On the occasion of an official statement by the new General Secretary of the WCC

Participation in the “World Council of Churches” as an Ecclesiological Heresy*

“Invisible Unity” and “Baptismal Theology”

I. Anxieties and qualms

1. AS IS WELL KNOWN, the “Inter-Orthodox Theological Conference” of Thessaloniki (20-24 September 2004, featuring sixty speakers) issued the following momentous proclamation:

The VERY ACT OF PARTICIPATION in the ‘World Council of Churches’ and in theological dialogues with heretical Papists, Protestants, and Monophysites CONSTITUTES A DENIAL OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CHURCH and an adequation of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church with heresies and schisms. It is, as has been said, THE GREATEST ECCLESIOLOGICAL HERESY IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.¹

2. TO BE SURE, this proclamation is not without precedent: expansive participation in the ecumenical movement, which involves not only the WCC and “dialogues,” but also an unimagi-
ably broad spectrum of inter-Christian and interfaith activities, has been aptly and correctly characterized as “something far worse than a panheresy” (Andreas Theodorou, 1973) and as “the greatest and most grievous blow against the work of redemption, which [Orthodoxy] is called to fulfill in the midst of the modern world” (Konstantinos Mouratides, 1973).

3. WITH REGARD, specifically, to the WCC, the initial anxieties of the Orthodox, both members and non-members thereof, led to the well-known Toronto Statement (Central Committee, 9-15 July 1950), entitled “The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches,” which is reckoned to “constitute the most reliable document to date concerning the nature of the WCC,” “primarily from an ecclesiological standpoint,” and by which, supposedly, “many qualms on the part of the Orthodox Churches were, at least partially, dispelled.”

4. HOWEVER, the Toronto Statement is not only inadequate, but also misleading and, in the end, useless, given the existence of the WCC’s Constitution, with its particular theological bias and manifestly theological character; the propositions of the Statement and of the Constitution are mutually contradictory.

a. “Membership in the World Council does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity”; “[t]he World Council cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the Church” (Toronto Statement).

b. The “Purposes and Functions” of the WCC are “to call the Churches to the goal of visible unity” (Constitution [of the WCC], III.1).

II. Invisible and visible unity

1. NOW, IS NOT the theology of the “invisible unity” of the Church—this supposedly existing unity, which aims, by means of
the ecumenical movement, in general, and of the WCC, in particular, to become “visible”—also included among the “specific doctrine[s] concerning the nature of Church unity” and “particular conception[s] of the Church”?

2. RECENTLY, the new General Secretary of WCC, the Reverend Dr. Samuel Kobia, in a very clear and official way, affirmed the ecclesiological importance of the theology of “invisible unity,” which forms the essential ecclesiological foundation of the ecumenical movement more broadly.

—On 16 June 2005, Dr. Kobia visited the new Pope, Benedict XVI; in the course of his formal salutation, he mentioned, inter alia, the “theme of unity,” in the presence of the Deputy General Secretary, Mr. Georgios Laimopoulos (Church of Constantinople), and also of Archbishop Makarios of Kenya (Church of Alexandria), a member of the Central Committee [of the WCC—Trans.]:

In baptism Christ has made us His own. In making us His own, Christ has bound each of us inseparably to Himself—and to each other. Because it is rooted not in us but in Christ, our bond of unity is unbreakable. We are one in Christ. May all Christians pray and work together, in order that that [sic] our unity may be visible for all the world to see!11

3. THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL content of the theology of “invisible unity” is, therefore, quite evident: We Christians, regardless of dogmatic differences, “are,” according to Dr. Kobia, already “one in Christ”; “Christ has made us His own”; this “bond of unity is unbreakable”; our goal is that “our unity may be visible.”

—This “particular conception of the Church,” this “doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity,” has often been given expression, one way or another, by Protestants and Papists, but, unfortunately, also by Orthodox ecumenists, even though its syncretistic comprehensiveness is completely at odds with the exclusiveness of Orthodox ecclesiology and soteriology.
III. “Invisible Unity” and “Baptismal Theology”

1. IN HIS aforementioned statement, which expressed the collective consciousness of the member-churches of the WCC, its General Secretary, Pastor Samuel Kobia, founded the alleged “invisible unity” of Christians on “Baptism”; consequently, there exists an “invisible Church,” whose “limit” is “Baptism”; there exist “baptismal limits in the Church,” and there exists “baptismal unity.”

2. In 1985, the now Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (Church of Constantinople) set forth with complete clarity an inclusive “Baptismal theology,” which is a kindred form of the Protestant “Branch Theory,” asserting, indeed, that “outside baptism there is no Church,” whereas “within baptism, even if there is a break, a division, a schism, you can still speak of the Church.”

2. THE DIRECT connection between “invisible unity,” which is supposed to become “visible,” and “Baptismal theology,” and their interdependence is so strong in the context of the ecumenical movement that it is promoted, in season and out of season, as the Megale Idea [Great Idea] of the ecumenists, who rush into successive declarations and acts of recognition of “baptism,” but prohibit “rebaptism.”

Apart from Dr. Kobia, who, in the aforementioned address at the Vatican, made mention also of a “mutual recognition of baptism among our member churches,” a large number of testimonies confirm beyond question that both the WCC and the ecumenical movement have a clear ecclesiological identity and self-understanding, which, however, bears no relation to the teaching of the Church Fathers.

3. NEXT, we will cite significant evidence in support of our critical conclusions and in order to demonstrate that there truly now exists a “broad ecumenical world family,” which, in May of 2005, the New Calendarist Archbishop Christodoulos called an “international brotherhood of Churches,” the members of which are already
engaged in a “common witness” and “fulfill together their common calling.”

a. “The Church is one, unique, and united before the Triune God, in Whose Name all of its members are Baptized, thus attaining their justification, regardless of the Confession to which they belong, united with Christ and with each other in a single Body, which cannot be divided into a plurality of bodies” (Ioannes Karmires, 1973).

b. “As members of the body of Christ, we are already united by our common baptism” (Seventh General Assembly of the WCC, Canberra, 1991).

c. “The theology of baptism is what unites us”; “in our search for visible unity we have taken too little from that common baptism in which we all share”; “baptism in the name of the Trinity unites us with God Himself and makes us members of his family” (Anglican Archbishop George Carey, Geneva, 1992).

d. “On each side [i.e., Orthodoxy and Papism] it is recognized that what Christ has entrusted to His Church—a profession of apostolic faith; participation in the same sacraments, above all; the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ; the apostolic succession of bishops—cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches. In this context it is clear that rebaptism must be avoided” (Balamand Union, Lebanon, 1993).

e. “The Sacrament of Baptism, which we have in common, represents ‘the sacramental bond of unity.’ The theological, pastoral, and ecumenical implications of our common Baptism are many and important”; “[T]he ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to re-establish full visible unity among all the baptized” (Pope John Paul II, 1995).

f. “We exhort our faithful, Catholic and Orthodox, to strengthen the spirit of brotherhood, which derives from a single Baptism and participation in the sacramental life...”; “[t]hey [the Pope and the Patriarch] included in
their prayers all those incorporated into Christ on the basis of their Baptism...” (Joint Communiqué of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew, Vatican, 1995).  

**g.** It is necessary to accelerate the process “of restoring our full communion [of Orthodox and Papists], so that the approaching third millennium of the Christian era may find the Church of God visibly united...” (Metropolitan John [Zizioulas] of Pergamon, Vatican, 1998).

**h.** “The Orthodox and Catholic members of our Consultation acknowledge, in both of our traditions, a common teaching and a common faith in one baptism...”; “we also recognize each other’s baptism as one and the same” (Agreed Statement, Crestwood, New York, 1999).

**i.** “Although ecclesiastical communion does not yet exist between our Churches [Orthodox and Protestant], we each regard the other’s members as baptized, and in the case of a change in confession, we refuse to undertake a new baptism. The participants in the dialogue salute the efforts of the Churches in Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen) to reach agreement regarding a mutual recognition of Baptism” (Joint Communiqué, Phanar, 2004).

**j.** “Baptism should be regarded as the only real sacrament of unity, which is recognized by both of the Churches [Protestant and Papist], in spite of their differences on dogmatic issues” (Statement by the German Lutheran Bishop Jürgen Johannesdotter, 2004).

**k.** The “Third European Ecumenical Assembly” (Sibiu, Romania, 4-8 September 2007), for which preparations are being made by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE), will concern itself, inter alia, with the question of the “visible unity of the Churches” (Meeting of the Joint Commission of the CEC and the CCEE), in continuity with the agreement reached at the “Second European Ecumenical Assembly” (Graz, Austria, 23-29 June 1997) about dedication “to the unflagging pursuit of the goal of visible unity” and about exhorting “the churches [members of the CEC] to seek to achieve mutual recognition of Baptism among
all Christian Churches,” in anticipation, no doubt, of the “Charta Ecumenica” (signed in 2001).  

**IV. “Not alienated from God?”**

1. **IT IS** quite evident that the ecclesiological foundations of the WCC, in particular, but also, more broadly, of the ecumenical movement, are the heretical theology of “invisible unity” and the equally heretical “theology of Baptism.”

2. **AWARENESS** of this awful reality fully justifies the ever-memorable Elder Justin (Popović; †1979), who very aptly characterized participation by the Orthodox in the WCC (as “organic members,” to boot!), and also their general stance towards ecumenism, in the following very severe terms: *slavish degradation, pitifully and dreadfully anti-traditional, an embarrassment, un-Orthodox, anti-Orthodox, apocalyptically horrendous, and an unprecedented betrayal!*  

3. **NOW,** how would one characterize a situation such as that today, when the ecumenists claim that their fall to ecumenism, issuing *joint proclamations* and undertaking *common service,* occurs at a pan-Orthodox level and by a pan-Orthodox synodal decision?  

   ‘Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement has always been founded’ ‘on the decisions of the Holy Synods of the local Orthodox Churches, the Pan-Orthodox Consultations, such as the Third Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Consultation of 1986, and the gathering of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches at the Phanar in 1992.’  

4. **FINALLY,** this awareness also justifies those Orthodox who are *walled-off in a God-pleasing manner* from the ecumenists, in the well-founded realization that the innovators are “*alienated from God,*” since they preach “another gospel” “than that [which we] have received” from the Apostles, the Synods, and the Fathers, who teach us with absolute clarity:
Angels do not dare to alter a thing, and if they do alter
something..., they do not remain unanathematized [Ga-
latians 1:8-9]. And so, how can any man in the flesh who
brings about changes and innovations, and especially
such innovations as these, not be alienated from God?\(^{34}\)

**II-12 November 2005 (Old Style)**

*Sts. Theodore the Studite and John the Merciful*


**Notes**

7. See note 5.
10. Tsetses, Οἰκουμενικὰ Ἀνάλεκτα, p. 114. “The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe” (http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/con-e.html. Accessed 22 May 2006).
13. Ibid.
14. The “Great Idea” was an ideology which flourished from the middle of the nineteenth century through the third decade of the twentieth century and which “envisioned the restoration of the Christian Orthodox Byzantine Empire, with its capital once again established in Constantinople, which would be achieved by incorporating within the bounds of a single state all the areas of Greek settlement in the Middle East” (Encyclopedia Britannica).
15. “Address by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia to Pope Benedict XVI,” §5.4.
26. See “Annäherung im Taufverständnis zwischen EKD und griechisch-orthodoxer Kirche” [“Rapprochement in the Understanding of Baptism Between the EKD and the Greek Orthodox Church”] (http://www.ekd.de/orthodoxie/pm183_2004_...
ekd_patriarchat_konstantinopel.html. Accessed 22 May 2006). (This document contains the communiqué of the “13th meeting in the bilateral theological dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, [which] took place between 16th to 22nd September 2004 on the subject of ‘God’s mercy and the salvation of the world’ in the Phanar, the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul” [http://www.ekd.de/bulletin/bulletin4_2004_15.html. Accessed 22 May 2006.)


32. Protopresbyter Stephanos Abramides, “Οἱ Ἀξιώσεις (Desiderata) τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἑκκλησίας ἔναντι τοῦ ΠΣΕ” [“The Desiderata of the Orthodox Church vis-à-vis the WCC”], Ἑκκλησία, No. 4 (April 2005), p. 307a.
