

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 : Οκτωβρίου 16, 2009

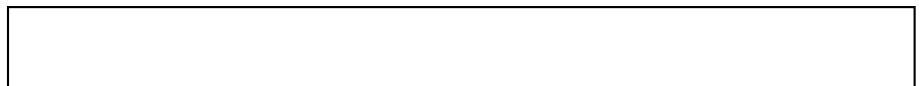
Holy Mountain, 22 September 2009

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 ecclesiologicaly "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 Batholomew 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)

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