



The Orthodox Informer

“For it is a commandment of the Lord not to be silent at a time when the Faith is in jeopardy. Speak, Scripture says, and hold not thy peace.... For this reason, I, the wretched one, fearing the Tribunal, also speak.”

(St. Theodore the Studite, Patrologia Graeca, Vol. XCIX, col. 1321)

To Lead Together the Theological Dialogue in Ravenna, Italy

An Invitation to the Pope by the Œcumenical Patriarch *

And a pro-Papal invitation by the Archbishop of Athens

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THE PROVOCATIVENESS of the Œcumenical Patriarchate and the Archbishop of Athens has no precedent.

Whereas the overwhelming majority of Greek Orthodox Christians object to the endeavors to bring about a *Union of the Churches*—which endeavors are undertaken with contempt for the Sacred Canons of the Orthodox Faith—, and whereas Abbots of monasteries, monks, nuns, the honorable clergy, and the faithful people express their opposition in every way to the course towards heretical Rome, the Œcumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Athens are indifferent to this opposition and display their pro-Papism all the more aggressively.

In an endeavor to expedite the procedures towards union, Œcumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has addressed a letter to the Pope, in which he proposes that together they lead or oversee the theological dialogue to be held in Ravenna, Italy next September.

The contents of the letter have not been published, but according to information we have received, the Œcumenical Patriarchate has devised a *stratagem* to overcome the question of *primacy*. The *plan*

is to proclaim the universality of the Church (including the Papal Church) and to recognize [Papal] primacy within this *Œcumenical Church*, with the proviso that all of the Pope's decisions be accompanied by Synodal approval.



This is a *strategem* to legitimate the Orthodox as interlocutors with the Pope and to lay to rest the accusation that they are apostates and heretics.

In the Orthodox Church, we do not have a *Pope* or a *Primate of the Church*, but rather a *President of the Holy Synod*. This means that decisions are made collectively, not by one Bishop (especially if they alter the polity of the Church).

The Patriarchate's *strategem* says: The Pope will make the decisions, there will be *pro forma* conciliarity (since his decisions will be approved by a Synod), and, at the same time, the Pope's primacy in the *Œcumenical Church* will be recognized.

The Archbishop of Athens, as well, in his study published in the journal *Ekklesia* (March 2007), proclaims that efforts towards a *Union of the Churches* will be continued.

According to an abstract of this study, posted on the website of the Church of Greece:

“Archbishop Christodoulos has given clear and unequivocal answers to all of those who criticized his recent visit to the Vatican and the overtures of the Church of Greece to the Roman Catholic West, in his study published in the journal *Ekklesia* (March 2007). *Inter alia*, His Beatitude stresses that all of the various exchange visits between Orthodox and Roman Catholics have been made within the context of the official dialogue (inaugurated in 1980), in which all of the Orthodox Churches have synodally resolved, since 1963, to take part (at a Pan-Orthodox

level). Given that dialogue has been decided upon, all kinds of meeting—not, of course, liturgical as such—are not only *not* prohibited, but are even manifoldly useful for the indirect facilitation of dialogue, undertaken on account of dogmatic differences. Who can assert that discussions and exchanges of viewpoints on subjects that are not primarily dogmatic or theological (and that separate us) do not help towards mutual understanding and the creation of a better climate among those who are of differing opinions? What sensible person today would undervalue the importance of interpersonal relations? When did the Church ever refuse discussion for the facilitation of dogmatic deliberations?

To hold discussions on subjects of common and universal interest with Christians who have dogmatic differences—this can only be a positive thing. Discussions on religious freedom, on the de-Christianization of Europe, on the need to declare the Christian character of Europe in the renowned European Constitution, on the scientific research into and correct understanding of our historical past, on ways of dealing with religious minorities, and on so many other subjects of common interest, undoubtedly contribute not only to handling these matters correctly, but also to the creation of a climate of mutual trust and, at the very least, to a lessening of the mistrust that has poisoned, and still poisons, every good effort towards a resolution of dogmatic differences....”

The Invitation by the Œcumenical Patriarch

The letter from Œcumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Pope, in which he proposes that together they lead the theological dialogue in Ravenna, Italy, next September, was delivered to the Vatican by Metropolitan John of Pergamon.

The Metropolitan also gave a revealing interview to the Italian journal *Repubblica*. The interview, which was reported by the ANIE [Athens News Agency—*Trans.*] on 16 April, is as follows:

“The journal *Repubblica* published an interview, entitled

‘The Œcumenical Church is Ours,’ with Metropolitan John of Pergamon, who will deliver a letter from Patriarch Bartholomew to Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

According to *Repubblica*, [Metropolitan] Professor John Zezioulas said that this is a critical moment and that the problem of Papal primacy must be dealt with; otherwise, the relations between the two Churches are in danger of falling into a period of stagnation.



Referring to the message that he is bringing to the Pope, Metropolitan John of Pergamon said: ‘The Patriarch invites the Pope to come to Ravenna to proclaim together the inauguration of the proceedings to be held from 7 to 15 October, within the context of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue.

Question: This is unprecedented. Does it perhaps signify a quantum leap in the acceleration of the dialogue?

Answer: *This meeting will be momentous. In Ravenna, just as in Belgrade—where, last autumn, after a long break, we began the dialogue anew—, all of the Orthodox Churches will be present, together with the Catholic Church. We share the same Faith and the same Tradition among us.¹ The greatest problem that we have to confront is that of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome; that is, the rôle of the Pope.*

Question: This was [Pope] John Paul II’s idea. How far are the Orthodox prepared to go?

Answer: *For some, this is an insoluble problem. I, on the contrary, maintain that a solution can be found, provided that we adequately define the place of the Bishop of Rome within the framework of the Œcumenical Church. The Orthodox are prepared to accept the idea of an Œcumenical primacy, and according to the canons of the ancient Church, the Bishop of Rome is first.*

Question: Where is the obstacle?

Answer: *The disagreement arises in relation to a fundamental problem: Can the Bishop of Rome intervene in [the affairs of] local Churches?*

Question: It is, then, a matter of jurisdiction. As for you, what solution to you propose?

Answer: *There can be no interventions without a common resolution by the other Bishops. Briefly put, the Bishop of Rome must act together with the Synod.*

Question: So, the Pontiff will no longer be an absolute ruler, but will function in consultation with a representative episcopal body?

Answer: *Precisely. It will be an œcumenical primacy that will always act in concert with the Synod.*

Question: At the meeting in Belgrade last year, there were problems with the Russian Orthodox Church. What exactly is the matter?

Answer: *I am afraid that, in Moscow, they are not ready to accept the œcumenical primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Moreover, they do not even want to recognize the primacy of the Œcumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. According to them, there is no need for primacy. But in Belgrade, all of the other Orthodox Churches voted that the See of Constantinople expresses the unity among the Orthodox.”²*



* **Source:** *Orthodoxos Typos*, No. 1686 (27 April 2007), pp. 1, 5. Publication lay-out ours.

1. Our note: If “among us” Orthodox and Papists “we share the same Faith and the same Tradition,” then the dialogue has already fulfilled its purpose and is no longer needed. But when did the Orthodox establish and proclaim such a thing, and collectively at that? Just which local Orthodox Church synodally notified its flock about this *auspicious* outcome to the dialogue?

- To be sure, for the ecumenists, the Papists were never essentially heretics; but for the One, Unique Orthodox Church, the Papists, since the *Schism of 1054*, always were, and have continued

to be, heretics, especially since they adhere to their principal heresies, which strike against Triadology, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

2. Our note: According to the meeting of the “Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church” (Belgrade, September 2006), the representative of the Patriarchate of Moscow, Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev), put forward ecclesiological views that called into question, from an historical standpoint, the position and the rôle of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the unity of the Orthodox Churches.

- These views have been rebutted by Professor Vlasios Pheidas in his lengthy article: “The Primate and the Synodal Character of the Church in Orthodox Tradition” (*Episkepsis*, No. 679 [28 February 2007], p. 40-46).