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Anti-Ecumenist and Anti-Papist
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2. The Ecumenist “Theater” of Rome*

by Professor Andreas Theodorou (†)

On 6 December 1987, an ecumenical extravaganza of the first order was staged in Rome.

The protagonists were the Primates of the two great Churches, the Papal and the Orthodox Catholic, who took part in a bizarre “concelebration”; its stage was the imposing Basilica of St. Peter, and the audience was a broad-based congregation of Latin faithful, among whom were many dignitaries and a few Orthodox—as we are given to understand—, headed by the higher clergy in the entourage of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The performance took place during a celebration of the Latin Mass, against the backdrop of a dialogue of love and the anticipated union of the Churches. As one would expect, the show was not without embraces and displays of emotion, allocutions and responses, and the like, which drew applause from those in attendance.

But since this is a very serious affair, which will probably create mistaken impressions and damaging misinterpretations, allow me to focus on certain points in what follows and to subject them to an Orthodox critique.

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A. The first and—I would say—tragic point was the “concelebration.”

For, what is the meaning of “concelebration”? As the word indicates, it means joint participation in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. And what is the Divine Liturgy? It is common Divine wor-

ship, with the celebration of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist as the focal point, which the Church, the Eucharistic Body of Christ, offers up to the Triune God. It is the liturgical expression of the Mysteriological (sacramental) unity of the Church, of the one Faith and the one Baptism, of the one ethos and the one Tradition, of a liturgical love and of the unanimous confession of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the Divine Liturgy the Catholicity of the Church, the profound unity of the Body with its transcendent Head, is expressed in a synoptic and vivid way, in Mysteriological communion from the same Cup of life.

If all of these observations are correct, the question automatically arises: At the “concelebration” that took place in Rome—even though the participation of the Œcumenical Patriarchate therein was limited—were these elements present: unity of faith and Catholicity of ecclesiastical tradition? What Orthodox believer could assert such a thing?

At St. Peter’s Basilica there was a meeting of two diametrically opposed ecclesiologies: on the one side, the corrupt ecclesiology of Papism, with its falling-away from the ancient Apostolic Tradition, with its abominable and authoritarian fictions of Papal Primacy and Infallibility, and with a heap of other dogmatic errors; and on the other side, the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Catholic Church, pure and immaculate, as formed by Christ and built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, without any deviation from the Faith of the original Apostolic Church handed down from of old.

And we ask: Is it or is it not contradictory, even self-contradictory, for the head of the Orthodox Church to be present in a Roman Catholic church and to participate in any way in a Latin Mass? Does this presence not come into conflict with the age-old tradition of Orthodoxy, in the consciousness of which the Pope has been characterized as an heretic, and does it not subvert its sacred Canons, which strictly forbid even a simple act of joint prayer with heretics?

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B. The second—and puzzling—factor of this entire ecumenist display was the joint recitation of the holy Symbol of Faith in Greek,

without the addition of the heretical Filioque clause.

This step—which is in principle correct—is liable to lead to extremely dangerous impressions, that perhaps on this crucial point of the Church’s teaching about the Trinity a unity of faith between the two divided Churches has come about.

In order to avert such a danger, allow me to note the following points:

1. The recitation of the Symbol of Faith without the Filioque is insignificant for the Pope. It is not a matter of any great moment or substance. The Popes recited it this way for centuries before the schism of the Churches. Even after the schism, for a long period of time the Latin Church firmly rejected the addition of this clause to the Symbol of Faith.

2. We have not hitherto received any official word about an authoritative declaration by the Pope concerning the deletion of the Filioque. It is certain that at the time when the Pope recited the Creed without the controversial clause, all the priests of the Latin Church exclaimed: “Ex Patre Filioque” (“from the Father and the Son”).

3. More important, however, is not the simple deletion of the addition, but the theology underlying the Filioque.

Let us not deceive ourselves. The Filioque constitutes a primary dogma of the Latin Church; it was given official formulation at a Latin ecumenical council (the Second Council of Lyons, 1274). It is a De fide truth which is completely binding on the faithful of the Latin Church.

For us, conversely, the Filioque is a primary heresy, which does severe damage to the hypostatic procession and relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, degrades the Person and the deifying work of the Holy Spirit, Who is the soul of the Church, and leads to an unacceptable Christomonism, from which the Latin West is unable to escape.

Is it, therefore, possible for the Pope to expunge, by a simple declaration, an official dogmatic decree of his Church? That is, to disavow himself and his ecclesiology? But if this is not feasible, then what was the significance of his recitation of the Creed without the Filioque? Was his tongue saying one thing and his mind and heart another?

C. The **third** important point is the theology of the “sheepfold,” which is so indicative of the spirit and tendencies of Papism.

According to this theology, the Papal Church constitutes the fold to which Christ entrusted the feeding of His rational sheep. The “Chief Shepherd” of this fold is the Pope, as successor of the Apostle Peter on the Apostolic throne of Rome. All those outside the Church of Rome are breakaway and erring sheep, which ought to return to the fold, to become true and active members of the Church of Christ, of which the Pope is the foremost, supreme, authoritative, and infallible head!

Thus, he does not see the Œcumenical Patriarch, either in his most fervent embraces or in his most stirring fraternal greetings, as anything other than a prominent, but deluded brother, as the “lost sheep,” whom he is obligated to save, to lift up on his shoulders, and to carry back to his fold!

Let us not deceive ourselves, brothers. The idea of Papal Primacy and Infallibility, which is so repugnant to the Orthodox conscience on account of its falsehood and monarchical absolutism, is in the very sinews of Roman Catholic ecclesiology and constitutes the kernel of the ecclesiological self-understanding of Papism.

The Pope does not neglect any opportunity to formulate and promulgate this belief. In season and out of season, he throws it in our faces and shows us the way in which His Holiness understands the union of the Churches: all we have to do is recognize his primacy! As for the rest, he is not concerned. He will respect—he emphasizes—our Orthodox traditions! Such great condescension!

In other words, he dreams about a union on the model of the notorious and sinful Unia, which, in spite of his histrionic statements, he does not cease to encourage and strengthen, always to the detriment of Orthodoxy, the “Sister Church” of the Roman Catholics!

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D. The **fourth** very important point is the much-trumpeted “dialogue of love.”

But love cannot be the subject of any dialogue. As a Dominical commandment, it exists by itself within our hearts. In the event of its

absence, no dialogue can restore it.

On the contrary, what ought to be the subject of dialogue is truth, something which is absent from separated Christianity (the heterodox “churches”). For precisely this reason we must hold discussions, engage in dialogue, and uncover and pinpoint the truth that redeems.

For us Orthodox, of course, there is absolutely no problem to be solved. In our Church there exists the whole truth as Christ revealed it and as the Apostles handed it down. This is why the Orthodox Church is—and is called—“Catholic and Apostolic.” Indeed, there is no other way for the truth to be made manifest than by ecumenical theological dialogue, which must be conducted carefully and with much prudence and discernment.

Yet, whenever excessive emphasis is placed on the so-called dialogue of love and whenever this dialogue is conducted at the expense of the dialogue of truth, the dangers that I have been describing are many and serious. The steps being taken towards union are reckless and hasty. Ecumenism is becoming a snare, with incalculable consequences for the true unity of the Churches. For, only the dialogue of truth can assist the Churches towards a genuine rapprochement, towards a relationship which could facilitate their authentic union.

Also very perilous and unrealistic is the proposition that we make progress in the dialogue of love by basing ourselves on the many common points that bind us together. But with regard to the issue of the Churches, the problem is not their common love and faith, but their differences and divisions. These factors constitute the disease that we must identify and cure.

If lung cancer exists in a bodily organism, what help is it to the sick person if the other members of his body—the hands, the feet, etc.—are healthy? So here, too, while there may be many points of common faith and agreement, the cancer of the Churches, their grave illness, consists in their many and various differences and dissensions. These need to be dealt with if the inter-ecclesiastical organism is to regain health. Unless they are dealt with, the aforementioned proposition will be used as a pretext for bringing about a populist union of the Churches, a unified structure, but one hastily assembled and contrived, which would rest on sand and would collapse at the first puff of wind.

All of us, and especially the leaders of our Church, must be particularly attentive to this point. If, driven by the spirit of an ill-conceived ecumenism, our leaders wish to reject ecclesiological “provincialism” (an accusation which they make against conservative Orthodox Christians!), and to make spectacular overtures in the inter-Christian theater of the world; if, instead of a prudent and circumspect dialogue of truth, which they ought to undertake with a deep sense of responsibility, with humility of heart and the fear of God, they engage in ecumenist alchemy and posturing; if, instead of a real union of the Churches on the foundation of one Faith and one Baptism, they aim at an external agglomeration of the Churches—an ecclesiological monstrosity and a spurious compromise—, let them be assured that what they will ultimately achieve is the rending of the garment of Orthodoxy.

Given such a prospect, a significant portion of the Orthodox Faithful will not follow them. And the schism in the bosom of Orthodoxy will be inevitable: an unprecedented and unrelenting schism!

* **Source:** Ἱεροθόδοξος Τύπος, No. 770(25 December 1987).