



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 Græca, Vol. XCIX, col. 1321)

A comparison between what is taking place in the current inter-Christian and interfaith dialogue and what took place in the age of St. Gregory Palamas

The Three Kinds of Atheism*

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IN HIS letter to “the most pious Monk Dionysios” (E.Π.E. IV, 404), St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Archbishop of Thessaloniki, writes that there are three kinds of atheism.

A) The manifold error of the Greek philosophers

THESE philosophers recognized the existence of no God except for the pleasures of the senses (Epicuros); or they acknowledged the existence of certain material elements (Empedocles, Heraclitos, Anaximenes, Democritos); or they believed that what exists is completely incomprehensible to anyone, mere appearance prevailing everywhere (Xenophanes of Colophon); or else they formed an idea of God, but very vaguely (Socrates, Plato).

The heretic Barlaam, whom St. Gregory Palamas successfully confronted, belonged to this first category of atheists, because he maintained that the Uncreated Essence of God is no different than His Uncreated Energy. According to St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr and other Fathers, however, he who equates Essence with Energy denies the existence of God. For something that has no energy neither exists nor is anything at all.

B) The multifarious and multiform error of the heretics

SOME regard the Father as childless (Jews), others regard

Him as both Son and Father (Sabellios, who taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one Hypostasis, which simply bears different names or wears different guises from time to time), others regard Him as the Uncreated Father of a created Son and Spirit (Arios, Evnomios, Makedonios), and others believe other things.

All of these people differ in no respect from atheists. They destroy the Triunity of God and the Divine nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They were rivalled by Barlaam and Akindynos, who, on the one hand, equated Uncreated Essence and Uncreated Energy, as we have said, and, on the other hand, accepted the existence of a created energy in relations between God and man. Thus, they made God out to be a creature, since they recognized created energy; for, as the Fathers say, the nature of something is shown by its energy.

C) When one avoids setting forth all of the doctrines concerning God

THIS kind of atheism is not far removed from the previous evil twosome. Nonetheless, theologians and clergy resort to it: they do not touch on things which are difficult for the minds of many to understand. They do not explain the theology of the Holy Fathers to those who are not aware of it, under the pretext that it is not easily understandable or accessible to most people.

If, however, you pass over even one dogmatic teaching in silence, the dogmatic enclosure of our Church is destroyed and, accordingly, the poison of heretical teaching breaks in.

Heretics fear and are displeased by the development of the all-embracing dogmatic teaching of Orthodoxy, for with this development the mask of virtue and piety that they wear falls off.

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SUMMARY. The first kind of atheism: God does not exist. The second: He exists, but [the conception of God is] not without error. The third: an incomplete presentation of the image of God.

St. Gregory Palamas refers to these things in his celebrated letter to the Monk Dionysios.

Let us now come to our own age, making certain comparisons to what took place in the age of St. Gregory Palamas.

At the beginning of the twentieth century an endeavor commenced among Christians of the various “Churches” to come into contact, so that they might one day sort matters out and reunite. The Orthodox Church also participated in this endeavor.

Thus, the so-called inter-Christian or ecumenical dialogue began. The differences were many, and serious at that. It was difficult to find a point of contact. Frictions and polarizations began.

In order for the dialogue to continue, it went from being a dogmatic dialogue to a dialogue of love.

Dogmatic minimalism began; that is, those participating in dialogue were to confine themselves to minimal dogmatic points on which they agreed, or they were to be united and recognize the dogmatic peculiarities of the others.

The “Branch Theory” appeared; that is, that we have a common root and are different branches of the same tree. The theory of “inclusiveness” also appeared; that is, that the Church can contain different Christianities, in a manner of speaking.

For political, diplomatic, and national reasons, and for reasons of necessity and globalization, the inter-Christian dialogue later turned into an **interfaith** dialogue, including monotheistic religions in its initial phase. The Muslim and Jewish belief in one God is considered a significant factor.

The “theological” flummeries, however, continue. All religions lead to the same God. All serve man. All of them contain some truth. In this way, interfaith dialogues were initiated with **religions of every kind and not necessarily monotheistic ones.**

And the decline knows no end!

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THIS raises the question: Where are we headed? Have we forgotten that Christ is the Light of the world (St. John 8:12), the only Way that a person can walk, the Truth and Life (St. John

14:6), and that no one else is a real and true God? Have we forgotten that “the gods of the nations are demons” (Psalm 65:5)? Have we forgotten that Christ did not leave the **idolater** Cornelius (Acts 10), who was pious and lived in fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, to his religion, nor did He say that he would be saved because he led a holy life, regardless of the fact that he was an idolater, but rather He sent an Angel and told him to call Peter to instruct Cornelius in the true Faith?

Christ did the same thing for the eunuch of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians (Acts 8:26-40). This eunuch was a pious Jew and had subjected himself to the labors and dangers of a distant journey to worship in Jerusalem. And though it was midday, and so he should have eaten and gone to sleep or enjoyed the beauty of the landscapes, he was, instead, reading the Prophet Isaiah. And though the carriage was jolting along and it was not easy to read and, what is more, he did not understand what he was reading, he nevertheless continued his reading, full of desire and yearning to understand the meaning of the Prophet Isaiah’s writings. And yet, God did not leave this most reverent Jew to his religion, nor did He say he would be saved because he was so zealous, but instead He sent His Apostle Philip to catechize him.

And this is because Judaism does not believe in a Triune God, or in the Divine nature of Christ, or in the perpetual virginity of the *Theotokos*, or in Icons, and—what is important—it awaited, and still awaits, the Messiah in the form of a worldly, national Messiah, who will come to save Israel in a material way.

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Therefore, what is the value of monotheistic religions and what—still more—is the value of idolatrous religions?

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St. Gregory warns us: you have degenerated into atheists. Will we listen to him?



* Source: *᾽Ορθοδόξος Τύπος*, No. 1670 (22 December 2006), p. 3. Words in bold are the text’s. Publication layout ours.