



The Participation by Patriarch Bartholomew in the Patronal Feast of Papist Rome is Anti-Patristic

2. Concerning the Joint Prayer of the Patriarch and the Pope*

What Synod Will Enforce Adherence to the Canons?

by Protopresbyter Theodore Zissis

PART II

7. The Pope, as a Heretic, Is an Excommunicate

IN HIS INTERPRETATION, in the *Πηδάλιον*, of the Forty-fifth Apostolic Canon, which we cited in Part I, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite first clarifies the word “merely” in the clause “who has merely prayed with heretics.” According to St. Nicodemus, this means that the Sacred Canons prohibit not only concelebration with heretics, but even a simple act of joint prayer.

That is to say, it is not just when one participates in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, either praying or communing, but when one takes part in any service whatsoever, even in a private place, which entails a prayer, that renders him liable and accountable before the Sacred Canons.

This brings to mind, of course, the Tenth Apostolic Canon, which says: "If anyone prays, even in a private house, with one who has been excommunicated, let him also be excommunicated." Now, heretics are *par excellence* excommunicates and excommunicated.

Can anyone with even the slightest knowledge of ecclesiological lore and of the centuries-long schism between East and West seriously maintain that the Pope and those with him are in communion with us? Does not their exclusion from communion of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist render them excommunicate, and therefore subject to all that the Tenth Canon of the Holy Apostles says about excommunicates?

From among the multitude of Patristic assessments of this matter, we will mention what St. Symeon of Thessalonica, the Mystagogue, says in his codification of Orthodox belief in the fifteenth century.

He includes Latin theology among the heresies, in the section "Against Heresies" of his work entitled *Dialogue*, and opines that Latin theology has caused greater damage to the Church than all other heresies and schisms together. He offers a marvelous elucidation and analysis of the reasons why Orthodox eschew communion, not with Popes in general—for we do have commonality with Orthodox Popes and commemorate them as Saints—, but with heretical Popes, who, having ceased to be successors of the latter in the Faith, are not their successors on the Papal throne, either. This is precisely why St. Symeon says that "we not only do not maintain communion" with any particular Pope, "but also call him a heretic."¹ As far as the Orthodox are concerned, the throne of Rome is vacant; it ceased to possess Apostolic Succession from the period when its lapse into heresy and schism became decisive.

With which Pope, therefore, do so many Patriarchs and Archbishops meet, and which Pope do they welcome? One who is

an excommunicate and has no Priesthood—given that a rupture over matters of Faith entails also a rupture in Apostolic Succession?

Are we to alter our ecclesiological and canonical criteria, and are we to employ them only for adjudicating claims to dioceses and thrones?

8. The Canons Prohibit Joint Prayer—Much More So Concelebration

BEFORE WE CITE the interpretation of St. Nicodemos and its concord with other Canons—which we consider indispensable, since it seems that the Sacred Canons are scorned by many and are used only when they happen to suit someone’s purposes—, we must comment on and clarify the justification put forward by many for joint prayers, which have now become *de rigueur*.

Many Orthodox clergy, and also lay people, participate liberally in ecumenical joint prayers, and particularly in countries to which Orthodox Christians have emigrated, but now also within our own ecclesiastical territory. Displays of “Eucharistic hospitality” are organized annually, and, in spite of loud protestations that we have not yet reached the point of communing from a common cup, Eucharistic communion is a frequent occurrence. These things have already become *faits accomplis*; a *de facto* union is gradually being imposed, so that we might become accustomed to it, while, in the meantime, various would-be defenders of the purity and authenticity of the Faith rant and rave about it.

Ecumenists assert, then, that strict and traditionalist clergy and lay people are wrong in protesting such things, because what took place some days ago in Rome, at St. Peter’s Square, is not a concelebration, meaning, of course, that the Sacred Canons prohibit only liturgical concelebration, that is, participation in a joint celebration of the mystery of the Divine Eucharist.

I was astonished when I heard this comment from the lips of two of my colleagues at the School of Theology—one an *emeritus* professor and the other an active professor—during the broadcast of the ceremonies in Rome on the evening of the 29th and the morning of the

30th of June. And it occurred to me that this ecumenist mentality is gradually spreading, since professors of theology, who are supposed to be familiar with the texts and to have studied the sources, are teaching that what the Patriarch is now doing is not something bad and does not go against the Canons, since it does not involve concelebration.

But come now, do the Canons forbid just concelebration, or joint prayer as well?

Indeed—as though the problem were about the prohibition of concelebration. This is as self-evident as it could possibly be, and no discussion or qualification is needed. It goes without saying that this is like forbidding what is already forbidden.

The Canons emphatically prohibit simple joint prayer, as something less than concelebration, and much more, of course, and self-evidently do they prohibit what is greater; namely, concelebration.

Regarding joint prayer, Reverend Fathers and beloved colleagues, we would like you to tell us: Do the Sacred Canons permit it or do they forbid it? “Let a Bishop, Presbyter, or Deacon, who has merely prayed [*συνευξάμενος*] with heretics be excommunicated; but if he has permitted them to perform any clerical function, let him be deposed.”²

A rudimentary knowledge of ancient Greek and ecclesiastical parlance is sufficient for anyone to be certain that *συνευξάμενος* means “having prayed” and not “having concelebrated.” For, if it meant “having concelebrated,” the word “merely” would be superfluous; “who has merely prayed with heretics.” There is nothing higher than concelebration, and consequently the word “merely” would not be needed.

That is precisely how St. Nicodemus interprets this: “The present Canon decrees that any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon who merely joins in prayer with heretics, even if he has not concelebrated with them, should be excommunicated.”³

9. What Happened in Rome Was a Concelebration

THE CANONS FORBIDDING joint prayer, however, are now violated habitually; joint prayer has been going on persistently for decades; for the ecumenists, it has become an ecclesiastical custom.

We have become inured to uncanonical acts, to violations of the Sacred Canons. Therefore, since we have overcome and demolished this minor obstacle, we can now proceed step by step to concelebration.

The ceremonies performed in Rome were not an instance simply of joint prayer—such as, for example, the joint recitation of the “Our Father” by the Archbishop [Christodoulos of Greece—*Trans.*] and the Pope in Athens at the residence of the Papal Nuncio, in May of 2001—but of concelebration, insofar as the service celebrated by the Pope was a liturgy, a celebration of the mystery of the Divine Eucharist.

Liturgy, as we well know, is something unitary and indivisible; all of its elements are mutually connected and integrated as a preparation for the Eucharistic sacrifice, its performance, and its impartation to the Faithful.

In whatever portion of it one participates, he concelebrates and joins in the preparation and performance of the sacrifice, even if he does not partake of the cup.

We have all seen the Patriarch “getting involved,” that is, wearing a Hierarchical *Mandyas*, kissing the Gospel Book, and being escorted by the Papist deacon; and the Pope, for his part, being escorted by the Orthodox Deacon, and the two deacons then separately censing and reading the Gospel, and the Patriarch and the Pope even reciting the Symbol of Faith, the recitation of which, prior to communion of the Precious Gifts, signifies that we have unity of faith and can, as a result, commune in this unity and love in the common cup: “Let us love one another, that we may with one mind confess.”

A necessary consequence of concelebration up to this point is communion of the Divine Eucharist. The opposite entails a distortion of the mystery.

Do we or do we not have unity of faith with the Pope? If we do not, as we indeed do not, then why are we reciting the Symbol of Faith without the *Filioque*, thereby duping the Orthodox? If we do have unity of faith, then why do we not commune together of the Precious Gifts? What precedent is there in the Tradition of our Church for what has been done yet again?

The entrance with the Gospel, the so-called Small Entrance, the readings, the recitation of the Symbol of Faith—are they or are they not parts of the Divine Liturgy? Can we Priests interrupt and not complete the Divine Liturgy? Can we drive away the Holy Angels who attend and concelebrate with us?

In essence, of course, there is no question, here, of a true and valid Divine Liturgy, since the mysteries of heretics are not valid and are deprived of Divine Grace.

Why, then, do we mislead and deceive them [the Latins], leaving them with the impression that we are “Sister” Churches, have the same mysteries, and together administer the same Divine Grace, as stated in the unacceptable Balamand Agreement?

Why deprive them of the opportunity, by our failing to encourage them to come to a crisis, of asking themselves questions, waking up to reality, and ceasing to imagine that they have what it takes to be members of the eternally One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church?

10. Our Forbears Upheld the Sacred Canons

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY of dialogue and rapprochement with the heterodox, without hobnobbing, joint prayers, or concelebrations: simple physical presence, by *oikonomia*, without any participation in prayer or worship.

Constantinople was in dire straits when the Council of Florence-Ferrara took place, a few years before the fall of the city (1437-1439). The entire empire, the Emperor, the Patriarch, hand-picked Hierarchs, Abbots, monks, aristocrats, and officials, knelt at the Pope’s feet with a view to securing the military assistance that they expected, but were never given, even after enduring the humiliation of signing the decree of the Council, which accepted the basic errors of Papism.

Yet, the Greek people, captive and debilitated though they were, maintained their Faith, and did so to the very end, bequeathing it to us, despite the betrayal of the Faith by those who governed the Church and the nation. So many meetings took place over a period of two years, but there was no joint prayer. The Greek delegates were

even concerned about how they should conduct themselves when entering a Papist church.

In his *Ἀπομνημονεύματα* [*Memoirs*], Sylvester Syropoulos preserves what was said in this regard by his spiritual Father, Bishop Gregory, before the latter apostatized to the Latin Church: “When I enter a church of the Latins, I do not venerate any of the saints depicted therein, since I am not familiar with any of them; Christ alone I might perhaps recognize—I do not know what the inscriptions mean, but I make the sign of the Cross and venerate Him. The Cross, therefore, by which I sign myself, that I venerate, but nothing else of what I see there.”⁴

Even when they began theological discussions at a joint consultation, the Latins and the Orthodox prayed separately,⁵ a policy which is maintained even today in some of the theological dialogues.

In the Œcumenical Patriarchate, too, this tradition was known and respected fifty years ago, at a time when there were traditionalist Hierarchs in the Patriarchal Synod who agonized over the extravagant overtures of Patriarch Athenagoras and who included among the terms of the Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical of 1952 the avoidance of participation in worship services with the heterodox:

“It is necessary that Orthodox clerical delegates be as cautious as possible about worship services with the heterodox, as these are contrary to the Sacred Canons and dull the sensitivity of the Orthodox to matters of Faith. They should aim at celebrating, if possible, purely Orthodox services and rites, in order to make manifest thereby the splendor and majesty of Orthodox worship before the eyes of the heterodox.”⁶

II. We Ought to Be Stricter Now

WHY HAS THIS POLICY now been abandoned and not been reinforced even more, as it should have been after all of the syncretistic and unacceptable events that we have seen at recent General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches, which have compelled certain Autocephalous Orthodox Churches to withdraw [from the

WCC—*Trans.*] and many traditionalist Faithful to seek ecclesiastical shelter with the Zealots?

Have the Sacred Canons changed? Is there no longer such a thing as Tradition? Is nothing uncanonical any more? Or are we Orthodox no longer sensitive to matters of Faith?

The vivid and seismic reaction of the Orthodox of Greece during the visit of the Pope to Athens in May of 2001, in a deserted and police-ridden Athens that has never received the Pope—the Archbishop and his circle received him—, demonstrates that the opposite is the case.

What a pity that the shepherds are now proving inferior to the sheep.

12. Epilogue

IN CONCLUSION, as an epilogue, we will cite in its entirety the text of the “Interpretation” of the Forty-fifth Canon of the Holy Apostles and also the “Concord” of the Canon in question with other Canons—both of them products of the pen of St. Nicodemos—, if for no other purpose than to cure the theological and canonical ignorance of those who are less educated.

Interpretation: The present Canon decrees that any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon who merely joins in prayer with heretics, even if he has not concelebrated with them, should be excommunicated. For, anyone who prays with excommunicated persons (as heretics are) should himself be excommunicated along with them, according to the Tenth Canon of the same Apostles. But if he has allowed these heretics to perform any service, as clergymen, let him be deposed. For, any clergyman who concelebrates with those who have been deposed (as heretics are, according to the Second and Fourth Canons of the Third Œcumenical Synod), is himself to be deposed, according to the Eleventh Canon of the Apostles. We should abhor and shun heretics and never pray with them or permit them to perform any ecclesiastical function, either as clergy or as priests.

Concord: The Sixty-fifth Apostolic Canon says that anyone who enters a congregation of heretics in order to pray, if he is a clergyman, is to be deposed; but if he is a layman, is to be excommunicated. The Synod of Laodicæa, in its Sixth Canon, does not allow heretics to enter a Church, and in its Thirty-second it says that one should not receive blessings from heretics, which are absurdities [ἀλογίαι], and not blessings [εὐλογίαι]; and, according to its Thirty-third Canon, one should not pray with heretics or schismatics. Its Thirty-fourth Canon anathematizes those who forsake the Martyrs of Christ and go to the pseudo-martyrs of the heretics. The Ninth Canon of St. Timothy does not permit heretics to be present at the time of the Divine Liturgy, unless they promise to repent and abandon their heresy. Moreover, the Ninth Canon of the Synod of Laodicæa excommunicates Christians who go to the cemeteries or *martyria* of heretics in order to pray or for the sake of healing those of them who are ill. Neither should any Christian celebrate feasts together with heretics or accept gifts sent to him by them on their feast days, according to the Thirty-seventh Canon of the same Synod of Laodicæa.

* Source: Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος, No. 1560 (23 July 2004), pp. 3, 4.

Notes

1. *Dialogue*, ch. 23, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. 155, cols. 120-121.
2. Forty-fifth Canon of the Holy Apostles.
3. *Πηδάλιον* [*The Rudder*] (Athens: "Aster" Publications, 1990), pp. 50-51.
4. *Les "Mémoires" du Grand Ecclésiarche de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439)* [*The "Memoirs" of the Great Ecclésiarch of the Church of Constantinople, Sylvester Syropoulos, Concerning the Council of Florence (1438-1439)*], ed. V. Laurent (Paris: 1971), p. 250.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
6. Basil T. Stavrides, *Ἱστορία τῆς Οἰκουμενικῆς Κινήσεως* [*History of the Ecumenical Movement*] (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute of Patristic Studies, 1996), p. 339.