

ECUMENISM AS AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL HERESY*

WE HAVE POINTED OUT and documented the fact that ecumenism constitutes an absolutely new “*ecclesiological position*” and that, since 1920, there has developed a literal “*ecclesiological modernization*,” provoking a radical change in the theological thought and consciousness of Orthodox ecumenists in accordance with the thinking of the heterodox communities and those of other religions.

By way of a variety of theological notions, the ecumenists maintain that the heterodox are within the “boundaries” of the Church.

The idea of “Baptismal Theology,” for example, is that baptism—Orthodox or heterodox—delimits the Church and brings Christians, independently of origin, into the so-called “*baptismal boundaries*” of the Church:

“We exhort our faithful, Catholic and Orthodox, to strengthen the spirit of brotherhood, which derives from a single Baptism and participation in the sacramental life” (“Joint Communiqué” of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope John Paul II, Vatican, June 29, 1995).

Another related theology, that of the “*Wider Church*,” speaks about a “*Church in the broadest sense*” and “*outside the canonical limits*” and “*ecclesiastical frontiers*” of Orthodoxy:

“We are all (Orthodox and heterodox) members of Christ, a single and unique body, a single and unique ‘new creation,’ since our common baptism has freed us from death” (Patriarch Ignatios of Antioch, Geneva, 1987).

These views, as well as other similar ones, tellingly characterize ecumenism as an ecclesiological heresy that completely abrogates the ecclesiological foundations of the One (and Only) Church, that is, the Orthodox Church.

In what follows, we cite earlier statements by distinguished “*pioneers*” of ecumenism and later—more recent—statements which bear witness to the “*unity of spirit*” of the ecumenists and the astonishing ecclesiological erosion of the Orthodox through their participation in the ecumenical movement, as well as their steadfast tendency towards the realization of a “*Universal Visible Church*,” which **already exists invisibly** and which is supposedly comprised of Orthodoxy, Monophysitism, Papism, and Protestantism.

1. The views of Archpriest Vassily Zenkovsky († 1963), Professor and Dean of the St. Sergius Theological School in Paris.

“We should for once and for all forget and abandon the arrogant opinion that the Spirit of God is only with us and in us (the Orthodox).... When I am outside of Orthodoxy, I feel that I am inside

the Church in every way. In my understanding, the boundaries of the Church are infinitely broader and more inclusive than we usually reckon.... Who would dare to assert that outside the walls of the (Orthodox) Church Christ has neither a Church, nor servants, nor disciples? Is it really possible for us to reject the heterodox, just because they serve God differently from us? ... I now believe that Protestants are in the Church and work for the Church, perhaps without realizing it and (without) calling things by their names.... No, the Church of Christ is broader than our limited view of her. She encompasses all those who believe in God and love Him, however their faith and love may be expressed."

(See *Messenger of the Russian Student Christian Movement* [Paris], No. 5 [n.d.], pp. 17-18, reprinted in the commentaries of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Bogucharsk: "Should the Russian Orthodox Church Take Part in the Ecumenical Movement?" [in *Proceedings of the Congress of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches at the Celebration of 500 Years of the Autocephalous Russian Orthodox Church*, July 8-18, 1948 (in French) Vol. II (Moscow: 1952), pp. 376-377].)

[Note: The views expressed in the foregoing proposition, which is very easily extended to those of other religions, form the basis of **interfaith ecumenism**, which proclaims that all the "believers" of different religions are allegedly united by way of a common inner experience ("mystic realism") at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.]

2. The views of Anton Kartashev († 1960), Professor of Church History at the same School.

"Even Protestant communities, mercilessly breaking contact with apostolic hierarchical succession and the living sacred tradition of the Church, but having preserved the Sacrament of Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, continue through this mystagogical door to introduce their members into the bosom of the one invisible Church of Christ and to commune to them that very same Grace of the Holy Spirit. All this gives ground for posing the question of a unification of churches on the basis of their equal rights in their mystic realism, and not on the basis of 'uniatism,' i.e. reuniting heretics to Orthodoxy. The reunification of churches should be a manifestation and a concrete incarnation in visible reality of an already invisibly existing unity of the Church."

(See his article in the collection *Christian Unification: The Ecumenical Problem in Orthodox Consciousness* [Paris: YMCA Press, n.d.]; reprinted in Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Selected Essays* ["The Church of Christ and the Contemporary Movement for Unification in Christianity"] [Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1996], p. 228. Quoted from the English text in *Selected Essays*.)

3. The views of Ilya Tsonevsky, Professor of the Theological School in Sofia, Bulgaria.

“The fact that the Orthodox Churches take an active part in the ecumenical movement is evidence that they have gradually abandoned the archaic idea that Orthodox Christians are the only true Christians and that only they belong to the Church of Christ.”

(See *The Spiritual Life* [July 1947], p. 31, a review of the book by another renowned ecumenist professor at the same school, Archpriest Stephan Tsankov, *The Eastern Orthodox Church Judged from an Ecumenical Standpoint* [in German] [Zürich: 1946], reprinted in the commentary by Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Bogucharsk: “Should the Russian Orthodox Church Take Part in the Ecumenical Movement?” *op. cit.*, p. 378.)

4. The views of Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh (now Metropolitan of Aenos).

“The Holy Spirit is at work at any Christian baptism”; “when we confess faith in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, we do not mean by that (only) Orthodox baptism, but any Christian baptism”; the Holy Spirit “is not limited by human canonical boundaries we have established for our convenience; we cannot bind the Spirit, and not allow Him to work with all the other Christians, just because some of us so decided”; “Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the two ‘sister churches’ of old, continue to recognize one another’s baptism, as well as the other sacraments celebrated in these churches”; the rebaptism by Orthodox of baptized heterodox Christians is inspired by “narrow-mindedness, fanaticism and bigotry,” “is an injustice committed against Christian baptism, and eventually a blasphemy against God’s Holy Spirit.”

(See the journal of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, *The Illuminator* [Summer 1995], reprinted in *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 [1996], pp. 2-6: “Orthodox Baptism: In Response to *The Illuminator*.” Quoted from the original English text in *The Illuminator*.)

5. The views of the “Second European Ecumenical Assembly” in Graz, Austria (June 23-29, 1997).

Taking part in this much-vaunted “Assembly” of the “*Conference of European Churches*” (CEC) was a very broad delegation of Orthodox ecumenists, who—apart from other ecumenist deviations—co-signed texts that were clearly ecclesiological in content, of which the following are representative extracts:

- ***“The gift of reconciliation in Christ inspires us to dedicate ourselves” “to the unflagging pursuit of the goal of visible unity; in this framework we will re-examine our divisions, and we will ask ourselves whether these are the results of diversities that were formerly***

considered divisive, but can now be regarded as enriching"; *"we should pursue coöperation at all levels"*; *"we should continue serious interfaith dialogues"* (See *Final Text No. 1*, "Final Message," § III.8).

- *"We confess together before God that we have obscured the unity for which Christ prayed"*; *"if the significance of Baptism, as the incorporation of all Baptized Christians into the Body of Christ, were seriously taken into account, then all acts of violence against women, as well as against any human being, would have to be described as wounds in the Body of Christ"*; *"every Baptism shows the unique dignity of every human being"*; *"in the water of baptism, we recognize the presence of the Spirit, which is the source of life and makes us members of the body of Christ"*; *"since (Christ) has reconciled us, we are obligated to make every possible effort to take the requisite measures for the common celebration of the Eucharist"* (*Final Text No. 2*, "Basic Text," §§ A 14, A 16, A 33).

- *"We recommend the churches (members of the CEC)...to seek to achieve mutual recognition of Baptism among all Christian Churches"*; *"we recommend the churches to support groups that are dedicated to interfaith dialogue"* (*Final Text No. 3*, "Recommendations for Action," §§ 1.1, 2.2).

- *"Our first and greatest loyalty is to God alone, the Holy Spirit, Who has formed us into one Body of Christ"*; *"God has always come to us Christians also through other people, their cultures, and their religions; although we believe that we have received the incomparable revelation of God in Christ Jesus, which is offered to all human beings of every culture, (nonetheless) we will be enriched by dialogue with others, because it will reveal a new aspect of the inexhaustible authority of God"* ("Background to the Recommendations for Action," §§ B 6, B 11).

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Given all of the foregoing un-Orthodox views, the Orthodox in resistance to the panheresy of ecumenism, abiding on the basis of *"sound and unperverted doctrine,"* as St. Basil the Great puts it, are fully justified in avoiding communion with ecumenists, *"putting truth and their own firmness in the right Faith before all else."*

* Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1999), pp. 11-14.