among us. He has become man for us in time and space, and given us teachings about His Person and His relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit (hence, we know that He is one God in Trinity). So, as we said, we know that there is only one true God and that He has certain identifiable attributes.

Likewise, there is only one Father Nektas Palassis in the whole universe. He is unique, since, presumably, only he has his unique DNA and other unique characteristics. Now — paraphrasing Father Michael Azkoul's example* — suppose you wanted to meet Father Nektas and you asked me to describe him to you. If I were to tell you that he is seven feet tall, weighs 300 pounds, has a red beard, green eyes, and speaks only Swahili with a French accent, and lives in Lompoc, California, would you ever be able to locate him and make his acquaintance — if you accepted my description of him as true?***

In like manner, if you accepted a wrong description of God as being true, would you be able to find and acknowledge Him? For

* See the published text of Father Michael Azkoul's talk, "The Western God," given at the Seattle Conference of 1980.

** Just for the record, Father Nektas is *not* seven feet tall, does not weigh 300 lbs., neither does he have a red beard or green eyes, nor does he speak Swahili [with or without a French accent], nor does he live in Lompoc, CA.

example, if someone were to tell you that God highly esteems men who are suicide bombers who kill innocent men, women and children; or that He approves of the "honor killing" of women; or that He reincarnates people as cats, dogs, or fish; or that He is a Tibetan monk and He teaches that nothing has any meaning; or that He is the Great Pumpkin Who rises into the sky from the Sacred Pumpkin Patch on Halloween night — would you ever be able to find the *real* God? — if you believed any of these false descriptions of Him?

In Church terminology, these false descriptions are called "heresies."

Further, it is important to know that, in the teachings of its Saints, the Orthodox Church — unlike some denominations or sects — does not condone the extermination, persecution, or condemnation to death of individuals who disagree with the Church's teachings. For example, St. John Chrysostom, one of the Church's foremost preachers, teaches us the following:

I do not persecute the heretic bodily, but I wage war against him with words — and not even against the heretic, but only against his heresy: I do not disdain the man; it is the error I hate, and I seek to pull him out of it....I am accustomed to being persecuted, not to persecute others....Thus did Christ triumph; He did not crucify, but rather it was He that was crucified. He did not smite others, but was Himself smitten. [PG 50, 701]*

* See also my earlier articles, *God Bless Lactantius*, parts one and two.