



Apostolic Exhortation Regarding Ecumenism

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+STEPHEN

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and of All Sicily, Southern Italy, and Magna Graecia
Metropolitan of the Americas and Canada of the Italo-Greeks
Bishop of Utica
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To the beloved priests, deacons, monastics, and laity and the entire plentitude of the Most Holy Apostolic and Archiepiscopal Throne of Syracuse, and to all Christians of goodwill: grace and peace from God our Father, the love of Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

We, who by the Grace of God has been raised with the dogmas of piety, and who follow the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in all things, believe that:

The only path to salvation for all men is faith in the Holy Trinity, the work and the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, and their continuance within His Body, the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church.

Jesus Christ is the only true Light that illumines all people. There are no other lights to illuminate us, nor are there any other names that can save us. In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told: "There is no other name under Heaven by which men can be saved" (Acts 4:12).

All other religions and beliefs that ignore and do not confess Christ "having come in the flesh" are human creations that do not lead people to a proper and accurate knowledge of God and rebirth through divine Baptism. Instead, such religions and ideologies confuse and mislead men and lead them to perdition.

For two thousand years, the one Church which Christ founded, and which the Holy Spirit has guided, has remained stable and unshakeable in the salvific Truth taught by Christ, delivered by the Holy Apostles, and preserved by the Holy Fathers. She did not buckle under the cruel persecutions inflicted upon Her by pagans and non-believers during the first three centuries of Her existence. She has brought forth a host of martyrs and emerged victorious, thus proving Her divine origin. As Saint John Chrysostom beautifully expressed it: "Nothing is stronger than the Church... if you fight against a man, you either conquer or are conquered; but if you fight against the Church, it is not possible for you to win, for God is the strongest of all."

Following the cessation of the persecutions and the Church's triumph over Her external enemies, the internal enemies of the Church began to multiply and strengthen. A variety of heresies began to appear that endeavored to overthrow and adulterate the faith once delivered. The heresies caused much confusion and doubt among the faithful. Their trust in the Gospel and traditions of the Church was debilitated.

In outlining the ecclesiastical state of affairs created by the dominance for over 40 years - even administratively - of the heresy of Arius, Saint Basil the Great says: "The dogmas of the Fathers are entirely disregarded; the apostolic traditions withered; the inventions of the youth are observed in the Churches; people are now "logic-chopping" not theologizing; precedence is given to the wisdom of the world, pushing aside the boasting in the Cross. Good shepherds are forced out from the Churches. In their place, cruel wolves and false shepherds are ushered in, dispersing Christ's flock."

That which happened because of external enemies - religions - also happened because of internal ones - heresies. The Church, through Her great and enlightened Holy Fathers, demarcated and marked the boundaries of the Orthodox Catholic Faith with decisions by Ecumenical Councils and the Regional and Local Synods in the cases of specific, dubious teachings, but also with the agreement of all the Fathers (Consensus Patrum), on all the matters of the faith. We stand on sure ground when we follow the Holy Fathers and do not move the boundaries that they have set. The expressions "Following after our Holy Fathers" and "Not withdrawing the boundaries that our Fathers have set" are signposts

for a steady course of spiritual advance and a guardrail for remaining within the Orthodox Catholic faith and way of life.

Consequently, the basic positions of Our Exhortation are the following:

The True Catholic Faith

We maintain, irremovably and without alteration, everything that the holy Nine Ecumenical Councils and the venerable Regional and Local Synods and the Fathers have instituted. We accept everything they accepted and condemn everything they condemned, and we avoid communication with those who innovate in matters of the faith. We neither add, nor remove, nor alter any teaching. Even from the apostolic era, the God-bearing Saint Ignatius of Antioch in his epistle to Saint Polycarp of Smyrna wrote: "Anyone who says contrary to what has been decreed - even if he is trustworthy, even if he fasts, even if he lives in virginity, even if he performs signs and prophecies, let him appear to you as a wolf in a sheep's hide, aspiring to the corruption of the sheep."

St. John Chrysostom, interpreting the Apostle Paul's words, "If any man preaches any other Gospel to you other than that which you have received, let him be anathema" (Galatians 1:9), observes that the Apostle "did not say if they should proclaim something contrary or if they should overturn everything, but that even if they should preach even the smallest thing that has not been delivered to you, even if they should simply propose it, let them be anathema."

Upon announcing its decisions against the Iconoclasts to the clergy of Constantinople, the 7th Ecumenical Council wrote: "We have followed the tradition of the Catholic Church, neither loosening the matters of faith nor making any superfluous addition, but, having been taught in the apostolic manner, we maintain the traditions we have received, accepting and respecting everything that the Holy Catholic Church has received from the first years, unwritten and written... for the true and straightforward judgment of the Church does not make any allowance for innovations within Her, or for attempts to remove anything. We, therefore, by following the laws of our Fathers, having received Grace by the one Spirit have duly safeguarded, without any innovations and reductions, all the things of the Church."

Along with the Holy Fathers and the Councils and Synods, we too reject and anathematize all the heresies that appeared during the historical course of the Church. Of the old heresies that have survived to this day, we condemn Arianism (still surviving, in the sect known as Jehovah's Witnesses) and Monophysitism - the extreme form of Eutychius and the more moderate form of Severus and Dioscorus - according to the decisions of the 4th Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon and the Christological teaching of

the great Holy Fathers and Teachers such as Saints Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Photios the Great and the hymns of our worship.

Regarding Islam

As Christians who believe in the Holy Trinity, we do not have the same God as any of the religions, especially with the so-called monotheistic religion of Islam, which does not confess Jesus Christ as true God, and which does not believe in the Holy Trinity.

We reject utterly the heresy and blasphemy that Orthodox Catholic Christians worship the same god as that of the Muslims. We also reject the preposterous proposition and heretical belief held by the Muslims that the Quran, the so-called Holy Book of Islam, is a third testament to revelation after the Old and New Testaments.

We denounce the blasphemy of the Muslims that denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and which asserts that the Most Holy and Most Pure Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is not the Mother of God.

Regarding Roman Catholicism

We proclaim that the Roman Catholic Church, known to all the Church and to the entire world as the Great and Holy Apostolic See of Rome, founded by the all-laudable and rightly honorable Prince of the Apostles, Peter, who presides in love and charity in Christ's Holy Church and whose place as Protos among all God's holy Churches has been consecrated by the blood of thousands of martyrs, first among whom are the holy and all-laudable Apostles Peter and Paul themselves, and sealed by the acts and decrees of the Holy Ecumenical Councils and Regional and Local Synods of the Orthodox Catholic Church, has fallen into a state of error, causing great confusion and loss of faith among the people of God of the Church of Rome.

Since the election of Pope Francis (Jorge Bergoglio) in 2013, Roman Catholicism has deviated even further from the Apostolic Faith once for all time handed down to the saints, to the extent that it no longer comprises a continuance of the ancient Church of the West.

Indeed, the present Pope has abdicated his role as vicar of Christ, as that term and role is understood and used in the Orthodox Catholic Church, and no longer speaks in the Name of Christ, who is the Head of the Church or with His authority. The Pope speaks rather, on his own behalf to garner for himself the praise, approval, and friendship of men.

Through Pope Francis, the Roman Catholic Church has introduced teachings and practices that are in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the basic laws

and ordinances of God. It has adopted and introduced into the life of the Church pagan Eastern religious practices and methods of prayer and meditation. It has, and continues to introduce, additional innovations into Divine worship that profane the sacred nature of the latria due to Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It has essentially ruined the Mass (Divine Liturgy) by making it a human-centered act rather than a God-centered act.

As regards ecumenism, the Pope of Rome has set down the foundation for the reunification of all religions based upon the erroneous and heretical belief that all religions worship and honor the same God.

The current papacy in the Church of Rome advocates that all men are joined together as one human family simply by the reality of that common humanity, without any relation or reference whatsoever to the call to grace in and through Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and Salvation for all men.

Dogmatic minimalism on the part of Pope Francis, as well as other Bishops and theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, has led the Church of Rome to a diminishing of moral requirements and absolutes in favor of worldly acclaim and approval. Rather than being the voice of Truth as well as the teachers, defenders, and guardians of God's laws in the human realm, the Pope and many of the Roman Catholic Bishops have chosen instead to abdicate their moral authority and the sacred offices entrusted to them by Christ, the only Head of the Church, in favor of human accolades and financial gain.

The failure of the present Roman Pontiff, the visible symbol of unity for the entire Christian Church throughout the world, to be the voice of Christ and the Universal Church to all nations and peoples, a place accorded to him by the Church as "first among equals" has created a well-spring of division, doubt, and contrary thoughts and beliefs among the people of God everywhere.

The current incumbent of the most venerable and holy Throne of Peter no longer confirms the brethren in their faith, but rather sows the seeds of disunity, heresy, and confusion among the faithful without remorse or concern for the salvation of their souls.

The deliberate breaking of the bond between dogmas and reality by the present Pope has exacerbated a loss of faith and belief among the clergy of the Church of Rome, a sad and unfortunate process that began with the erroneous interpretations of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, that has infected many of the faithful of the Church of Rome since the Council's close.

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a radical change in Roman Catholicism, the most significant of which has been a radical turn towards Protestantism, relativism, and even adoption of various "spiritual" movements of the "New Age."

The present Roman Pontiff, rather than building up Christ's Church on earth, and firmly establishing and ruling that portion of the Kingdom of God on earth entrusted to Him by divine mandate, seeks to destroy God's Holy Church and all that She stands for by removing Christ as Head of the Church and subjecting Her to the power of the princes and rulers of this world.

We Orthodox Catholic Christians have communion with the pre-schism Popes, and we commemorate many Roman popes as Saints. However, we hold with great suspicion and regard with great concern the papacy of the present Roman Pontiff, His Holiness, Pope Francis.

We believe Pope Francis, the current incumbent of the Most Holy and Apostolic Throne of Rome, consecrated the first See of Christendom by the blood of Saints Peter and Paul shed in martyrdom for the Holy Faith, to be in grave error and that many of his teachings, pronouncements, writings, and positions are ambiguous and flirt dangerously close to heresy.

We, therefore, in charity and love and out of concern for the Church of Rome and the salvation of the souls of Her faithful children, call Pope Francis and all those Bishops, clergy, and faithful who believe and practice as he does, to account, repentance and conversion and we exhort him and them to restore the most venerable and holy Church of Rome to the fulness of the Catholic Faith, which subsists in its entirety in the Orthodox Catholic Church.

The Protestant Confessions

The Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church does not maintain any relations with any of the Protestant Communions. It is expressly forbidden for clergy and faithful of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church to participate or attend the prayer or worship services of the many and various Protestant faith communities. We believe these communities not only to be in grave error but in heresy.

Protestantism has rejected Tradition accepting Holy Scripture (Sola Scriptura), which it misinterprets: it has abolished the Holy Priesthood as a unique Mystery (Sacrament), as well as the veneration of the Saints and of the holy Icons; it has failed to honor, or even, in some cases, slighted the person of the Most Holy Theotokos (Mother of God); it has discarded monasticism; among the Holy Mysteries, it accepts only Baptism and the Divine Eucharist, which are understood in a way that deviates sharply from the teaching and the practice of the Church; it teaches such things as absolute predestination (Calvinism) and justification through faith alone. Furthermore, its more "progressive" sector has introduced Priesthood for women and marriage between homosexuals -whom

they even accept into the ranks of the clergy. But above all, it lacks a proper ecclesiology, because the Orthodox Catholic understanding of the nature of the Church does not exist among them. The only way that our communion with heretics can be restored is if they renounce their delusion and repent, so that there may be a true union and peace: a union with the Truth, and not with delusion and heresy.

We utterly reject any attempt by any individual or group that advocates the idea that we have a common baptism with heretics (baptized outside the Orthodox Catholic Church and by *economia* the Catholic Church, the Polish National Catholic Church, and the Oriental Orthodox Churches). While we may acknowledge the baptism of heretics baptized in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity and done in accordance with the holy tradition of the Church, we do not acknowledge or affirm them as members of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Indeed, upon this nonexistent baptismal unity, there are those who want to base the unity of the Church, which supposedly exists wherever a baptism may exist, upon a false understanding of a common baptism that exists only within the Church. One enters the Church, however, and becomes a member thereof, not with just any baptism, but only with the "one baptism", that uniformly performed baptism, officiated by priests who have validly and legitimately received the Holy Priesthood of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

As long as the heterodox continue to remain in their errors, we avoid communion with them, especially in common prayer. All those holy canons which address the matter of common prayer are unanimous in prohibiting not only common officiating and common prayer in the temple of God, but even ordinary prayers in private places. The Church's strict stance toward the heterodox springs from true love and sincere concern for their salvation, and out of Her pastoral care that the faithful be not carried away by false hope, sentimentality, or heresy. Whosoever loves, reveals the truth, and does not leave the other in falsehood; otherwise, any love and agreement with him would only be counterfeit and false. There is such a thing as a good war and a bad peace: "...for a praiseworthy war is superior to a peace that separates one from God" says Saint Gregory the Theologian.

St. John Chrysostom recommends: "If you should see devoutness infringed upon, do not prefer a oneness of mind to the truth, but stand fast until death... in no way betraying the truth". And elsewhere, he recommends with emphasis: "Do not accept any false dogma on the pretext of love." This stance of the Fathers was also adopted by the great defender and confessor of the Orthodox Catholic Faith against the Latins, Saint Mark of Ephesus, who concluded his own Confession of Faith in Florence with the following words: "All the teachers of the Church, all the Councils and all the divine Scriptures exhort us to avoid heretics, and to refrain from communion with them. Therefore, am I to disregard them all, and follow those who under the pretense of a manufactured peace strive for union? Those, who have counterfeited the sacred and divine Symbol of Faith (The Creed) and

who introduced the Son as the second cause of the Holy Spirit? [...] May this never happen to us, benevolent Comforter (Paraclete), and may I never fall away from my own duteous thoughts, but by following Thy teaching and the blessed men who were inspired by Thee, may I be added to my fathers, by bringing in, if nothing else, this: devoutness."

Up until the beginning of the 20th century, the Church has steadfastly and immutably maintained a dismissive and condemnatory stance towards all heresies, as clearly formulated in the Synodicon of Orthodoxy which is recited on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Heresies and heretics are anathematized, one by one; furthermore, to ensure that no heretics be left out of the anathema, there is a general anathema at the end of the text: "Let all heretics be anathematized."

Unfortunately, this uniform, the steady, and unswerving stance of the Church up until the beginning of the 20th century has begun to be progressively abandoned, following the Encyclical that was released by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920, "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere," which for the first time officially characterized heresies as "churches" that are not alienated from the Church, but are familiar and related to Her. It recommended that "the love between the Churches should above all be rekindled and reinforced, and they should no longer consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of Christ and 'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ.'"

Sadly, the door was opened, and it remains open, for the adoption, shaping, and development of the heresy of false ecumenism within the sphere of the Orthodox Catholic Church - this "pan-heresy," initially of Protestant inspiration, now with Papal acceptance, adopts and legalizes all heresies as 'churches' and assaults the dogma of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This new dogma regarding the Church, this new ecclesiology, is now developed, taught, and imposed by Popes, Patriarchs and Bishops. According to this new teaching, no Church is entitled to demand for itself exclusively the designation of the catholic and true Church. Instead, each one of them is a piece, a part, and not the entire Church; they all together comprise the Church.

All the boundaries set by the Fathers have fallen; there is no longer a dividing line between heresy and Church, between truth and delusion. Heresies are also 'churches' now; in fact, many of them are considered on equal footing with the Orthodox Catholic Church. Under the banner of the heresy of false ecumenism, all things are relative. The goal of those who practice false ecumenism is not to teach and proclaim the eternal truths, but to change the eternal truths so that they do not inconvenience or otherwise obstruct an individual's or society's exercise of freedom and happiness.

The Grace of the Holy Spirit now also exists within heresies, and therefore their baptisms are - like all the other Mysteries - considered valid. All who have been baptized into a heretical group are now considered members of Christ's Body, the Church.

The condemnations and the anathemas of the Nine Ecumenical Councils and the Regional and Local Councils and Synods of the Orthodox Catholic Church are no longer valid and should be stricken from liturgical books. We are now expected to join and be an active part of the "New World Order" and the "New World Religion." We are expected now to betray without hesitation our ecclesiastical self-awareness. We are being told that the dogma regarding the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church - the dogma of "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism" is offensive, exclusionary, and divisive; that it is not compatible with the Great Reset to which many governments of the world have adopted as a better path to harmony, peace, and justice among the peoples and nations of the world.

This inter-Christian syncretism has now expanded into an inter-religious syncretism, which equates all religions with the unique knowledge of and reverence for God and a Christ-like way of life - all revealed from on high by Christ. Consequently, it is not only the dogma of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in relation to the various heresies that are being attacked, but also the foundational and unique dogma of revelation and salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ in relation to the religions of the world. It is the worst delusion, the greatest heresy of all ages.

We believe and confess that salvation is possible in Christ alone. The religions of the world, but also the various heresies do not lead man to salvation. The Orthodox Catholic Church is not merely the true Church; She is the only Church. She alone has remained faithful to the Gospel, the Nine Ecumenical Councils, the venerable Regional and Local Synods, and the Fathers, and consequently She alone represents the true Catholic Church of Christ.

Regrettably, the heresy of false ecumenism has been embraced and accepted by many Orthodox Catholic patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, clergymen, monks, and laity. They teach it, "bareheaded." They apply it and impose it in practice, communing with heretics in every possible manner - with common prayers, with exchanges of visits, with pastoral collaborations - thus essentially placing themselves outside the Church. Our stance, per the Conciliar canonical decisions and per the example of the Saints, is obvious. Each one must now assume his responsibilities.

There are of course collective responsibilities also, and chiefly in the ecumenistic conscience of our hierarchs and theologians, towards the Orthodox Catholic people (pleroma) and their individual flocks. To them, we declare with a fear of God and with love that this stance of theirs and their involvement in false ecumenical activities are condemnable from every aspect, because:

- a) They actively impugn our Orthodox-Patristic Tradition and Faith;
- b) They are sowing doubt in the hearts of their flock and unsettle many, leading

- them into division, disunity, and schism, and
- c) They are luring a portion of the flock into delusion, and thus, to spiritual disaster.

We, therefore, declare that, for all the reasons set forth in this Confession of Faith, those who endeavor within this false and dangerous ecumenical irresponsibility, whatever rank they may hold within the Church Body, contradict the tradition of our Saints and thus we stand in opposition to them. For this reason, their stance must be condemned and rejected by the entirety of the hierarchy and faithful of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

Let God witness and judge!

Amen.

+ Archbishop Stephen