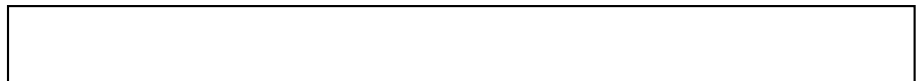


# **On the recognition of universal primacy for the Pope of Rome during the first millennium (Archmandrite George, Abbot of the Sacred Monastery of Hossios Gregorios of the Holy Mountain)**

**Date :** 16 Οκτωβρίου, 2009

Holy Mountain, 22 September 2009

The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholics will be convening in Cyprus this October, in order to discuss the subject: «The role of the Pope of Rome in the communion of the Churches during the first millennium». The matter was brought up by the same Commission in the familiar Ravenna Document (2007) and is summarized in the question: What was the role of the bishop of Rome during the first millennium, when there was communion between the Churches of the East and the West, and how should the teaching of the Vatican I and II Synods regarding the universal primacy of the Pope (para.45, detailed below) be understood?



The outcome of the said Convention is causing consternation to our pious people, because the Vatican's diplomacy has created the following prerequisites, which forbode anti-Orthodox developments.

In July of 2007 Pope Benedict XVI in a Vatican Directive had characterized the Orthodox Churches as ecclesologically "deficient", and that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church **"subsists in the Catholic Church"**. In footnote No.1 (below) of the Ravenna Document the Roman Catholic delegation crossed that line, whereas the Orthodox delegation confined itself to stressing the self-awareness of the Orthodox Church as comprising the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church



In other words, while the Roman Catholic side had boldly echoed the ecclesiology of the Vatican II Synod, (that it recognized only certain elements of the true Church in the Orthodox Church), the Orthodox did not dare to state that the Roman Catholic church is heterodox -to say the least- when the proper thing would have been for them to express with clarity what we believe about it: that "the now Roman Church is one of innovations, of adulteration of the writings of ecclesiastic Fathers and of the misinterpretation of the Holy Bible and the Oroi of the holy Synods; for which reason, it was justifiably and rightly renounced and will still be renounced, as long as it persists in its fallacy»[\[1\]](#).

In the Ravenna Document, the primacy and conciliarity in the Church are being discussed, pursuant to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians having "mutually agreed upon and confirmed the ecclesial character of both churches (with Apostolic faith, valid introductory Sacraments, Priesthood and Eucharist, and with Apostolic Succession), based on the joint statements of Munich, Bari and Balamand.

**«On the basis of these common affirmations of our faith ...», they characteristically note (para. 2, 3), even though the said common statements have not received any Conciliar approval, by any of the Orthodox Churches.**



The Orthodox are discussing the primacy as though the Roman Catholic church is an Orthodoxizing local Church, without taking into account that synods and Fathers have perennially regarded it as cacodox and heretical.

Saint Gregory Palamas wrote about the Filioque and its consequences: **«Such are the depths of Satan - the mysteries of the evil one»**, and he concludes immediately after, as a God-enlightened pastor of the Church: **«But we, having been taught by the divine wisdom of the Fathers to not ignore its inferences as something whose principle is entirely obscure to the many, shall never accept you (the Latins) as communicants, for as long as you say the Spirit is also from the Son»**[\[2\]](#)

Saint Mark of Ephesus also stresses very emphatically: **«From where, therefore, did they suddenly appear before us as orthodox - they, who have for so many years and by so many Fathers been judged to be heretics?»**[\[3\]](#).

Four hundred years later, the Patriarchs of the East with the Conciliar Encyclical of 1848 once again proclaimed: **«It is for this, that our one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church - by following in the tracks of the holy Fathers, both the eastern ones and the western ones - had in the past, during the time of our Fathers, proclaimed - and is proclaiming once again today synodically - that this unprecedented belief (that the holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND the Son) is essentially a heresy and its followers heretics, whoever they may be, per the aforementioned Conciliar decision of the holy Pope Damasus; and that the congregations that they form are heretic ones, and every spiritual and religious communion of the Orthodox children of the Catholic Church with such as them is irregular, and in fact by virtue of the 7th Canon of the 3rd Ecumenical Synod (para. 5)»**[\[4\]](#).

Even His Beatitude the Most Holy Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had stated on the 1st of October 1997 from the official rostrum of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki that:

**««...Two single words [OODE note: *he means the "Filioque": "and Son"*] can overturn the entire structure of the world and justify the infallibility and the authority of one individual on earth. The sense of freedom that Christ freed us with, does not allow the Eastern Orthodox Church to accept Her absolute submission to the will of one individual, and for that reason refuses to acknowledge the uprightness of those two words, upon which that one individual strives to support his power.»**[\[5\]](#).

What possible planning could obligate the Orthodox Churches in the Theological Dialogue to embark on discussions regarding the Primacy of the

Pope, by bypassing the opinions of Saints and Synods - and even that relatively recent statement by His Beatitude the Patriarch - as though the Roman Catholics comprise a Church of the same beliefs?

The Joint Commission (Ravenna Document para 2) directs to the Balamand Statement (1993), which has equated the Roman Catholic church to the Orthodox Church, by acknowledging valid Sacraments, Apostolic Succession, and the confessing of the Apostolic Creed, even though only nine (9) local Orthodox Churches were present and official ecclesiastic bodies such as the Sacred Synod of the Church of Greece had rejected it as unacceptable. The Orthodox representatives nevertheless went ahead and signed the Ravenna Document.

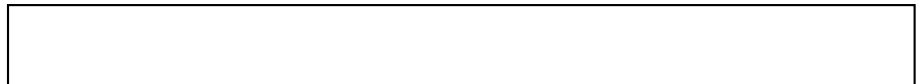
While Unia remains in place and is being fortified thanks to the ecclesiological cover of the Vatican, the Orthodox are retreating more and more on this matter. First we accepted the presence of Uniates in the dialogue, despite the contrary decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Conventions, then we agreed to the resumption of the dialogue (2006), in spite of the audacious papal intervention during the Baltimore Convention (2000) in favour of Unia. Now we are still continuing with the dialogue, and even though the Pope has re-confirmed Unia in various ways, we Orthodox are compromising with the presence of Uniates in official meetings between Orthodox and Roman Catholics.

The holy Fathers would theologize and act, «following behind the holy fathers». Nowadays, it is the academic theologians among the initiators of the theological discussion panels who publicly declare that the Orthodox must transcend the Holy Fathers, in order to attain the union with the Roman Catholics (Meeting of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki School of Theology, 20/5/2009)

All the above justify our concerns and are clearly indicative of the Vatican's excellent planning of the course of the Theological Dialogue, and that with the Ravenna Document, it has created the prerequisites for us Orthodox to acknowledge that the Pope of Rome already had universal primacy during the

first millennium.

The bases for the discussion of the aforementioned issue have been laid in the Ravenna Document. These bases are regarded by the Joint Commission for the Dialogue as «**a firm basis for future discussion of the question of primacy at the universal level in the Church**» (para.46, below).



And yet, that "basis" is not at all "firm" - which forebodes that the conclusions to be reached in October will range from precarious to dangerous. The reasons are as follows:

**First.** It has already been agreed in Ravenna that during the first millennium the primacy did in fact exist, and at a universal level, and that the Pope of Rome was the first in rank among the patriarchs of the ancient pentarchy (para.43)



**43. [...] Concerning primacy at the different levels, we wish to affirm the following points:**

**1. Primacy at all levels is a practice firmly grounded in the canonical tradition of the Church.**

**2. While the fact of primacy at the universal level is accepted by both East and West, there are differences of understanding with regard to the manner in which it is to be exercised, and also with regard to its scriptural and theological foundations.**

**We wonder:** Will the primacy of the bishop of Rome be interpreted in an

Orthodox manner - that is, **ONLY** as a primacy of **honour**, with the commemoration of his name cited first in the Diptychs, and as the one presiding over the Ecumenical Synods, or will the term be given a Pope-centered content of an "active role" and "prerogatives" beyond the aforementioned ones? (paras. 42, 44);

**Second.** In the Ravenna Document mention is made of an '**ecclesiology of koinonia**', in the framework of which the role of the bishop of Rome during the first millennium must be understood (para.45).

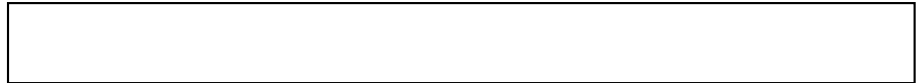
**We wonder:** Will the fact that the communion of the ecclesiastic Sees of both the East and the West during the first millennium was securely based on the un-innovated Apostolic Faith - in spite of the heretical teaching of the Filioque that was brewing in the West - be taken into account, or will the **unity in the diversity**» of the dogmas be understood as an **«ecclesiology of communion»**, and the dogmas be understood as **«differing theological approaches of the same truths of the faith»**?

**Third.** In the Ravenna Document it is mentioned that in the East and the West, the universal primacy was understood, established Scripturally and theologically and was exercised in a different manner (para.43 above)

**We wonder:** Will this mention constitute a reason and an opportunity for the Orthodox to articulate an Orthodox invitation during the Cyprus Convention to the Roman Catholics, so that they might see the Pope's primacy with those Orthodox hermeneutic prerequisites which had secured in the East a balance between conciliarity and authority, or will the Roman Catholic side be allowed to uphold its own prerequisites, which had led to the dogmas of Primacy and Infallibility in the Vatican I and II Synods?

**Fourth.** The Ravenna Document states that Orthodox and Roman Catholics **«disagree on the interpretation of historical evidence»**, which pertains to

and interprets «**the prerogatives of the bishop of Rome as protos** » (para. 41 below).



**We wonder:** Will we Orthodox remain faithful to the hermeneutic guideline of the Holy Fathers, which had preserved the Orthodox Faith and the Conciliar polity in the East intact, or will we compromise for the sake of a dubious «unification of the divided Christian world», based on some roman-centered re-interpretation of the «**historical evidence of the first millennium**» and be subsequently led with mathematical accuracy to the «**teaching of the first and second Vatican synods on the matter of universal primacy, in the light of (the now reinterpreted) ecclesial practice during the first millennium**» (para.45 above) ?

The Papist ankyloses in their interpretations of the «**historical evidence of the first millennium**» are only too familiar (see for example Dositheus of Jerusalem, Dodecabiblos), so that any retreat whatsoever by the Orthodox theologians from the Roman Catholics' arguments for some of those interpretations would be a dangerous one.

We would like to present some of those historical facts, indicatively:

**1. The «testimonies» of Christian literature regarding the «office of Peter».** We wonder if these testimonies are going to be interpreted in the Papist manner, the way that Papal Decrees have been doing until now, or, in

an Orthodox manner, the way that the works of the holy Fathers and Conciliar opinions have recorded them? Will the Orthodox remain faithful to those opinions (for example of the years 1848 and 1895), or will they give in to theological innovations - like the assertion that the canonical tradition of the Church during the first millennium contains the idea of primacy for the bishop of Rome, in the "office of Peter" ?

**2. The «testimonies» regarding the «appealing» of all the bishops of the entire Church to the Roman See and its bishop.** We wonder if these testimonies will also be interpreted in accordance with the canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, which gives the prerogative of appealing to the exarchs of ecclesiastic administrations (the patriarchs) and for matters of greater importance to an **ecumenical synod** - or, in accordance with the Papal tradition, which requires that all its bishops appeal to the Pope of Rome, thus leading to the conclusion that for the Easterners also, the See of Peter has played an important role in matters of appeals?

**3. The «testimonies» regarding roman authority in matters of the Faith or the interpretation of the Scriptures.** We wonder if they will take into account the instances of heretic popes that have been recorded by History, which have debunked Papal Infallibility, or, will they find a way to justify that notorious dogma of the Vatican I Synod?

We hope that the Orthodox representatives involved in the Theological Dialogue in Cyprus will uphold the word of the Truth and help the Roman Catholics understand that **a true communion with the Orthodox Church presupposes a congruence of Faith** and does not permit any kind of «otherness» (diversity) in dogmas, and that for this reason, they must renounce the heretic dogmas of the Filioque, of created Grace, of Primacy and Infallibility, of immaculate Conception etc.; and to also discard the secular spirit of the Vatican and embrace the divine-human ethos of the Orthodox Church.

We hope that the Orthodox theologians will not be agreeing to the existence

of a universal papal Primacy during the first Christian millennium - whether as a primacy of power or as a supposed office of ministry. We fear that if this does occur, there will be uncontrollable schismatic moves within the body of the Church. The faithful Orthodox people will come to realize that they are being forced into a new, Uniate type of union with Rome.

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[01]. Conciliar, Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895 (para.20), in the work by John Karmiris, *"The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church"*, Vol. II, Graz-Austria 1968, page 942 [1028].

[02]. On the procession of the Holy Spirit, Demonstrative Word A', in: *Writings by Gregory Palamas*, Pan. Christou publications, Thessaloniki 1962, page 26.

[03]. Saint Mark of Ephesus, To those in all the world..., in the work by John Karmiris, *"The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church"*, Vol. I, Athens 1960, p. 426.

[04]. John Karmiris, *"The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church"*, Vol. II, Graz-Austria 1968, page 908 [988].

[05]. See Volume "HE HATH VISITED US" (Patriarchal Visits to the co-regnant City, 1997-1999-2000), published by the Sacred Metropolis of Thessaloniki, 2000, σελ. 275.

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*Translation: K.N.*

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