

A Momentous Step in Anti-Ecumenism

A “Memorandum Concerning Ecumenism”*

The Time Has Now Come for the Complete
Demystification of Ecumenism and the
“Messianic Mission” of the WCC

It is an incontrovertible and very hopeful fact that anti-ecumenism is undergoing a pan-Orthodox awakening and that the critique that is being levelled against the ecumenical movement is constantly gaining ground in quality and in quantity.

Clark Carlton, an American convert to Orthodoxy and a former Baptist, who is also a university professor, admits, in a recent book of his, that

there are many in the Orthodox Church, myself included, who believe that the Church should cease Her participation in the Ecumenical Movement. At the time of this writing, the Churches of Jerusalem and Georgia have withdrawn from the WCC [the Church of Bulgaria has now been added to this number—editorial note in the Greek original], and Church of Serbia is seriously considering [the possibility of] doing likewise. Furthermore, there are strong movements in this direction in Russia, Greece, and the United States.¹

Professor Carlton goes on to point out that “*Based on a simple cost/benefit analysis, it is evident that Orthodox participation in the WCC has produced very little fruit—even among Orthodox.*”¹

To the hitherto “powerful stirrings” in anti-ecumenism we can now add yet another: the “Memorandum Concerning Ecumenism,” which was submitted, on September 23, 1998, to “His Beatitude, Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece.”

The paramount importance of this “Memorandum” is demonstrated, first and foremost, by the fact that it is signed by Abbots from holy monasteries belonging to the Church of Greece, respected and notable clergymen, and university professors; to be precise, the following persons signed it, in order:

(1) Protopresbyter George Metallinos, Professor at the Theological School of the University of Athens; (2) Archimandrite Athanasios (Athnasiou), Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron; (3) Father Athanasios Menas, Presbyter; (4) Demetrios Tselengides, Professor at the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki; (5) Archimandrite Eusebios (Vittis); (6) Archimandrite Theokletos (Bolkas), Abbot of the Holy *Hesychasterion* of St. Arsenios of Cappadocia; (7) Protopresbyter John Photopoulos; (8) Archimandrite Ioannikios (Cotsonis); (9) Archimandrite Cyril, Abbot of the Holy *Hesychasterion* of the Pantocrator, Melissochorion; (10) Constantine Gregoriades, Professor at the University of Patras; (11) Archimandrite Maximos, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St. Dionysios of Olympos; (12) Protopresbyter Sarantis Sarantos; (13) Archimandrite Sebastian (Amanatides), Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St. Paraskeve, Castoria; (14) Archimandrite Spyridon, Abbot of the Holy *Hesychasterion* of the *Theotokos Kecharitomene*; (15) Archimandrite Timothy, Abbot of the

Holy Monastery of the Paraclete; (16) Archimandrite Chrysostomos, Abbot of the Holy *Cænobion* of St. Nicodemos, Goumenissa; and (17) Protopresbyter Lambros Photopoulos.

The importance of the “Memorandum” is likewise evident from a list of the issues that it addresses, which, in seven sections and forty-five pages, covers the entire spectrum of the anxieties felt by pious Orthodox people:

§1 (pp. 8–10): The Orthodox Church and the WCC.

It is noted that “participation by the Holy Orthodox Church in the WCC daily proves detrimental to Her unity.”

§2 (pp. 11–13): Interfaith Ecumenism.

“It is not confined to a discussion of philosophical or social issues. It is advancing to a theological level”; “it overturns the fundamental Christian belief” in a Christ-centered soteriology; “interfaith syncretism relativizes Evangelical truth”; “this [brand of ecumenism—*Trans.*] is also advancing to the level of worship.”

§3 (pp. 13–21): The Orthodox–Catholic Dialogue.

“We also have some very serious questions about the theological dialogues that are being conducted with Papists, Non-Chalcedonians, and other heterodox”; specifically, “with regard to the joint text of the Balamand Agreement, very serious objections have been expressed” by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, the Sacred Community of the Holy Mountain, and other prominent theologians.

§4 (pp. 21–31): Dialogue with the Non-Chalcedonians (Monophysites).

“The Orthodox are deeply troubled by the agreed statements [arising from this dialogue—*Trans.*];” the adherence “of the Non-Chalcedonians to their Monophysite faith” is noted; “very serious reservations” are expressed regarding the “methods” of the “Joint Theological Commission on Liturgical and Pastoral Issues” and its efforts towards “purging” [*i.e.*, deleting anti-Monophysite statements from Orthodox liturgical texts—*Trans.*] and “updating” [*i.e.*, recognizing that the differences between the Orthodox and the Monophysites are, supposedly, merely “semantic” in nature and that both sides adhere to the same Christology—*Trans.*].

§5 (pp. 32–37): The Common Celebration of Pascha.

“The concelebration of Pascha is being promoted without there being any unity in the Faith”; “it is touted as a means for attaining the spurious union to which ecumenism aspires”; “the dulling of the doctrinal sensitivities [of the Orthodox—*Trans.*] must not lead to further syncretistic convergences, such as the concelebration of Pascha”; concelebrating Pascha, while we disagree “on the most important issue, that is, salvation in Christ,” “constitutes schizophrenia, a dichotomy of form and substance” and places us “under the curses and anathemas of the Sacred Canons”; any concelebration of Pascha “would entail (for the Orthodox) yet another step towards the loss of their Orthodox identity.”

It should be noted that in this section (5), there is an affirmation of truly crucial importance, which requires particular attention and scrutiny:

Undoubtedly, the tendency to indulge in idle talk about concelebration with the heterodox began during the twentieth century that has now passed by, when a change in the ecclesiological perceptions of the Orthodox not only occurred, but was also cultivated, that is, ever since the Orthodox began to relinquish the ecclesiological principle, enshrined in the lives of the Saints and the writings of the Fathers, that the Orthodox Church constitutes the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of the holy Symbol of Faith [p. 36].

§6 (pp. 37–46): The Deviations of Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland.

“As a theologian and as a representative of the Orthodox Church in many theological and academic dialogues, Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland has significantly deviated from the Orthodox Tradition and Faith”; “he does not fulfill the prerequisites for making a positive contribution [as secretary in charge of preparation for the future Holy (and Great—*Trans.*) Synod of the Orthodox Church—*editorial note in the Greek original*] to the organization of an Orthodox Synod”; his “dogmatic deviations and misguided ecumenist ventures” are noted; as Co-President of the dialogue with the Non-Chalcedonians, “his ecclesiological views are incompatible with Orthodox ecclesiology”; “he has displayed inter-confessional syncretism in other theological dialogues, too”; “at the epicenter of his theological outlook” lies the un-Orthodox “concept of ‘sister-churches’”; he directs the “Post-Graduate Institute of Orthodox Theology” in Chambésy, Geneva, where the curriculum has an openly ecu-

menist perspective; “in the context of the dialogue with Islam” he has advocated syncretistic views.

§7 (pp. 46–47): The Functioning of the Synodal System.

“The Orthodox ecclesiastical conscience is scandalized because the agreements that have been reached in inter-Christian dialogues up until now do not carry the seal of conciliarity; information on them is not widely disseminated among the venerable Hierarchies of the local Orthodox Churches, and, in general, the Faithful are unaware of the content of these agreements.”

Epilogue (pp. 49–51): Proposals: Measures That Should Be Taken.

“The self-understanding of the Orthodox Church (ecclesiological exclusivity) should be affirmed”; “The Balamand Agreement and the Orthodox–Non-Chalcedonian Joint Statements should be annulled”: various decisions of a liturgical and pastoral nature should not be implemented and the Non-Chalcedonians or Monophysites should not be characterized as “Oriental Orthodox”; “the progress of the dialogues should be discussed more widely, and decisions on such matters should be made by the Hierarchies of the local Churches...”; “participation in the WCC,” “if it is judged indispensable,” “should presuppose the possibility of the Orthodox issuing special statements, as representatives of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.”

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The issues raised by this momentous “Memorandum,” the sobriety of its observations, and its high theological calibre, truly demand the convocation of an extraordinary Synod of the Hierarchy [of the Church of Greece—*Trans.*], which would have ecumenism as the exclusive topic of its agenda.

Since September of 1998, when this historic “Memorandum” was submitted, there does not appear to have been any action in this regard; however, its paramount importance remains unimpaired, and it is having a positive effect on the conscience of Orthodox people: it is increasing prayers and cultivating hope that further steps will be taken.

• *The time has now come, it seems, for the complete demystification of ecumenism and the “messianic mission” of the WCC.*

Notes

¹ *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Press, 1997), p. 220.

* Source: Archimandrite Cyprian, *The Dramatic Crisis in the Ecumenical Movement and the Awakening of Orthodox Anti-Ecumenism* (Etna, California: C.T.O.S., 2000), pp. 137-143.