

# The “Lawful” Character of the Struggle Against the Heresy of Ecumenism\*

## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF OUR SYNOD OF BISHOPS

The Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece is comprised of those Faithful who regard political ecumenism as an ecclesiological panheresy and the New Calendar as a reprehensible innovation, and who have walled themselves off lawfully and canonically from the New Calendarists.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Synod in Resistance believes that the calendar innovation of 1924 divided the Orthodox Church of Greece into those who stand in resistance to the panheresy of ecumenism, and thus form the anti-innovationist plenitude of the Faithful, and the innovating ecumenists, who have violated, by revising the Festal Calendar, the traditional resistance of Orthodoxy to Papism and to heresy in general.

The Old Calendarists in resistance, who have walled themselves off from the (New Calendarist) State Church of Greece, do not constitute an administrative substitute for, or jurisdictional parallel to, the innovating New Calendar Church; nor do they constitute a second Orthodox Church in Greece. Rather, they belong to the Church of Greece, the historical witness of which, rooted as it is in Patristic Tradition and freedom from innovation, they continue in the genuine spirit of Orthodoxy.

As the Confessor and Hierarch, Metropolitan Chrysostomos, former State Church Bishop of Florina (†1955), said: “Hence, we who follow the order of the Festal Calendar as it has been handed down by Tradition, and who honor, as we ought, the injunctions of the Synods and the Apostles, rather than the uncanonical decisions of the [innovating—*Trans.*] Hierarchy, not only do not constitute a distinct schismatic Church, but, in the context of the One Church, have preserved the edicts of the Church’s Traditions and continue both the history and the Orthodox nature of the Autocephalous Greek Church.”<sup>2</sup>

The task of the Holy Synod in Resistance is to inform the People of God about the heretical character of the so-called ecumenical movement, so as to awake the synodal conscience of the Church and to convene a unifying general Synod, with a view to condemning this heresy and restoring the unity of the Orthodox in the Festal Calendar.

The Holy Synod in Resistance considers itself duty-bound to preach without ceasing the glad tidings of “Orthodox and God-pleas-

ing resistance,”<sup>3</sup> doing this with faith and resolve, with discernment and calmness, with humility and love, and in a sober and responsible manner.

The innovating New Calendarist Church, by virtue of Her participation in the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, is following a catastrophic course and will, in time, find it more and more difficult to demonstrate Her fidelity to the Patristic and Synodal Traditions of Orthodoxy, whether in theory or in practice, and, of course, to account for the soteriological ramifications entailed by such participation.

There exists a segment of well-intentioned Faithful in the innovating Church, which turns its gaze with hope towards the anti-innovationist Old Calendar Church and says to Her: “Come hither and help us.”<sup>4</sup>

These individuals place enormous responsibilities on the shoulders of the resisters, who have walled themselves off, responsibilities which are constantly on the increase, since the path of political ecumenism is leading directly to pan-religious ecumenism and the “apostasy” of the last days.<sup>5</sup>

“There is a need, then, for a great and lawful struggle.”<sup>6</sup>

Since political ecumenism is now a fact, characterizing not only the contemporary religious atmosphere in general, but also, more broadly, developments within society, in order for us to carry out an in-depth theological examination of political ecumenism, and to deal with it from an ecclesiastical perspective and “lawfully,” it is vital that we stand on firm ground both in terms of the subject matter and the methodology that we employ.

So many are the factors involved, and so complex is the process of the historical development and theological degeneration of the ecumenical movement, that any oversimplification in confronting it inevitably leads to the classical danger of the “Cyanean Rocks”: on the one hand, tilting at windmills, and, on the other hand, an unhealthy introversion and the loss of Orthodox catholicity.

For this reason, the “lawful” character of the sacred struggle against ecumenism demands a powerful manifesto of the highest quality, which, in our humble opinion, can be condensed, for now, into the following five theses:

(1) We must not, motivated by a zeal “not according to knowledge,”<sup>7</sup> be led into extremes, that is, we should not “become either more lawful than the law or straighter than the rule,” as St. Theodore the Studite says, but should content ourselves with “the teachings and precepts of the Divine Fathers.”<sup>8</sup>

(2) We must understand the sayings of the Fathers correctly and not misinterpret them, led astray by “fanatical impulses,”<sup>9</sup> that is, outbursts of rage that are foreign to genuine zeal, thereby changing over

to “another Gospel”<sup>10</sup> and ultimately falling into “warfare against the Fathers” and “warfare against God,” as St. Theodore the Studite says in another place: “We do not grasp well the voices of the Saints, and as a result we find ourselves waging warfare against the Fathers or, rather, against God.”<sup>11</sup>

(3) It is imperative that we nurture genuine love towards our brothers who are caught up in innovation and heresy, but have not yet been brought to trial, because “zeal for piety is a good thing, but when combined with love,”<sup>12</sup> as St. John of Damascus says; love should impel us to be concerned about their return and salvation, giving them “every exhortation with compassion,” according to St. Basil the Great, “in accordance with the ancient laws of love.”<sup>13</sup>

St. Theodore the Studite is quite adamant that not only is it inadmissible for heretics to be persecuted and killed, but also that “we are not allowed even to pray *against* them,” but should, “rather, pray *for* them.”<sup>14</sup>

(4) Constant vigilance is required, lest the sanctity of the unificationist vision be obfuscated by other priorities, for the primary concern of the plenitude of the Church in resistance is the steady planning and careful coördination of a unifying general Synod.

There is no room, in walling-off, for quietism, or for an unhealthy ecclesiological introversion; rather, it is imperative that we remain open to the catholicity of Orthodoxy, since the struggle against heresy has always been catholic or œcumenical in character; that is to say, Orthodox everywhere have taken part in it.

St. Basil the Great, for example, repeatedly addressed letters to the West, requesting “like-minded” Bishops to “visit,” in order to reconcile those who were “at variance” and to bring back “into friendly union the Churches of God,”<sup>15</sup> which were suffering dreadful turmoil under the tempest of Arianism; in coöperation with other Bishops—and here we see the genuine ecclesiastical mentality at work—he devised a plan involving a “memorandum” by which to persuade “the Bishops from Italy to visit”<sup>16</sup> the East and convene a Synod.

Likewise, the same Holy Father, writing to Bishop Atarbios of Neocæsarea, on the one hand reminded him that, if they did not “undertake efforts equally strenuous on behalf of the Churches as the opponents of sound doctrine make to subvert and utterly destroy them,” then the truth would be lost and they would be condemned for not showing corresponding “care for the unity of the Churches,” and this, indeed, “with all zeal, eagerness in mutual unanimity, and godly agreement”; and on the other hand, he urged Atarbios to drive out of his soul “the idea that you need communion with no one else,” because “to cut one’s self off from contact with the brethren”<sup>17</sup> is not a mark of love or of fulfilling the law of Christ.

(5) It is necessary, as we journey towards a unifying general

Synod, that we unceasingly elucidate and put forth an Orthodox ecclesiology, since political ecumenism is plainly an ecclesiological heresy.

The living Church has a living theology, which is constantly being renewed, and it is this charismatic ecclesiological theology, and certainly not some *barren, provincial anti-ecumenism*, that will form the sure and secure basis for the awaited Synod.

It should not be forgotten that the Holy Fathers of the fourth century—St. Athanasios the Great, St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the Cappadocians, *et al.*—, for example, in the midst of their struggle against heresy and the Arians, Pneumatomachians, and Apollinarians, made marvelously clear the Orthodox teaching on this subject (a teaching which was finally validated and proclaimed by the Second Holy Œcumenical Synod), and bequeathed to us the inestimable wealth of their numerous theological writings.

Now, a charismatic theology can only be cultivated within the boundaries of the Hesychastic and Eucharistic Tradition of our Church, because through neptic purification and continuous Divine Communion, we are led to illumination and deification, in which case we assuredly have an empirical sense of the Church as a “Communion of Deification”<sup>18</sup> and as the “Catholic” Body of our Savior Christ.

With these presuppositions, we are struggling, by the Grace of God, “lawfully,” and our struggle is carried on “for the work of the ministry”<sup>19</sup> and “unto the edifying of the Church.”<sup>20</sup>

## Notes

1. Fifteenth Canon of the First-Second Holy Synod of Constantinople (861, in the time of St. Photios the Great).

2. Metropolitan Chrysostomos (former Bishop) of Florina, *Υπομνήματα-Ἐπιστολαὶ-Ἀπολογίαὶ ἐν σχέσει πρὸς τὸ Ἰουλιανὸν Ἐκκλησιαστικὸν Ἡμερολόγιον* [*Memoranda, Letters, and Apologias Relating to the Julian Church Calendar*] (Athens: 1941), p. 33 («Ἀπολογία εἰς τὸ Ἐφετεῖον Ἀθηνῶν» [“*Apologia to the Court of Appeal in Athens*”], March 29, 1940). See, also, the article on the ecclesiology of Metropolitan Chrysostomos entitled «Ἡ μέρις τῶν Παλαιοημερολογιτῶν δὲν δύναται νὰ ἀποτελῇ ἰδιαίτεράν Ἐκκλησίαν» [“*The Faction of the Old Calendarists Cannot Constitute a Special Church*”], in *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἑνοτασις καὶ Μαρτυρία*, Vol. II, Nos. 24-25 [July-December 1991], pp. 297-300).

3. St. Theodore the Studite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIX, col. 1045D (Epistle I.39: “To Theophilus the Abbot”).

4. Acts 16:9.

5. II Thessalonians 2:3.

6. St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXI, col. 1540B (“Oratio 2, On Baptism,” §9).

7. Romans 10:2.

8. St. Theodore the Studite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIX, col. 1064D

(Epistle I.43: “To His Brother Joseph the Archbishop”).

9. St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. III, col. 1096C (Epistle 8: “To Demophilos the Monk,” §5).

10. Galatians 1:6.

11. St. Theodore the Studite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIX, col. 1484D (Epistle II.155: “To Theophilos of Ephesus”).

12. St. John of Damascus, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1436A (“Against the Jacobites,” §1).

13. St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, col. 557A (Epistle 128: “To Eusebios, the Bishop of Samosata,” §3).

14. St. Theodore the Studite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIX, col. 1484D (Epistle II.155: “To Theophilos of Ephesus”).

15. St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, cols. 433D, 436A (Epistle 70: “Unaddressed, Concerning a Synod”).

16. *Idem*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, col. 428CD (Epistle 68: “To Meletios, the Bishop of Antioch”).

17. *Idem*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, col. 421C (Epistle 65: “To Atarbios”). Atarbios had broken communion with St. Basil the Great and had departed from a Synod which the Holy Father had convened (see Epistle 126: “To Atarbios” [*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, cols. 552-553]).

18. St. Gregory Palamas, “Second Apodictic Discourse Concerning the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” §78 (Συγγράμματα [Writings], ed. P.K. Chrestou [Thessaloniki: 1962], Vol. I, p. 149).

19. Ephesians 4:12.

20. I Corinthians 14:12.

\* Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (2001), pp. 2-6.