

Professor Andreas Theodorou (†)  
Anti-Ecumenist and Anti-Papist  
(1922-2004)



## 6. Which Union of Churches Are You Talking About, Mr. Emmanuel Gikas?\*

by Professor Andreas Theodorou (†)

### I.

**I**n the newspaper Βήμα, on 22 March 1992, an article by a Mr. Emmanuel Gikas, an ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was published, entitled “Η Ένωσις τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν δὲν εἶναι οὐτοπία” [“The Union of the Churches Is Not Utopian”]. By “Churches” the author means only the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox. About Protestant communities, and especially Anglicanism, he says nothing.

It is evident that Mr. Gikas was impelled to write this article by the recent cooling in relations between Papism and Orthodoxy over the political interference of the Vatican in the affairs of the Christian East and the pernicious activity of the Unia to the detriment of the Orthodox.

Strangely enough, he makes no mention at all of the Unia, which constitutes the ecclesiological model of union, as the Pope understands it, and a stumbling block for unionist efforts.

Why is this, one wonders?

He talks in a mostly superficial way about the differences that separate the two Churches, offers his personal interpretations of them, and proposes concrete measures which, in his view, will make union possible.

It would appear that Mr. Gikas does not have a deep sense of the nature of, or at least does not ascribe proper significance to, the dogmatic differences on which the estrangement between the Churches centers.

For the Orthodox Catholic Church, on the contrary, this matter is especially significant. Every deviation from her traditional Faith is a heresy.

*It is something that vitiates her raison d'être and her work of sanctification. For the sake of her truth, Orthodoxy has waged fierce struggles, fought vigilantly against heresies, and is not disposed to deviate even one iota from the dogmas handed down to her by the Fathers.*

*In reading Mr. Gikas's article, one has the impression that the author wishes to be impartial, but that, in spite of this, he studies the issues with a Roman Catholic rather than with an Orthodox eye, and that he has a taste for the ecumenist view of things; that is, a certain dogmatic minimalism and an inclination to relativize, compromise, and haggle over the Divine truths of the Faith.*

\* \* \*

**But let us look** at these matters in somewhat greater detail.

When stating his theses at the beginning, Mr. Gikas writes that “the *Filioque* is wrongly viewed by some as dividing the Churches,” that is, that it constitutes an insignificant difference, or rather, does not in any way constitute a difference between the divided Churches, and he insinuates that the many conflicts, the many disputes, and the voluminous controversial theological literature created on both sides with the passage of time have become “*a mere trifle*”!

We are sorry, but we cannot agree with the views set forth by Mr. Gikas.

According to Orthodox dogmatic teaching, the *Filioque* is not a mere *theologoumenon*, that is, a matter for independent theological judgment, which one may accept without deeper dogmatic consequences (without being considered a heretic), but an **outright distortion** of the dogma of the Faith concerning the Holy Trinity.

If we accept that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son, then we destroy the order of the Trinity, confuse the hypostatic properties of the Persons, which are unalterable and incommunicable, and abolish the monarchy in the Godhead, that is, that the Father is the source of the Godhead, from which the other two Persons of the Trinity receive their existence, the Son through eternal generation, and the Spirit through procession; and, finally, the God-befitting dignity of the Spirit is diminished and His sanctifying and deifying work is vitiated.

For these reasons, the *Filioque* is, for us, an outright Trinitarian

heresy which destroys the concept of the Christian God; the Orthodox Catholic Church has always seen it as such and fought against it.

\* \* \*

**According to the** Orthodox Faith, the Holy Spirit proceeds from **the Father alone and is sent into the world through the Son** in order to consolidate the work of redemption accomplished by the Father through the Son.

On this point, St. John 15:26, *“But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, Which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me,”* is truly revelatory.

Accordingly, the present “proceedeth” refers to the eternal procession from the Father, while the future “I will send” refers to the temporal sending of the Spirit (into the world), which is accomplished through the Son.

This belief in the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone is given infallible confirmation by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith: *“Who proceedeth from the Father.”*

The assertion made by Roman Catholics, that the Symbol of Faith does not explicitly rule out procession from the Son or its restatement, is artless, to say the least.

\* \* \*

**Moreover, the** entire choir of the Greek Fathers of the Church confesses the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone, as the source of the Godhead, and that His sending into the world comes about through the Son.

Thus, St. John of Damascus, the preëminent dogmatic theologian of the Church, in whom the preceding dogmatic tradition culminates, succinctly observes:

*The Holy Spirit of God [the Father], as proceeding from Him, Who is also said to be the Spirit of the Son, as being manifested and imparted to the creation through Him, but not having his existence from Him.<sup>1</sup>*

This belief is echoed in the more recent dogmatic books of the

Orthodox Church.

In this third response [to the Lutheran Divines of Tübingen—*Trans.*], Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople writes:

*Accordingly, none of the Teachers of our Church has said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, or that He has His existence from the Son, or that He is an emission of the Son, and none of them has ever declared that the Son is the emitter or cause of the Holy Spirit. They all proclaim that the Spirit is poured out, gushes forth, goes forth, shines forth, is sent, is bestowed, and is given through Him, not being unaware that these terms pertain to the imparting of the emanations.<sup>2</sup>*

## II.

**I**t is certainly true that in the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria there is some unclarity with regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit (I have written a special treatise on this). An awkward phrase of this Holy Father, who called the Spirit “*proper to the Son*,” gave occasion for disputes between theologians of his era. Theodoretos of Cyrus made the following distinction:

*If Cyril calls the Spirit proper to the Son in the sense that He is co-natural with Him and proceeds from the Father, then we shall agree with him and recognize his expression as Orthodox. But if he uses this term in the sense that the Spirit has His existence from the Son or through the Son, then we shall repudiate this expression as blasphemous and impious.<sup>3</sup>*

Mr. Gikas (following the opinions of Roman Catholics) censures this thoroughly Orthodox view of Theodoretos, who was the most important theologian of the Antiochene school in the early Church, on the ground that Theodoretos was condemned by the Fifth Œcumenical Synod as a Nestorian (!), ignoring the fact that his writings, and not his person, were condemned, and for other reasons.

Now, why does St. Cyril say that the Spirit is “*proper to the Son*”? On account of their identity of essence: “*The Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father, according to the utterance of the Savior, but He is not alien to the Son.*”<sup>4</sup> And: “*That which proceeds from Him [the Father] is not alien to the Son according to the definition of the essence.*”<sup>5</sup>

St. Cyril does not teach the *Filioque*, and in vain do Roman Catholics search for this doctrine in his writings. The verbal formulæ

“is poured out” and “goes forth,” whereby Cyril characterizes the provenance of the Spirit from the Son, do not refer to the eternal provenance of His hypostatic property (the procession), but to his being sent into the world in time:

*And He is poured forth, that is, proceeds, from God the Father as from a source, but is bestowed on the creation through the Son.*<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

Finally, Mr. Gikas ascribes the phrase “*through the Son*” to St. Gregory of Nyssa “*in a causal sense,*” that is, that the Son is a cause of the Spirit.

It is true that the example used by this Holy Father to elucidate the mystery of the procession of the Holy Spirit tends to support this notion: that is, the example of three candles, of which the second receives its light from the first and the third through the second, once the latter has been lit:

*It is as if one were to see a flame divided among three candles—and let us suppose that the cause of the third light is the first flame, which has kindled the candle on the end by transmission through the middle one.*<sup>7</sup>

However, from the more general teaching of the Saint it emerges that this “*mediation*” of the Son is not a mediation of essence, but a “*conceptual*” mediation. In the Godhead there exists a order within the Trinity, that is, the three Persons are enumerated: first the One, then the Second, and then the Third (i.e., Father—Son—Holy Spirit).

The Father (the First) is conceived as preceding the Son (the Second) logically, not temporally, and the Son (the Second) is conceived as preceding the Spirit (the Third).

The Father, therefore, is conceived as preceding the Son,

*and through the Son and yet with Him the Holy Spirit...is conceived in close union, not subsequent in existence to the Son.*<sup>8</sup>

Thus, although the two [other] Persons derive their existence from the Father, yet the Son, Who is logically regarded as prior (to the Spirit), is treated as an intermediary between the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit as connected to the Father through Him, as a product of the essence of the Father Who first begets the Son, or as a product

of the essence of the Father, “*which is the essence of the Son.*”<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that in the complexity of this line of thought, the preposition “**through**” does not have any special dogmatic significance.

This, in basic terms, is the Orthodox view of the matter.

\* \* \*

**But for the Western Church**, the *Filioque* is not a trivial doctrinal issue; it is a primary dogma of faith. Taking this dogma from the teaching of St. Augustine, the Western Church adopted it at a council convened in 589 in Toledo, Spain, adding the phrase “and from the Son” to the Symbol of Faith, in spite of the many diverse reactions to the contrary.

After the schism of the Churches, the Western Church elevated it to a dogma of faith (*De Fide*), an authoritative truth binding on the believing conscience of the Church and necessary for salvation.

Consequently, in the nature of things this Church cannot reconcile the *Filioque* conceptually with our teaching, nor, of course, can we reconcile it with our teaching,

The claim that there is no essential contradiction between the two doctrines and that both teach the same thing, but express it in different ways, is, from our point of view, unrealistic.

\* \* \*

**Let me say**, in passing, that in the dogma of the Triune God, apart from the *Filioque*, we have another equally important difference with the Roman Catholics, which has, however, hitherto not been given the attention that it deserves: the issue of the existence of the uncreated energies in the Godhead, which are eternal in the infinite essence of God, but capable of being communicated and imparted, and through which God has access to external entities (e.g., creation, providence, Divine revelation, and salvation).

The Papists do not regard these energies as uncreated.

In the fourteenth century, the two theologies (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) came into intense conflict over this topic in the

persons of St. Gregory Palamas and Barlaam, a Greek monk from Calabria, Italy, who crudely disparaged the mystical prayer of the Athonite monks and their vision of the uncreated Divine light during such prayer.

According to Barlaam, the light of Tabor (or the glory of God, or the Grace of God) is not an uncreated dimension in the Godhead, something that would entail the abolition of the simplicity of the Divine nature, but created, something that suddenly and temporarily appears and then disappears.

The Western Church is unable, by reason of its doctrine of the Trinity, to understand the mystical experience of Orthodoxy and the deification of human nature, which comes about in the Divine energies and constitutes the quintessence of Orthodox soteriology.

### III.

**M**r. Gikas also brings up the topic of purgatorial fire (*Purgatorium*), emphasizing that “*Furthermore, it is not possible for anyone seriously to maintain that the teaching of the Western Church concerning purgatorial fire separates the two Churches.*”

It is certainly correct that this doctrine does not constitute a primary dogmatic difference between the Churches, as do the *Filioque* and Papal primacy and infallibility. Nevertheless, it is still a difference. In Orthodoxy it is not always safe to separate dogmas into minor and major, into primary and secondary. Dogmatic truths form a unified and seamless totality, a chain with individual links bound so tightly to one another that if one is detached, it causes the entire chain to disintegrate. A heretic is not only one who distorts a “*primary*” dogma of the Faith, but also one who sets aside a “*minor*” dogmatic truth which the Church teaches explicitly.

\* \* \*

For us, *purgatorial fire* is a heresy, albeit of less importance for the theological dialogue. It is all the more a heresy because it is not an isolated dogma, but is undergirded by other dogmatic errors, such as the distinction between temporal and eternal punishments, the idea of the

satisfaction of Divine justice by undergoing temporal punishments, the treasury of the superabundant merits of the Saints, of which the distributor is the Church (the Pope), indulgences, etc.

The central idea of *purgatorial fire* is the **satisfaction** of Divine justice through purification, an idea unheard-of in Orthodoxy.

The connection that Mr. Gikas makes between *purgatorial fire* and the memorial services celebrated by our Church for the reposed is totally beside the point.

Memorial services are not means of appeasing God, nor is their purpose the postmortem purification of the soul from sin. They are simple prayers of the Church to the All-Good God that He assist and assuage, in the way and to the extent that He knows best, the suffering that souls endure on account of their sins in the middle state (not in some non-existent Purgatory), which they enter immediately after death.

All that Mr. Gikas says is certainly correct regarding the prayer of the Priest:

*O Creator, burn me not by my partaking [of Divine Communion]. For Fire art Thou which burneth the unworthy. But purify me from every stain.*

In general, the fire which burns sins and sinners is the Divine Energy, the fire of God, which in the end will burn up the physical elements and will fashion the new earth and the new Heavens.

But what rationale is there for us to associate it with Purgatory?

The fact that St. Gregory the Dialogist taught this idea does not mean that is necessarily right. And other Popes have succumbed to wrong beliefs, just as great Fathers of the Eastern Church have missed the mark of dogmatic rectitude in certain of their teachings (e.g., St. Gregory of Nyssa on the *Apokatastasis*).

As far as we are concerned, there is no such thing as personal infallibility in matters of dogma.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Gikas goes on** to stress that it is commonly accepted that liturgical differences and ecclesiastical customs are not an impediment to the union of the Churches.

But imagine a case in which—to cite just one example—an Orthodox Christian in a united Church, as the author of this article conceives it, goes to a Roman Catholic church to commune and receives only the Host, i.e., only the Body, and not the Blood of Christ, while regarding as erroneous the theory of Thomas Aquinas concerning concomitance (*concomitantia*)?

The issue is, naturally, not only liturgical, but also dogmatic.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Gikas concludes** his article with a correct observation: that the principal reason for the separation of the Churches is Papal primacy, as this was formulated at the First Vatican Council (1870), as well as the “*personal*” infallibility of the Pope, which is a corollary of the former.

But here, too, Mr. Gikas interprets matters “*half-heartedly*.”

He quite rightly emphasizes the varied and manifold reactions within the bosom of the Papal Church against Papal primacy and infallibility, the most important of which was the reaction of the Councils of Constance and Basle, whose primary goal was the restriction of Papal primacy and the subordination of the Roman Pontiff to the conciliar system.

However, he misinterprets the Orthodox view of the matter.

We do not, of course, deny the many ways in which the Pope has been characterized, or the courteous forms of address, typically used, as the situation demanded, for reasons of Church politics, which Hierarchs of the Eastern Church have from time to time applied to him.

The essence of the dogma, however, does not rest in these characterizations.

In the Orthodox understanding, with which Mr. Gikas must surely be familiar, there is a distinction between **primacy of authority and jurisdiction** and **primacy of honor**.

**According to the first** kind of primacy, the Pope is regarded as the alleged successor of the Apostle Peter on the Apostolic throne of Rome, as the visible head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ on earth, as concentrating all ecclesiastical authority in his hands, as an absolute monarch by Divine right, to whom all the other bishops of the Church

ought to be obedient and subject.

Such a notion, which connotes such madness, haughtiness, and pretentiousness, and is engendered by a spirit of centralization, autocracy, and lust for power, was never accepted by the early Church; nor, more generally, has it been accepted by Orthodoxy.

Nowhere do we see the Pope presiding over Church synods or imposing his will on them. The Pope is the Bishop of a local Church only—the most important, to be sure—and equal in rank with the other Bishops, having one and only one vote at synods, just as they do. Nor, again, is there any proof that he is the successor of Peter in the Church of Rome.

What are we to say about the idea of infallibility, which connotes tons of Luciferian arrogance, at the same time that Popes of Rome have been caught red-handed in error over the Faith, teaching heretical and false doctrines?

According to the second kind of primacy, the primacy of honor, prerogatives of honor were indeed assigned to the person of the Pope, as the Bishop of Rome, the capital of the ancient Roman Empire and the city of Saints and Martyrs.

But did the Church (at the Third Œcumenical Synod) not grant equal prerogatives of honor to the Bishop of Constantinople?

It is in this spirit, that is, of the primacy of honor, that we should embody all of the honorific titles accorded to the person of the Roman Pontiff.

Orthodoxy has never recognized any prerogatives of authority.

\* \* \*

Mr. Gikas concludes his article by proposing a synod of the two Churches, either in Constantinople or in Thessaloniki, for the purpose of “*reaching agreement on joint acceptance and an authentic interpretation of the decrees of the First Vatican Council.*”

But Papal primacy is not our problem, Mr. Gikas. It is the Papacy’s problem. Is it up to us to explain the primacy and infallibility of the Pope?

If the Pontiff thinks that something is not going well, let him convoke an official meeting of his Church to formulate a correct

interpretation of these decrees, and then let us take a look at the matter together.

Is it not, in fact, the purpose of the ongoing theological dialogue between the two Churches to reach such an understanding at some point?

What is the meaning of the “œcumenical synod” that Mr. Gikas proposes when it is uncanonical (only a synod of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church can be œcumenical) and unrealizable in practice?

Such a synod did, of course, recently take place in Constantinople, but it was a synod of the Orthodox Catholic Church, which had as its goals the containment of the political and ecclesiastical expansionism of the Papacy in the countries of the East and the confrontation of the accursed Unia, which is proving to be a cardinal problem and an impediment to relations between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

As I said at the beginning, Mr. Gikas passes over the question of the Unia in silence. He does not so much as mention its name.

\* \* \*

**The union** of the Churches is not utopian.

Our Church is not chasing after a shadow, a will-o'-the-wisp, or an elusive dream when she prays, at every Divine Liturgy, *“for the union of all.”*

Union is the will of the Lord (*“that they all may be one”*), and we must all assist in this direction with hope, love, and humility.

But this exhortation should be addressed primarily to the other side—without, of course, overlooking our own shortcomings and deficiencies.

For, we know well from history and from our own present-day experience that the Pope does not wish for a real union of the Churches on the basis of Divine truth, but a subjugation of Orthodoxy to his primacy.

This had been his insatiable desire all along. He has always seen union as the acceptance on our part of his primacy. He devised, a long time ago, the model that embodies his unionist ambitions, namely the

Unia, which he has never ceased to foster and promote—this motley and freakish fabrication, replete with deception and hypocrisy, loathsome and unrelenting, which does not hesitate to shed even fraternal blood in order to attain its goal!

In all honesty, how is possible, under these conditions, for a constructive theological dialogue to be conducted and the union of the Churches not to be regarded as a chimerical dream?

\* **Source:** Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος, No. 972 (10 April 1992), No. 973 (17 April 1992), No. 974 (24 April 1992).

---

## Notes

1. St. John of Damascus, “Homily on Holy Saturday,” §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCVI, col. 605B.

2. John Karmiris, *Τὰ Δογματικά καὶ Συμβολικά Μνημεῖα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* [*The Dogmatic and Credal Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church*] (Athens: 1953), Vol. II, pp. 482-483.

3. Theodoretos of Cyrus, in St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Twelve Chapters Against Those Who Dare to Defend the Doctrines of Nestorios*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXVI, col. 432D.

4. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *ibid.*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXVI, col. 433B.

5. *Idem*, Epistle 39, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXVII, col. 181A.

6. See Panagiotis Trembelas, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* [*Dogmatic Theology of the Orthodox Catholic Church*] (Athens: 1959), Vol. I, pp. 288-289.

7. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Macedonians and the Pneumatomachi*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLV, col. 1308B.

8. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Evnomios*, Book I, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLV, col. 369A.

9. See Trembelas, *Δογματικὴ*, Vol. I, p. 293; Chrestos Androutsos, *Συμβολικὴ* [*Dogmatic Theology*], p. 155.