

ECUMENISM

The Holy Monastery of the Paraklete

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Introduction

The Orthodox Church is, by its very nature, catholic and obviously ecumenical (universal). It welcomes with open arms all peoples, of all races and all times, and invites them all to come. Christ, who is the head, addresses the world diachronically: “Come to Me all of you” while at the same time sending out His apostles to teach the Gospel of salvation “to all nations.”

This component and inherent feature of the Church, ecumenicity or universality, is today being contested by two movements which express the spirit of the age: Ecumenism and Globalism.

Globalism is promoted by powerful socio-political forces and projects the model of a single united humanity, while Ecumenism is active in the religious sector, attempting to realize the vision of a united Christianity and aiming ultimately at one universal religion, a “pan-religion.”

In this paper, we will attempt to provide an outline of the Ecumenical movement, of which the Orthodox Church is a participant, since, for most of the Church its nature and work remains unknown and certain developments within ecumenical circles have raised fears and provoked concerns.

It may sound strange, but it is a fact that Ecumenism today is threatening the ‘ecumenical nature’ of our Church, as it falls all the more into compromising and syncretistic tactics which contradict the basic principles of our Orthodox faith. We must not forget, *correct faith is the first and foremost prerequisite for the salvation of mankind*, according to the divinely-inspired patristic declaration: “*Whoever wishes to be saved is first of all obliged to keep the catholic [entire] faith; if he does not keep this faith safe and unblemished, without hesitation, he will be eternally lost*” (*The Symbol of Faith of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria*).

Thus, if the salvific message of Orthodoxy is obscured and lost among the alluring messages of the heterodox and non-Christian religions, for the sake of a utopian, ecumenistic vision, then the hope of the world will also have been lost.

The Holy Monastery of the *Paraklete*

ECUMENISM

Ecumenism is a movement which declares that it has as its purpose the unity of the divided Christian world (Orthodox, Papists, Protestants and others). The idea of unity stirs every sensitive Christian soul and corresponds to its innermost longing. This idea is also appropriated by Ecumenism. However, Ecumenism's unifying vision, a vision above all spiritual, is based mainly upon human endeavors and not on the action of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can, upon encountering human repentance and humility, make this vision a reality.

Contemporary Ecumenism

The roots of contemporary ecumenism are found in nineteenth century Protestantism. At that time some Christian confessions, faced with an exodus of their members due to an increase in religious indifference and organized anti-religious movements, were compelled to rally together and co-operate.

Their unifying activity took on an organized form as the Ecumenical Movement in the twentieth century, and specifically in 1948, with the establishment in Amsterdam of the World Council of Churches, which has its headquarters in Geneva.

It is important to note that the World Council of Churches (WCC) would never have been able to assume an ecumenical character, but would have remained merely an inter-protestant affair, had not been for the participation of certain local Orthodox Churches. The Roman Catholics, at first, refused to participate. Later, however, without becoming an organic member of the WCC, they also entered the Ecumenical Movement. With the relative decree at the Second Vatican Council (1964) they inaugurated their own particular version of ecumenism which aims at the union of all Christians under the authority of the pope.

Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement

It must be acknowledged that the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople provided an important boost to the creation of the Ecumenical Movement. This was the case especially with the Proclamation of 1920 which, as it turned out, became the basis and "Great Charter" of Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement.

This Proclamation was quite unprecedented in the history of the Church since, for the first time, an official Orthodox text characterized all heterodox communities of the West as 'Churches', as "being a part of the household of Christ and *'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ'*" (Eph. 3:6). In this way it subverted and overthrew Orthodox ecclesiology. So as to avoid referring to earlier periods, it suffices to remember that only a few years earlier (in 1895), in one its encyclicals, the same Patriarchate placed Papism *outside the Church* because it introduced *heretical teachings and innovations*. Thus, it likewise called upon Western Christians to return to the One Church, that is, to Orthodoxy.

The Proclamation of 1920, having as its prototype the international 'League of Nations,' proposed the creation of *an association and fellowship between the churches* with the primary aims being (a) a re-examination of dogmatic differences with a mollifying character, (b) the

acceptance of a uniform calendar (the partial application of which brought about, unfortunately, an inter-Orthodox calendar division), and (c) the convocation of pan-Christian conferences.

Except for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, nearly all of the Orthodox Churches gradually asked to be accepted, and eventually *were* accepted, as members of the W.C.C. Some, however, were later compelled to retreat and to withdraw since, on the one hand, they observed with disappointment the Ecumenical Movement's degeneration, and, on the other, they were pressured by intense anti-ecumenical reactions of their flock. One could very well ask: "How is it possible for Orthodoxy to be a 'member' of 'something,' at the same time that she is herself the 'whole', the Body of Christ, and calls all to become His members?"

The presence, in any case, of Orthodox Churches at W.C.C. gatherings was, due to the way in which they were assembled and functioned, was always tenuous, ineffective, and decorative. The decisions of the W.C.C. were molded exclusively by the overwhelming majority of the Protestant vote. Of course, until 1961, at the General Assemblies the Orthodox submitted separate statements – some of which constitute historic confessions of faith – as representatives of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

With regard to the ecumenistic overtures of Vatican II, the Orthodox response was positive, with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras as chief spokesman. The Patriarch met Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem (1964), carried out together with him the mutual lifting of the anathemas from the Schism of 1054, and encouraged the "dialogue of love," and thus promoting the aims of the Second Vatican Council.

The Theoretical "Overtures" of Ecumenism

Ecumenism, in order to realize its aims, is obliged to reconsider or even overlook certain basic principles of Orthodoxy. It promotes the idea of an 'Extended' or 'Broad Church', according to which the Church is one and consists of Christians of every Confession from the moment in which they were baptized. In this way, all Christian Confessions are amongst themselves 'Sister Churches.'

Within this same spirit is found the idea of the 'Universal visible Church'. That is, a Church which exists 'invisibly' and consists of all Christians, which, through the various mutual union efforts, will appear in its visible dimension.

These views were shaped and influenced by the protestant "branch theory", according to which the Church is a 'tree' with its 'branches' being all the Christian confessions, each one of which holds only a part of the truth.

We should also add the theory of 'the two lungs' which was developed between Orthodox ecumenists and Papists. According to this theory, Orthodoxy and Papism are the two lungs with which the Church breathes. For the Church to start breathing again properly, the two lungs must synchronize their breathing.

Finally, among the methods which Ecumenism uses for the rapprochement of Christians, there is included 'dogmatic minimalism'. This is an attempt to reduce the dogmas down to the most necessary, the bare minimum, in order to leap over the differences between the confessions. The result, however, is to overlook the dogmas, to downgrade and minimize their importance. "Let the Christians unite," they say, "and the theologians will discuss the dogmas later"! With the method of dogmatic minimalism it may

indeed be quite easy for Christians to unite. Yet, can such 'Christians' be Orthodox, that is, truly Christians?

The Orthodox Understanding of the Church

According to Orthodox ecclesiology, Church and Orthodoxy are one and the same. The Church is undoubtedly Orthodox, and Orthodoxy is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Body of Christ. Because Christ is one, the Church is therefore also one. That is why division *in* the Church is inconceivable. There can be only a separation *from* the Church. That is, at specific historical moments, the heretics and the schismatics cut themselves off from the Church and thus cease being members of the Church.

The Church possesses the fullness of the truth, not merely an abstract truth, but a way of life which saves man from death and makes him "God by grace". On the contrary, a heresy is a whole or partial rejection of the truth, a tearing into pieces of truth, which then takes upon itself the character and pathology of an ideology. It separates man from the way of being which God imparted to His Church, and it kills him spiritually.

Furthermore, the dogmas which encapsulate the transcendental truths of our faith are not abstract ideas and intellectual ideas originating in the mind, nor, much more, are they a result of medieval obscurantism or theological scholasticism. They express, rather, the experience and life of the Church. Hence, when there exists a difference in dogma, there likewise definitely exists a difference in the way of life. Whoever, then, undervalues the *akrivia* (exactitude) of faith cannot live the fullness of life in Christ.

The Christian must accept all that Christ has revealed. Not a 'minimum', but the whole. For, in the entirety and wholeness of the faith are preserved the catholicity and the orthodoxy of the Church.

This explains the struggles unto blood of the Holy Fathers to safeguard the faith of the Church, as well as their concern for the phrasing - under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit - of the 'terms' of the Oecumenical Councils. These 'terms' are nothing other than the 'termination points,'¹ the borders of truth, so that the faithful can discern the Church, as Orthodox, from heresy.

The heterodox, by rejecting the fullness of the truth, separated themselves from the Church. This, then, is why they are heretics. They therefore lack the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, and their 'Mysteries' are invalid. Consequently, the baptism they perform cannot admit them into the Church of Christ.

The 68th Canon of the Holy Apostles states: (Free Translation) "Those who have been baptized or ordained by heretics cannot be either faithful Christians or clergymen." Saint Nicodemus the Athonite adds: "The baptism of all the heretics is impious and blasphemous and has no communion whatsoever with that of the Orthodox."

What, however, do the Orthodox ecumenists tell us?

One Orthodox hierarch has proclaimed that "the Holy Spirit is at work in every Christian baptism" and the rebaptism by Orthodox of baptized heterodox Christians is

¹ The noun *term* comes from the Middle English *terme*, boundary, end, from Old French, from Latin *terminus*, and likewise akin to Greek *termōn*, boundary, end.

inspired by “narrow-mindedness, fanaticism and bigotry... [It] is an injustice committed against Christian baptism, and eventually a blasphemy against God’s Holy Spirit.”²

Another hierarch, speaking to the heterodox, stated: “We are all members of Christ, [the] one and only body, one and unique ‘new creation,’ given that our common baptism has freed us from death.”³

The ecumenist ecclesiology was likewise officially expressed thus: “We are obliged to be ready to search for and to recognize the presence of the Church outside our own canonical limits, with which we identify the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”⁴

Yet, there are those who are even bolder, who envision the re-founding of the Church through the unification of all Christians. One Orthodox hierarch maintains that “we have need of a new Christianity which will be based entirely upon new perceptions and terms. We cannot teach the type of religion which was handed down us to the next generations.”⁵

The dialogues of the past

Ecumenism, in order to promote its plans, uses a variety of means. The most basic means is that of dialogue.

No one is ignorant of the fact that the Orthodox Church by its very nature is open to dialogue. God is always in dialogue with man, and the Saints of the Church never refused dialectical communication with the world.

The Saints, having self-awareness of their communion with God, try through dialogue to impart the experience of the truth they lived. For the Saints, the truth wasn’t an object of research. They didn’t seek it, they didn’t negotiate it; they merely offered it. If the dialogue didn’t lead the heterodox to the rejection of their mistaken belief and acceptance of orthodox faith, they did not continue it.

Saint Mark of Ephesus dialogued with the Papists at the Council of Ferrara-Florence for two years (1438-1439). When, however, he saw their haughtiness, their intransigence and their persistence in error, he cut off all relations with them, to the point of exhorting the orthodox faithful “to avoid the Papists as one avoids a snake.”

A theological dialogue was also begun between the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II Tranos and the Protestant theologians of Tübingen (1579). When he ascertained that the dialogue was fruitless, he ended it. The Patriarch wrote: “Please release us from these cares. Therefore, going about your own ways, if you like, you may write to us, but no longer concerning dogmas.”

The dialogues of Ecumenism

Contemporary ecumenical dialogues differ radically from the dialogues of the Saints, because they are conducted on the basis of the principles of an *extended Church* and on *dogmatic minimalism*. For this reason they are unorthodox and fruitless. The proof of this is that in the almost 100 years that the talks have been held they have not offered anything of value to the unity of the Christian world. On the contrary, they have succeeded in dividing the Orthodox!

² The journal *The Illuminator*, Summer 1995, Pittsburgh, USA.

³ Magazine “Επίσκεψη”, No. 370, p.9, Geneva 1987

⁴ Magazine “Επίσκεψη”, No. 260, pp. 13-14, Geneva, 1981

⁵ Newspaper Athens “Εστία” 5-10-1967

The main aspects of the pathology of contemporary dialogues are the following:

A. *Lack of orthodox confession.*

In the dialogues certain Orthodox representatives do not express the unshakeable belief of the Orthodox Church, that it is, in fact, the one and only Church of Christ on earth. They, likewise, do not put forward the holy tradition and spiritual experience of Orthodoxy, which differ from the traditions and experiences of western Christianity. Only such a confessing stance would be able to vouchsafe and make productive and fruitful the Orthodox presence at the dialogues.

B. *Lack of sincerity.*

The lack of Orthodox witness, in combination with the demonstrated insincerity of the heterodox, makes the inter-christian dialogue even more difficult and ineffective. On account of this, many times either mutual superficial compromises or equivocal language and terminology are employed, so as to cover up the differences.

If, in the first place, the Roman-Catholics were sincere they should proclaim with frankness in ecumenical circles that which they emphasize to their own faithful – their non-negotiable attachment to the primacy of the pope and his infallibility. This of course would reveal clearly how they envision the unity of Christians: not as a *unity of faith*, but rather as a *subjection* of all under papal supremacy. In addition to this, the finding would be confirmed that the institution of the papacy on the one hand comprises the most tragic distortion of the Gospel and, on the other hand, uses dialogues purely for the sake of its own expansionist policies.

The chief expression of this insincerity of the Papists is found in their maintaining and strengthening of the *Unia*.⁶ This is a perfidious and subversive institution which Papism used and continues to use as a unifying model, despite all the strong objections of the Orthodox and despite the fact that today it (the *Unia*) comprises the primary obstacle to the bilateral talks.

If, on the other hand, the multifarious Protestant groups were honest, they should state outright that they are no longer willing to compromise their fundamental protestant principles and that (in fact) there are other reasons that force them into dialogue. This is, in any case, what is revealed by the deterioration of their ‘churches’ (ordination of women, same-sex marriages, etc)

C. *Over-emphasis on Love.*

Because dishonesty and self-serving motives have poisoned the dialogues, which have been reduced to endless and fruitless theological debates, a turn of events was attempted. The dialogues were now called “dialogues of love”, both for effect, and to side-step the hurdle of dogmatic contentions. “Love comes first,” they emphasize. “Love compels us to unite, even if there are dogmatic differences.”

For this reason, their method in the dialogues of today is for there not to be any discussion of things that *divide*, but only of those things that *unite*, so as to facilitate a false

⁶ The *Unia* is a religious-political scheme which was invented by Papism for the westernization of Christians of the East. It took advantage of the difficult historical circumstances faced by these Christians and constrained them to be subjected to the papal authority. They encouraged them, however, not to change their ecclesiastical customs (clerical dress, liturgical typikon, etc.), so as to be able generate obfuscation and promote the papist propaganda.

sense of unity and shared faith. In the Oecumenical Synods of the past, however, the Fathers always discussed precisely that which divided. The same happens today in any dialogue between two parties with differences: They discuss the issues which separate them – that is, indeed, the whole point of the dialogue – and not those issues that unite.

For us Orthodox, Love and Truth are notions inseparable. A dialogue of love without truth is false and unnatural. Whereas, a dialogue of love “in truth” means: Conversing with the heterodox out of love, to point out their errors and how they can be led to the truth. If I truly love them, I must tell them the truth, however difficult or painful this might be.

D. *The Blunting of Orthodox Criteria.*

Within the pathology of the dialogues there also belongs the deadening of orthodox theological criteria, and this has arisen due to the cultivation of an “ecumenical courtesy”, of personal relationships and friendships amongst heterodox theologians. The faith is no longer considered the truth which saves, but the whole of a series of theoretical truths which allows for compromises.

The orthodox ecumenists claim: “We are merely discussing, we are not changing our faith!” Of course dialogue, as a ‘loving approach’ to the other, is pleasing to God. The ecumenist dialogue, however, as it is carried out today, is not a meeting in truth, but rather a “mutual recognition”. This means that we recognise the heterodox communities as Churches; that we concede that their dogmatic differences comprise “*legitimate expressions*” of the same faith. By doing this, however, we fall into the trap of dogmatic syncretism: we place on an equal footing the truth and delusion; we equate light with darkness.

E. *Joint Prayer.*

With the deadening of their theological criteria, it is quite natural that Orthodox ecumenists would participate, without reticence, in common shows of worship with the heterodox and in joint prayer, which take place regularly at inter-christian meetings. They know that within this common ecumenical spirituality the right psychological climate is created which is necessary for promotion of union efforts.

However, the Holy Canons of the Church strictly forbid us to pray with the heterodox, for the heterodox do not share the Orthodox faith. They believe in a different, distorted Christ. On this account Saint John Damascene calls them unbelievers: “Whoever does not believe according to the tradition of the Catholic [Whole] Church is an unbeliever.”

Praying with the heterodox, then, is forbidden because it professes belief and participation in the faith of the other person praying and it gives the other the false impression that he is not in error or delusion and therefore has no need of turning to the truth.

F. *Intercommunion.*

If the Holy Canons forbid praying together with the heterodox, they even more strongly forbid our participation in the heterodox ‘Sacraments.’ Even on this point, however, we Orthodox have not been consistent.

The Second Vatican Council, within the framework of the ecumenistic “overtures” which it made, proposed intercommunion with the Orthodox: the Papists would be able to commune at Orthodox churches and the Orthodox at papist churches. In this way, both the Papists and the Orthodox Ecumenists believe that the union of Papism and Orthodoxy will gradually happen de facto, despite all of their dogmatic differences.

If, for the Papists, this position is justified from their perception of the Church and the Sacraments (created grace, etc), for us Orthodox it is illogical and unacceptable. Our Church never regarded the holy Eucharist as the means to accomplish unification, but always as its seal and crown.

Moreover, the common Chalice presupposes a common faith. This means, in other words, that if an Orthodox Christian communes in a papist church, he accepts the papist faith.

Cooperation in practical affairs

Another means for the achievement of the aims of Ecumenism is inter-christian cooperation in practical matters. Ecumenists maintain that the various contemporary problems (social, ethical, environmental and others) oblige us to unite.

The Church, certainly, has shown and always shows great sensitivity towards all human problems. However, to work together with the heretics in order to find a solution to these problems poses the following disadvantages:

a) The voice of Orthodoxy, when it is intermixed with other Christian voices, loses its lucidity and is unable to communicate to contemporary man its own unique way of life, which is *theanthropic* (God-man centered) in contrast to the *anthropocentric* (man-centered) way of life of the heterodox.

b) The Church succumbs to the temptation of secularization, using in its social welfare work the same worldly practices of the other confessions, at the expense of its message of salvation. What modern man has most need of, however, is not the improvement of life based on a worldly Christianity, even if this could expunge all social wounds, but rather his liberation from sin and his *theosis* (deification) within the true body of Christ, the Orthodox Church.

c) The Orthodox faithful, seeing their own ecclesiastical shepherds cooperating with the heterodox, is given the mistaken impression that the heterodox also belong to the Church of Christ, despite their dogmatic differences.

Exchange of visits

It has become, over the last few years, ecumenistic policy for the various confessions to exchange official visits, and for these visits to be carried out by high-ranking clerics. They often include laudatory addresses, kisses, exchange of gifts, dining together, praying together, joint announcements, and other gestures of friendliness.

In particular, from 1969 onward, mutual participation of Orthodox and Roman-Catholic in the annual thronal feasts in Rome and Constantinople has become the rule. These gatherings, unfortunately, cannot be characterized as a mere formality or ceremonial gesture. The ecumenists themselves confess that, with these joint celebrations and their reciprocal recognition, a certain kind of ecclesiastical communion is experienced.

Our faithful flock, however, as it watches these visits via the media, experiences an unpleasant surprise. It is scandalized, embittered, dumbfounded and confused, and given to doubt and questioning as it hears its shepherds speak, on the one hand, with a most orthodox and patristic tongue, and on the other hand, watches them move among the heterodox with the demeanor of a diplomat.

The inter-religious evolution of Ecumenism

A deep crisis regarding a sense of direction appeared quite early in the Ecumenical Movement; a crisis which initially forced it to turn to addressing the socio-political problems of the people, abandoning theology as the road to union, and later lead it open itself up to non-Christian religions. In the Ecumenical Movement it is generally accepted that all religions comprise various paths to salvation, along with Christianity, and that the Holy Spirit is active and works in them also. Its slogan is the “new age” axiom: “Believe what you want, only don’t claim exclusivity on the truth and the road to salvation.”

It convenes, therefore, inter-religious meetings, which are not merely scientific conferences as their organizers contend, but assemblies confessing unity with belief in the one God as their foundation. For this reason they often include joint displays of worship in which orthodox, heterodox and non-christians pray together. The Triune God of the Orthodox, the true and self-revealed God is not, however, the same “God” of the heterodox and of the other religions; that is, some imagined “God” who was created and is perpetuated by the religious need of fallen man.

Unfortunately, this inter-religious overture is also shared by Orthodox ecumenist hierarchs, who express opinions like the following:

“The Ecumenical Movement, although it does have a Christian beginning, must now become a movement of all religions...All religions serve God and man. There is only one God...”⁷

“Deep down, a church or a mosque aspires to the same spiritual dignification of man”.⁸

“Islam, in the Koran, talks of Christ, of the Panagia, and we should also talk about Mohammed with the same courage and boldness. We should look at its history and see what it has to offer; (we should look at) its preaching of the one God and the lives of its followers, who are followers of the one God...”⁹

“Roman Catholics and Orthodox, Protestants and Jews, Muslims and Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists, the time has come to bring about, all of us together, the promotion of the spiritual principles of Ecumenism...We are all united in the spirit of the one God.”¹⁰

The main objective of the inter-religious meetings is the creation of **contact points** between religions so that a united resistance to social and international problems might be facilitated. This aim is at times exploited by powerful world leaders, who enlist the help of religions in order to promote their unlawful self-interests. This was clearly manifest after September 11, 2001, when a number of inter-religious assemblies were carried out “on command.”

In this way, however, our Church, instead of being the ‘judgment’ and ‘check’ of lawlessness, is transformed into its supporter and preserver. Our Church is confined within the earthbound outlook of the various religions and is relegated to the level of a worldly religion with a utilitarian and expedient character. At the same time, it is forced to disregard its apostolic-missionary commission since its official representatives accept that all religions comprise “God-willed roads to salvation”!¹¹

⁷ Athens Newspaper “The Orthodox Press”, August-September, 1968

⁸ Magazine “Επίσκεψις” No.494, p.23, Geneva 1993

⁹ Magazine “Πάντατινος” No.1/1991, p. 59, Alexandria, Egypt

¹⁰ Magazine “Επίσκεψις” No.511, p. 28, Geneva, 1994

¹¹ Magazine “Επίσκεψις” No.523, p. 12, Geneva, 1995

Certain Orthodox ecumenists, likewise, reach the point of talking about peace, about justice, about freedom, of love, and other par excellence spiritual qualities, in a cold, impersonal, worldly idiom. They neglect to mention that these spiritual qualities constitute fruits of the Holy Spirit, that they are divine gifts which are distributed to those who engage in spiritual struggle “in Christ Jesus,” and not at inter-religious gatherings.

It should be emphasized, however, that Orthodoxy is not a religion, not even the best of religions. It is the Church: the self-revelation and manifestation of God in history. Orthodoxy is conscious of its Oecumenicity (Universality) and the Truth regarding Christ which it possesses, and this is why it is not afraid of its relationship with non-Christians. It knows, however, the limits of these relationships as these have been defined by the patristic Tradition and by its own *mysteriological* experience. For example, Saint Gregory Palamas, under the cruel conditions of captivity debated with the Ottoman Turks. He did not hesitate, however, – even at the risk of losing his own life – to tell the truth and to reproach their delusion and erroneous beliefs. Moreover, how did the Holy Martyrs confront the idol worshippers and the New Martyrs the Muslims? Didn’t they confess the truth? Could we imagine them praying together with them? In that case we wouldn’t have any martyrs!

Our Church, then, refuses to sacrifice its uniqueness on the altar of expediency, and to accept the ecumenical slogan that “in all religions, under different names, the same God is worshipped.” The Orthodox Church firmly believes that man is saved only through Christ, in accordance with the apostolic dictum: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

What, finally, is Ecumenism?

After successive developments and the Ecumenical Movement’s gradual moving away from its original aims, the Orthodox faithful justifiably ask themselves: Doesn’t it clearly seem that the aim of Ecumenism is not merely the unification of Christians, but the predominance of a syncretistic, worldwide religion, the leveling of everything and the transformation of the Church of Christ into a “club for religious people,” in a worldly organization like the United Nations, desensitized and a-spiritual?

How is Ecumenism viewed by our traditional Orthodoxy, however?

“Ecumenism, in the way the meaning of the word has prevailed, is of course a heresy because it means a renunciation of the basic principles of the Orthodox Faith, as, for example, the acceptance of the so-called branch theory, that every church has a part of the truth and that all the churches should unite and put all the pieces of the truth on the table to form a whole. We believe that Orthodoxy is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. That’s it. It’s non-debatable; and subsequently, whoever professes the contrary can be called an ecumenist and therefore a heretic.” (Archbishop of Athens, Christodoulos, *Interview on the Church Radio*, 24-5-1998)

“Ecumenism is the collective name for pseudo-Christianities, for the pseudo-Churches of Western Europe...All of these pseudo-Christianities, all of these pseudo-Churches are nothing more than one heresy after another. Their common evangelical name is the ‘ultimate heresy’. Why? Because through the course of history diverse heresies have negated or distorted certain characteristics of the Theanthropos, the Lord Jesus. These European heresies remove the God-man altogether and put European man in His place.” (Archimandrite Justin Popovich)

“Ecumenism is not heresy and pan-heresy, as it is usually called. It is something much worse than pan-heresy. The heresies were obvious enemies of the Church. The Church

could therefore fight them and vanquish them. Ecumenism, however, is indifferent to the beliefs of the Church and to the dogmatic differences between the Churches. It is the transcendence, the pardoning, the overlooking, if not the legitimization and justification of heresy. It is an underhanded, insidious enemy and this is exactly where the mortal danger lies.” (Professor Andreas Theodorou)

Reactions to the Ecumenical Movement

Today in the orthodox world, reactions against Ecumenism and those who represent it are constantly on the rise. Many books, articles and critiques are seeing the light of publicity where, with much pain and anguish, the view is expressed that we are marching “according to plan” towards a Babylonian captivity of Orthodoxy within this heresy of many-faces and many names.

There are not a few distinguished Orthodox clerics and theologians who propose the immediate withdrawal of Orthodoxy from the Ecumenical Movement and its conferences, because they believe that Orthodox participation in these is not just fruitless, but in many ways harmful.

Some Churches have already withdrawn from the World Council of Churches, while others have been caused to think long and hard about their own participation. This distress and uneasiness was likewise expressed at the Inter-Orthodox meeting held in Thessaloniki in 1998, where, among other things, it was confirmed that “after a whole century of Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement, and half a century’s presence in the World Council of Churches..., the chasm between the Orthodox and the Protestants has grown even larger.”

The participation of the faithful in the Ecumenical Movement

We know that that the criterion for Orthodoxy remains the faithful and pious people of God. No one – neither Patriarchs nor Synods – is capable of by-passing and silencing the conscience of the faithful. For this reason, “there should be no dialogue or decision made if this vigilant conscience of the Church (grace-filled clerics, laypeople, monastics) does not agree.” (Metropolitan Ierotheos of Nafpaktou)

Ecumenist dialogues as they are practiced are supported and sustained within the circles of academic theology, and by other ecclesiastical or non-institutional organizations, which aspire to certain benefits politically, financially, internationally and publicly. They do not constitute a request of the ecclesiastical body, but are imposed both from “outside” and “above” This fact highlights an unhealthy phenomenon: the autonomy of the administrative institutions of the Orthodox Church today. The church administration is, in other words, separate from theological consideration, but also from the views, the concerns and the experience of the ecclesiastical *pleroma*.

Thus it is that, the people of God do not participate actively in, nor are they informed objectively and responsibly about, these dialogues. Moreover, the decisions made during these dialogues do not always carry the seal of authentic conciliarity, are not genuinely synodical, but rather are usually made by particular “professionals” of Ecumenism. One Orthodox hierarch has confessed characteristically: “The Orthodox faithful know nothing

about the Ecumenical Movement...yet perhaps the Ecumenical Movement is fortunate that the Orthodox people know nothing of what goes on in Geneva!"¹²

Our duty

We are undoubtedly living in a period of cosmic change. Events, seemingly directed, race forward at a frantic pace. Ecumenism is evolving within the destructive, leveling viewpoint of Globalism, which is being pushed by powerful economic-political organizations. No one any longer takes serious the viewpoint that Ecumenism can offer a visible and viable solution to the problem of Christian unity.

As Orthodox Christians, we should neither retreat to our ivory-tower nor relax our vigilance. If we truly value and respect the life of people, if we truly have pain of heart for the people of the Western world who are tormented by dead end religious traditions, as well as those in Eastern world, who caught up in demonic delusions, we have an obligation to remain devoted to our Holy Church. We must keep the traditional faith of our fathers pure and unadulterated, and to live it authentically within our daily struggle for our own personal holiness and *theosis*. The right faith and a strict and precise life will make us capable of witnessing to Orthodoxy, but also - and why not? - unto martyrdom, if and when the times demand it.

Adherence to Orthodoxy, that is, to the genuineness of life, and perseverance in the truth that frees and saves, is not egotism, fanaticism or intolerance. Rather, it expresses the ecumenical (universal) dimension, the love and philanthropy of the Orthodox Church. It constitutes the last possibility for a radical spiritual change in the West, but also for a way out for the East from its captivity to false gods.

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¹² Magazine "Ekklesia" No.13, p. 500a, Athens, 1994

