

«One must not pray together with heretics or schismatics» An approach to the precise practice (akrivia) of the Church (By fr. Anastasios Gotsopoulos, Parish Priest of Saint Nicholas' Church of Patrae)

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**What does «common prayer» involve?
Why should we «not pray together»?**

From as early as Apostolic times, according to the teaching of our Church, heresy has had devastating effects on Man. It has isolated him from God and led him into perdition. That is why the Lord Himself and His Apostles are especially austere with «heresies of perdition»^[1].

The Fathers of the Church have always alerted us to this great danger, and, in adherence to all the Apostolic admonitions^[2], they call upon Christians (mostly those who are not yet fully familiarized with the faith) to **not** associate with heretics, because the danger threatening their salvation is certain.^[3]

Unfortunately, there are many who –albeit lacking any essential association with the spirit of the Fathers and the life of the Church– imagine that behind prohibitions such as these lurks a hatred and hostility of the Church towards the persons of heretics. Saint Nectarios, however, very succinctly summarizes the Orthodox teaching and exhorts us thus: «Turn away from faithlessness and heresy and schism: not from the faithless or the heretic or the schismatic - **not the person**. Abstain from the opinion, not from nature. As far as opinion is concerned, it is something alien and different; it is condemned to encounter aversion and hatred. As for nature, it is a familiar and close thing; it is deserving of mercy and sympathy and quite often, (deserving) of guardianship and care»^[4]. «The prohibitions pertaining to the various forms of association with heretics essentially sprang from **the Church's love**. In other words, the Church strove on the one hand to protect Her more robust members from the soul-destroying sickness of the cacodox and on the other hand, to alert the latter (the cacodox) with this stance of Hers and make them realize they are on the wrong path. **Abstinence, therefore, from any communication with them, was simultaneously of an educational character also**»^[5].

When studying Patristic teaching on one's association with heretics, we notice that our Saints are especially austere and categorical in their **prohibition of communication with heretics or schismatics**^[6] in matters of **Worship and common prayer**. Patristic references on the issue are multitudinous^[7]. We shall not

refer to the Patristic testimonies in this article, but confine ourselves exclusively to the **Canonical Tradition of our Church** on the issue of common prayer with heretics; in other words, we shall focus on the **precise adherence** (akrivia) to the Sacred Canons.

A. What common prayer is and what it isn't

But what does the term “common prayer” mean? In ancient Hellenic literature, according to John Stamatakos, the term “**συνεύχομαι**” means “I wish (pray) in common with someone; I join my wishes with his” [8]. In **Patristic literature**, according to G.W.H.Lampe[9] the term “**συμπροσεύχομαι**” means “I pray together, pray with”, while the term “**συνεύχομαι**” means (a) “I pray with” (pray together with) and also (b) “I wish one well”.

Furthermore, we can say that we have a case of “common prayer” when:

- 1. there is a coinciding of the place and the time of prayer** [10] (a necessary, but not a strong prerequisite).
- 2. there is a common desire for the same purpose of performing prayer** [11] (a strong and necessary prerequisite).
- 3. we participate in the development of prayer, through the observance of a common schedule of worship;** i.e., when the content of benedictions or hymns is common; when there is a common response to the commands of the officiating minister^[12], and also when the clergymen’s liturgical attire is common. (an able, but not a necessary prerequisite)
- 4. In conclusion: When, with our overall stance** (words, works, behavior), **we strive to give the impression to others that we too desire to participate in their worship.**

In accordance, therefore, with the above, **we cannot say that common prayer is taking place** when we have a case of someone visiting or observing a certain religious ceremony, **only** for scientific, tourist, social reasons or for reasons of etiquette^[13].

B. The Sacred Canons pertaining to common prayer with heretics

The Sacred Canons of the Church, **with their universal authority**, on the matter of common prayer are the following:

- 1. Canon 10 of the Holy Apostles:** “If one **prays together, even at home**, with one who does not receive Communion, let him be excommunicated”
- 2. Canon 11 of the Holy Apostles:** “If one who is a priest **prays together** with a defrocked priest, let him too be defrocked.”
- 3. Canon 35 of the Holy Apostles:** “If a Bishop, or a Presbyter, or a Deacon should **offer benedictions only, together with heretics**, let him be excommunicated; **if he has permitted them to perform anything as Clergymen**, let him be defrocked.”
- 4. Canon 64 of the Holy Apostles:** “If a Clergyman or a Layman should enter a

Jewish synagogue, or **pray with heretics**, let him be excommunicated and defrocked."

5. **Canon 71 of the Holy Apostles:** "If a Christian should bring oil to a Gentile altar, or to a Jewish synagogue during their feast-days, or light lamps, let him be excommunicated"

6. **Canon 6 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "On the matter of **not allowing heretics to enter the house of God**, thus persisting in heresy"

7. **Canon 9 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "On the matter of **not allowing heretics to take those who are of the Church** to cemeteries or to so-called places of martyrdom, **on the pretext of a benediction or a cure** ; if they are of the faithful, let them be excommunicated for a certain time, and, after repenting and confessing that they erred, be re-admitted."

8. **Canon 32 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "That it is **not permitted to accept the blessings of heretics**, which are foolishness, not blessings"

9. **Canon 33 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "**That one must not pray together with heretics or schismatics**"

10. **Canon 34 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "That it is not permitted for any Christian to abandon the witnesses of Christ and **go to the false witnesses, which are the heretics**, or to those who are predisposed to becoming heretics. For they are alien to God. Let them therefore be anathema, who would depart for their sake."

11. **Canon 37 of the Local Synod of Laodicea:** "One must not accept the festive tokens sent by Jews or heretics, nor celebrate together with them."

12. **Canon 9 of Timothy of Alexandria:** "Question. May a Clergyman offer prayers in the presence of Arians or other heretics, or does this not harm him at all, whenever he performs the **benediction, that is, the offering?**; Reply. During the divine anaphora, the Deacon recites this address prior to the greeting: "Those not in communion, walk away". **Therefore, they do not need to be present**, unless they have reported their intention to repent and abandon the heresy"

To the above Canons, one must also add the following:

13. **Canon B' of the Antioch Synod:** "All those entering the Church and listening to the divine Scriptures, but not participating in the prayer together with the people, or displaying aversion to the Holy Communion of the Eucharist as an act of mischief, let them be cast out of the Church, until they have confessed and have shown works of repentance and are able to beseech forgiveness, **so that thereafter they will not be in communion with the excommunicated, nor congregate in houses with those who do not pray together in Church, nor with those who do not congregate**. Should any of the bishops, or presbyters, or deacons, or someone of the Canon **be in communion with the excommunicated, let them also be excommunicated, as ones who have confused the Canon of the Church.**"

14. **Canon A' of the 4th Ecumenical Synod**, (which validates the Canons of the Local Synods of Laodicea and Antioch, and of Saint Timothy of Alexandria)

15. **Canon B' of the 6th Ecumenical Synod**, (which validates the Apostolic Canons,

the Canons of the Local Synods of Laodicea and Antioch, and of Saint Timothy of Alexandria).

16. **Canon A' of the 7th Ecumenical Synod** , (which validates the Apostolic Canons, the Canons of the Local Synods of Laodicea and Antioch, and of Saint Timothy of Alexandria).

On a simple examination of these Canons, the following become evident:

1. For the Fathers, the matter of communicating with heretics in the context of prayer and Divine Worship is of extreme importance, from a spiritual aspect. This is made evident, by the **vast number of Canons** that deal with the issue.

2. The matter of common prayer with heretics has been preoccupying the Church throughout Time. That is why the relevant prohibitive Canons cover the entire period that Her Canonical Justice was being drafted.

3. Equally obvious is the fact that the infractions of these Canons were frequent. However, the Church persists; She reverts and re-formulates the same prohibitions.

4. The Canonical clauses themselves are explicit, absolute and categorical in prohibiting participation in common prayer and worship with heretics and schismatics.

C. «Sinful pretexts» and common prayers!

Despite the clear and categorical prohibition of common prayer with heretics or schismatics, certain Orthodox -for various reasons- actually participate in common displays of worship together with heretics (in our time also, and specifically with Papists). So, how do they supposedly override the fixed Canonical order of the Church, which forbids this behavior?

The excuses (with a 'theological' content) that they recruit are mainly the following:

1. Papists are **not** heretics; They are schismatics, therefore it is not forbidden to have a common worship with them! ^[14]

2. When the Canons refer to common prayer, they are only implying participation in the "common chalice", or the participation of clergymen (both Orthodox and heretics) in the Divine Eucharist; in other words, that only common **officiating** is forbidden^[15] and therefore other common prayers are not forbidden!!

3. Given that these Canons are no longer observed, they have ceased to apply, and the Church is therefore obliged to also abolish them officially. ^[16]

4. For reasons of Poemantic discernment, the Church is entitled to resort to "ecclesiastic providence" and pray together with heretics.

1. The opinion of the Saints is unanimous: PAPISM IS A HERESY!

With reference to the first "excuse", we have pointed out in another brief essay ^[17] that our Orthodox Church, from the time of the Schism through to this day, has unreservedly accepted - upon the **unanimous opinion of the Fathers (consensus patrum)**, and also that of **acknowledged Sociologists and Theologians**, but most

of all by the **decisions of Local Synods** (with the participation of all the Patriarchs of the East) - that **PAPISM IS A HERESY!** But Even if Papists were indeed only schismatics, again, common prayer with them is **explicitly** forbidden!!^[18] If someone -whoever he may be- does **not** accept the clear and fixed teaching of our Church (that Papism is a heresy) it will be a matter of his own personal choice and his responsibility. Perhaps he believes he is better informed than.....the Saints, or that he is 'above' all Synods, or, that he possesses a personal...revelation, which gives him the right to give opinions from his position, "ex cathedra", ...both "infallibly", but also...arbitrarily!!

2. Is "praying together" also understood as "participating only in the common chalice", in cases of co-officiating in a liturgy?

Let us examine more carefully the second excuse - that is, that the Sacred Canons - when referring to common prayer - supposedly only mean a partaking of the "Common Chalice" of the Divine Eucharist, or, that they pertain to co-officiating; i.e., the common performing of the Divine Liturgy, by an Orthodox clergyman together with a heretic.

A. The meaning of the term "prayer" in the Holy Bible, the Fathers and classical education.

We have already examined the meaning of the term "συνεύχεσθαι» according to classical education and the Fathers. We should mention here, that in the New Testament, we encounter only the verb "to wish well" (εύχεσθαι)^[19], which **by no means** has any inference to the performance of the Divine Liturgy, but is limited to the meaning of praying or simply wishing well. Equally similar are the references in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

Consequently, **there are no grounds - either in the Holy Bible, or in Patristic or classical literature or interpretation - that the term "wishing together with" or "praying together with" explicitly implies participation, not only in ordinary common prayer, but in the performance of Divine Liturgy.**

B. The meaning of the term "wishing together" in the Sacred Canons themselves

Furthermore, when carefully studying the texts of the Canons themselves, it becomes more than obvious that **the Fathers forbade not only common participation in the Divine Eucharist, but also in ordinary prayers with heretics:**

• When the **10th Canon of the Holy Apostles** imposes excommunication to anyone who "**even prays together at home**", with someone who is not in communion (heretic or excommunicated), **it is obviously referring to ordinary praying and not the performance of Divine Liturgy, given that performing the Divine Liturgy at home is strictly forbidden**, according to Canon 58 of the Laodicean

Synod.^[20] Therefore, the words **“even if he prays together at home” refer to every form of common praying**. And those transgressing this Canon “must be excommunicated”!

• **Canon 45 of the Holy Apostles** is absolutely clear, and it **fully contradistinguishes the act of ordinary common praying with heretics from the performing of any kind of hieratic act, hence the Divine Liturgy as well** : “any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, **who only prays together with heretics**, should be excommunicated; if he perchance has permitted them **to perform any act, as Clergymen**, he should be defrocked.” Besides, the pursuant, **46th Canon of the Holy Apostles** pertains to the “Divine Eucharist” of the heretics, inasmuch as it commands that any Clergyman who may acknowledge it as valid should be defrocked, because “what is the agreement that Christ can have with Belial, or, what is the ration of the faithful with that of the unfaithful?”

• When the **64th Canon of the Holy Apostles** forbids one to enter into a **Judean or heretic congregation** for the purpose of praying, it is obviously not implying participation in a common Divine Eucharist and a “common Chalice”, because the Divine Eucharist is never performed inside a Jewish Synagogue, and there cannot be any “common Chalice”! It is naturally therefore referring to simple prayer, which is strictly forbidden.

• Only **Saint Timothy of Alexandria**, in his **9th Canon**, relates the **“blessing” to the Divine Eucharist**. But even though he is confining the meaning of the term “blessing” to the Divine Liturgy only and not to any prayer in general, he feels the need to clarify this, by adding the words “...whenever he performs the **blessing - that is, the offering**”. We must, however, underline with emphasis that this Canon, which refers to the Eucharist prayer, does not pertain to a common liturgy, but merely to the presence of heretics in a Divine Liturgy, whom it **forbids strictly**, stating: **“therefore they are not obliged to be there”**.

B. The views of acclaimed Canon and hermeneutic experts

Apart from the above straightforward approach to the texts of the Sacred Canons themselves, **all the acclaimed Canon experts** acknowledge **precisely** that, on the basis of the Sacred Canons, not only is participation in common prayer forbidden during the Divine Eucharist, but also in any other simple prayer, by any Orthodox clergyman or layman. Indicatively, let me mention:

• **Theodore of Valsamon (patriarch of Antioch):**

§ **«We should comprehend ‘common praying’ simply, as the communing and more willingly submitting to the blessing of a heretic. These you must abhor as something repugnant, and with whom we are obliged to not familiarize ourselves».**^[21]

§ **«The Canon is very clear. It does not make allowance for heretics who persist in their heresy to congregate along with Orthodox».**^[22]

§ «When you hear of the Canon that calls bishops and other priests who pray together with excommunicated ones as excommunicated also, do not say –for the purpose of contradistinguishing– that laypeople who act contrary to the Canon are not responsible. For they too are excommunicated, according to the 10th Apostolic Canon which makes no distinction between clergy and laity».^[23]

§ «Heretic, is... the one therefore who deviates even for a minor reason from the Orthodox Faith. Given, therefore, that those who were enumerated in the current question (**Latins**, Armenians, Monotheletes, Nestorians) have alienated themselves from the Church of the Orthodox - not for any minor reason, but for an inexplicable, immensely major reason - they should absolutely not be in communion with us, **not even for the sake of undertaking spiritual children with the mediation of holy blessings and many sanctifications**, lest we too be condemned with excommunication according to the Canon that says “whomsoever is in communion with an excommunicated shall likewise be excommunicated».^[24]

§ **15th question by His Eminence the Patriarch of Alexandria Mark:** «Can one safely **officiate or pray together** with heretics - that is, with Jacobites and Nestorians - in their Church, or perhaps in ours also? Or to participate with them in the common chalice? Or to make someone a godparent through a Holy Baptism? Or to officiate **memorial services** for the deceased? Or to transmit divine sanctifications to them? **Because the limited area of the land gives rise to many of these things, and I am asking you what should be done.**».

Reply by Theodore Valsamon: «It is for this reason (...he recounts here the Canons that forbid common prayer with heretics...) that we likewise decide, not only to submit to excommunication and to defrocking of both laity and clergy who would pray together with them hieratically, or even commonly participate in the chalice, but also to contain them even more, according to the aforementioned summary of divine Canons. **Because neither limited areas nor any population of heretics has ever altered the integrity of the Orthodox Faith**».^[25]

§ «So, if catechumens should not be present during the performing of the divine sacrifice, **how can heretics be present**, except only –I stress– the ones who intend to repent and abstain from heresy. And even then, I believe, they should not be allowed to be inside the Temple, but outside, as are the catechumens; so that, if they do not intend to abstain from heresy, they will not be grouped together with the catechumens either, but be expelled».^[26]

o **John Zonaras:**

§ «The heretics and their rituals **must be abhorred** by the Orthodox; in fact, they should rather be checked and counselled by the (Orthodox) bishops and presbyters».^[27]

§ «It is considered to be a major sin according to the Canon, for a Christian to enter the synagogue of Jews or **to pray for heretics' sake**. For, what agreement is there, between Christ and Belial? Or, what is the portion of the faithful along with that of

the unfaithful, according to the great Apostle? The congregating of heretics, who uphold things contrary to the Orthodox, **should not be honored by the Orthodox, but rather, should be rejected**. Some, therefore, who have hugely sinned by entering synagogues for a benediction, should be subject to double punishment, per this Canon». ^[28]

§ «He who prays together with an excommunicated or defrocked one, is, according to the existing written Canons, placed under a penance...and even if he does not believe what they believe, because **he scandalizes many, by giving them cause and suspicion against him** as one who is honoring Jewish rituals. Furthermore, it is believed that he has polluted himself through association with them». ^[29]

§ «They who have fallen into heresy and have persisted in it, **are ostracized from the Church, as ones who are alien to Her. How, therefore, can allowance be made for them to enter?**» ^[30]

o *Alexios Aristinos:*

§ «He who enters a synagogue of Jews or heretics and prays with them». ^[31]

§ «To heretics, the sanctum is out of bounds. Heretics are not allowed to enter the house of God.» ^[32]

§ «there is no communion between light and darkness. For this reason, therefore, a Christian should not celebrate together with heretics or Jews.» ^[33]

§ «...should not pray together with heretics or schismatics. Excommunicated be the one who prays with them.» ^[34]

o *Matthew Vlastaris:*

§ «The 33rd (Canon of Laodicea) does not allow us at all to pray together with a heretic or a schismatic.» ^[35]

§ «The 2nd Canon of the Antioch Synod calls upon all of us to distance ourselves from any communion with excommunicated ones, and to **not pray with them** - either in the home, or in the Church». ^[36]

o *Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain:*

§ «This Canon (45th Apostolic) ordains that, if any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon were **to pray together only, but not also officiate with heretics, let him be excommunicated**, because, whosoever prays together with excommunicated ones (given that such are the heretics) must be likewise excommunicated, according to the 10th Canon of those same Apostles. If any of the aforementioned happens to allow those heretics to officiate in any function as priests, let him be defrocked, because any Clergyman who officiates together with defrocked ones (as are the heretics, according to the 2nd and 4th Canons of the 3rd Ecumenical Synod), should also be defrocked, according to the 12th Canon of the Apostles». ^[37]

o *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, the Confessor:*

§ «There is no need to enter into such temples (that belong to heretics), in the said manner (for the sake of prayer and psalms)... **from the moment that heresy enters therein, the Angel who oversees them departs** - according to the voice of Basil the Great - and **that temple becomes an ordinary house**. And it is said: “let me not enter into a Church of mischievous ones”; and also by the Apostle: “what consent can there be to idols, by a temple of God?”»^[38]

o Photios the Great, Μ. Φώτιος.

§ Legislative Canon, title C, chapter 15 and title 12, chapters 1-18. **[39]**

o Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem (1848):

§ «...once again opine today, synodically... **that it (=Papism) is a heresy, and its followers heretics**...Also, that the synods convened by them are heretic and **every spiritual communion of Orthodox children with them is irregular**, as decreed by the 7th Canon of the 3rd Ecumenical Synod».^[40]

o Athenagoras, Patriarch of Constantinople:

§ «Orthodox clergymen representatives must, as much as possible, **show hesitation in worship meetings between them and the heterodox - which meetings are contrary to the sacred Canons and which blunt the confessional sensitivity of the Orthodox** - by striving to perform, if possible, **purely Orthodox services** and rites, thus evidencing the splendor and the majesty of Orthodox worship before the eyes of the heterodox».^[41]

Patriarch Athenagoras stated with exceptional clarity that:

- clergymen who participate in a dialogue should be, to the best of their ability, **more hesitant** when in congregations with heterodox that are intended for common worship!
- gatherings for common worship are **contrary to the Holy Canons!**
- gatherings for common worship **blunt the confessional sensitivity of the Orthodox!**
- **unadulterated Orthodox services** should be held.
- **the splendor and the grandeur of our worship** should be made obvious to the heterodox.

D. Refusal of common prayer does not signify...

I have chosen to complete the indicative quoting of references and interpretations pertaining to the Sacred Canons, with the views of one of the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement, the Patriarch Athenagoras (who can hardly be characterized as a fanatic or a zealot), so that through this testimony also, it will be made even more apparent that the implementing of precision (akrivia) - that is, the refusal of common prayer with heretics:

· **does not signify a hatred** and dislike towards the persons of the heretics^[42].

· **does not signify a denial to display acts of love** and understanding towards any person whatsoever, regardless of their religious convictions. It is characteristic, that in all the monasteries of the Holy Mountain where precision (akrivia) is observed in the matter of common prayer with heretics, there is no discrimination in the treatment of the Orthodox and the heterodox visitors (=exactly the same conditions of hospitality).^[43] But: the heterodox are not allowed to participate in common prayer, either in the Holy Temple, or the common dining quarters. **After all**, we would not be Christians if we did not love the “other”, whoever he may be. Even if he is our enemy and Christ’s enemy.^[44]

· **does not signify narcissism and arrogance**; that we are supposedly better than “the others”. A perception such as this, is foreign to Orthodox teaching and alien to the ecclesiastic ethos and mentality.

· **does not signify an interruption of the Theological Dialogue** with heretics. When the Church has judged that all the prerequisites have been secured so that She may give witness and call upon them to repent and return, it will be imperative for Her to participate in theological dialogues, without, however, any digressing from Her canonical order with common prayers.^[45]

· **does not signify an interruption in collaborations** for the purpose of confronting common social or political problems. Saint Nectary makes it absolutely clear, that: «...abstaining from them (=collaborations) pertains to spiritual matters only, whereas for the other issues, we utilize external association and communion with them, with every freedom, leniently and philanthropically, preserving all human rights and duties towards them... but we avoid only the spiritual communion with them, although political life does oblige you to preserve temporal familiarity and relations.»^[46]

This, therefore, is the **precision** stance of the Church on the matter of common prayer with heretics. Do we truly have the right - if we want to have a consistent Christian lifestyle - to scorn Tradition and the centuries-long life of our Church?

E. Why must we «not pray together with heretics or schismatics»?

But now, let us examine the reasons for which the Church is so austere and categorical in Her prohibition of common worship with heretics or schismatics, which has made common prayer be characterized as a “major sin”.

A. Because of our immense love for God: REASONS OF FAITH

Common prayer with heretics is a liturgical, ecclesiological and dogmatic deviation

1. For the tradition and the life of our Church - i.e., Orthodox Theology - salvation can exist, only if Man is incorporated as an organic member in the “Body of Christ”, which has as its head the very Lord Himself; in other words, in the Church ^[47].

Naturally, the Body of Christ has been in existence from the Apostolic era through to our day, and is **u n i q u e**. And that "Body" is the «ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC CHURCH» - the Orthodox Church. There cannot be many bodies, as the Head is only one: Christ.

2. Consequently, even the Divine Worship is not an individual affair of each faithful; it actually belongs to the organic unison of the members of Christ's Body. In fact, the center and the essence of Christian Worship is the Divine Liturgy, in which the remaining services and sacraments of our Church are also located.^[48] In other words, the Divine Liturgy is not just one of the prayers of the Church; **it actually relates to the Church Herself**: «The Church is denoted in Her sacraments»,^[49] notes Saint Nicholas Kavalas, implying with this the Divine Liturgy. In other words, the **Divine Liturgy is not the means by which the "in Christ" unity of people can be attained; it is the unity per se; it is the manifestation of the already attained unity in the one body of Christ**^[50]. That is also **why in the Divine Liturgy only those can participate, who through Baptism have already been incorporated and continue to remain in the Body of Christ**. Even the catechumens who are preparing for Baptism cannot remain as onlookers.

3. Thus, because heresy is a contempt for and an excising from and -after all- a refusal to participate in the Church, in the "Body of Christ", participation in worship is not only pointless, but also unthinkable. **How can I participate in worship, that is, in the manifestation of the unity of Christ's Body, when I have chosen to excise myself and not belong to it?** For those who are outside the Church - heretic or schismatic - it is at least a matter of consistency to not want to be regarded as a member of the body, since they, after all, have wittingly chosen to depart from it!

Quite logically and naturally, Nikeforos Gregoras asks: «For if our **intentions** here are **opponents** and the innovation of dogmas has **separated** us, **how can we have Christ as one Head, or, how can we pray together for each other** ?»^[51] and Zonaras: « They who have fallen into heresy and have remained in them, **are ostracized from the Church, as ones who are alien to Her. How, therefore, can allowance be made for them to enter?**».^[52]

Only if we perceive Orthodox Worship as a spectacle, without any essential personal participation, is the presence of non-Orthodox in it legitimized! However, woe betide, if the Temple and our Divine Worship become ... a theatre! In other words, the participation of heretics in the Divine Liturgy is a reversal of its very essence; it is a **liturgical deviation**.

4. Furthermore, in order for us to participate in common Worship, a necessary prerequisite is an **agreement on the faith**.^[53] Saint Irenaeus stresses characteristically: «our opinion (the orthodox faith) is in accord with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist certifies the opinion ... for we offer Him (God) the same things in melody, proclaiming and confessing communion and union»^[54]

According to the Metropolitan of Pergamon John (Zizioulas), «Orthodoxy without the Eucharist is inconceivable, but equally **the Eucharist without**

Orthodoxy is impossible ... the prerequisite of Orthodoxy for participation in the unity of the Eucharist always of course existed in the Church, as witnessed by the confessions of faith that are incorporated in liturgical texts»^[55]. This liturgical tradition continues through to our time and demands the confession of the common and unadulterated faith, prior to the Referral (Anaphora), which is done by reciting the Symbol of Faith.^[56] Since therefore «**the unity in the Divine Eucharist is combined with the unity in Orthodoxy**»,^[57] any common praying with a heretic will constitute a **liturgical deviation**.

5. It is thus apparent that for our Church, the place of worship cannot be used as a place of mere communication and socializing, but is most essential and it is linked to Her very nature. Thus, we can comprehend the “abhorrence that the Orthodox felt about the performing of the Divine Liturgy together with the heterodox, with whom they had recently co-confessed (at least apparently) the Union (of Ferrara-Florence)»^[58], or the refusal of Saint Alexander of Alexandria to co-officiate with Arius. In the conscience of the Saints there is no room for social courtesy and politeness in Worship: the reception of and common praying “in Church” with a representative of a heretic “synagogue” as though he were a canonical Bishop cannot be ecclesiologicaly accepted, because it would be **legitimizing a heresy**. The act of recognizing a heresy, in worship, as though it is another “Church” that exists legally – and in parallel to the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” Church, constitutes the basis for development of the «**branch theory**»^[59], which leads to an **ecclesiological deviation**.

6. Finally, when I accept heretics -without any compunction or restriction- in common prayer, overlooking the many and essential differences in matters of the faith, I am in practice scorning the struggles by the Church and Her Saints to preserve our faith without innovation, I am also underestimating the value of the correct dogma, and finally, I am equating the Truth to deception. In other words, I am regarding the fallacious teaching as just another legitimate version and a potential to interpret the Evangelical Truth. An approach such as this to ecclesiastic life will naturally lead to a **dogmatic deviation**.

In conclusion: the strict stance of the Holy Fathers towards common prayers with heretics is the consequence of their teaching regarding the Church.

B. Because of our great love towards Man: REASONS OF LOVE

Common praying with heretics is a poemantic digression

The basis of Christian morality is love towards the other, whoever he may be. This is the supreme virtue that the Saints of our Church had served. This love was expressed, not only through their catering to the material needs of the people, but primarily to their liberation from the bonds of delusion and falsity. Because, what is the benefit for man, if he gains the entire world but lives all of his life incorrectly, with false hopes and an incorrect perspective? Besides, the work of the Church and the Saints is not the solving of social problems and the respectable lifestyle of the

populace; it is chiefly the transcending of Man's ultimate enemy: death, through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This ministry of love is served through the strict adherence of the Saints to the Trust of the faith which they received, and to its precise and infallible spreading through History. This is why we observe such meticulous care in the formulating of the dogma and the austerity towards its forgers, the heretics.

1. LOVE TOWARDS THE FAITHFUL:

Thus, by forbidding common prayer with heretics, the Church seeks to protect Her own members -and in fact Her more fragile ones in the faith- from the fallacy of the heresy.

α) As Saint Nektary characteristically says about those who are easily diverted from the faith through their association with heretics: «an external non-communication preserves from an internal alienation»^[60]

And we have «alienation» when:

- § the faithful denies the Gospel's truth and accedes to a demonic fallacy,
- § the orthodox sensor is altered and it ceases to discern the truth from a lie,
- § he regards the church and the heresy as equivalent paths leading to God,
- § he has the impression that Orthodoxy and the other heretic confessions are equally agreeable to Christ,
- § he regards the "one Church" as one of many "others",
- § he associates Orthodoxy to the denial thereof.

β) Quite frequently, however, those who pray together with heretics are noteworthy theologians or Bishops with an immense theological education; who are "strong and fervent and solid in the faith"^[61]; who technically are not in danger of any "alienation". Could it be that when such a fear is absent, common praying with heretics is then permissible?

OF COURSE NOT, because - among other reasons:

1) this behavior of theirs will most certainly blur the awareness of their flock regarding «the meaning of heresy as being entirely incompatible with the Truth of the Church, and as being the cause of losing one's soul ... If the pastors of the Church adopt a syncretist stance towards heresy, the ... flock will lose its confessional sensitivity and will easily be drawn into heresy»^[62]

2) additionally, the contrary to the Sacred Canons behavior of a pastor, «even if he does not uphold their (=the heretics') beliefs, will nevertheless be **the cause for scandalizing the many and for raising suspicion against himself**»,^[63] as well as «make himself be perceived as being **of one accord with the unfaithful**».^[64] An impression such as this (erroneous as it may be) that the Bishop or the theologian is "of one accord with the unfaithful" - that he agrees with and tolerates the heresy, or that he does not correctly dispense "the word of the truth" - becomes the cause of the

faithful's "alienation" and then..."woe betide the person by which the scandal comes". Woe to the pastors who, with their careless actions shake the people's trust in the hierarchy and who scandalize them! When the situation becomes more acute and the infractions of the Sacred Canons become the cause for **aschism in the Body of Christ**,^[65] doesn't the "powerful" but careless pastor have any responsibility? On the contrary, the upholding of the Sacred Canons protects all of us, and causes no harm to anyone...

2. LOVE TOWARDS THE HERETICS:

Perhaps at first glance it may seem that the prohibiting of common prayer with heretics springs from the Church's love towards the heretics themselves.

However:

a) When I *fully accept the heretic* in common prayer, as though he is a canonical member of the Church, or as though he is not living far away from the Truth, isn't there a certainty that **he will remain confident and persevere in his fallacy**? Wouldn't it be like agreeing with him, that outside the "One Church" there can be a healthy and salvific relationship with our Lord? Is there any likelihood that my behavior will thus raise any concerns in him, and make him reconsider his choices?

b) But when I explain to him with **love, discretion and respect towards his person** the difficulties that -unfortunately- exist, which impede our spiritual communication and especially our presence in common prayer before God, won't there be better chances (if he is well-intentioned) that our fellow-man will evaluate our behavior and benefit from it, essentially? He will of course be upset -just as we will- but could it be that this sorrow will eventually turn into joy?

Those of us who have visited the Holy Mountain have seen for ourselves how the heterodox perceive the love of our Church that hides behind this kind of austerity, and they are not offended by anyone. On the contrary, elsewhere, we may have also had a taste of the flabbiness and the disregard of the canonical tradition of our Church...

Ultimately, by disregarding the centuries-long ecclesiastic order, are we to believe that we are displaying more love than our Mother the Church, or our Saints? Let us ponder on this!!

3. LOVE TOWARDS THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE WITH THE HETERODOX

Finally, the contrary to the Sacred Canons common praying with heretics not only does not benefit the Ecumenical Movement and the opus of unification and reconciliation, but on the contrary, it is harming it, (a) by obscuring matters and making the heterodox foolishly believe in vacant hopes and (b) with the intense reactions on the part of significant factors of the Orthodox Church (High Priests, the Holy Mountain, Sacred Monasteries, Clergymen, theologians) but also by significant sections of the faithful population who look upon this course towards the "common Chalice" with much displeasure and caution (to the point of suspicion).

Because, in the end, who will disagree that “the union of two Churches” is not a matter of coinciding perceptions between a few or many persons on either side, but is a sameness in faith of everyone on either side. As very succinctly outlined by the Metropolitan of Athens, Meletios, in London in the year 1919, the Unification **“should not be a mere agreement between hierarchs, but also a union of faith in the hearts of the populace».**^[66]

On the other hand, if Orthodox clergymen had been “as much as possible **hesitant in their congregational worships with heterodox, these being contrary to the sacred canons and which also blunt the confessional sensitivity of the Orthodox**”, as recommended by the Patriarch Athenagoras, wouldn't they have found understanding among their heterodox interlocutors? Could it be, that such punctual and honest tactics would have been a threat to the theological dialogue? Of course not!

F. Is common prayer permitted “for the sake of providence” (economia)?

From all the above, it becomes evident that the **precision** (akrivia) practiced by our Church is clear and categorical: “one must not pray together with heretics or schismatics”.

For all those who disregard this instruction, the penances are especially severe: defrocking for clerics, excommunication for the laity. Of course, poematic concern and caring, as well as poematic prudence, can often -for the sake of providence (economia)- “override” the implementation of certain canonical decrees, in the need to save people's souls. However, it must be made absolutely clear that it should be implemented only under certain conditions, because recourse to Ecclesiastic economia should not be construed as disregard for precision, transgression of the Sacred Canons and arbitrariness. Most of all, there can be no “providential” relativizing of the Truth and minimalizing of the true Faith.

However, given that the topic is a huge and especially sensitive one, we shall revert in a forthcoming article. The relative views of Saint John of the Ladder, also those of Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios and the acclaimed Canon experts, Demetrios Chomatinos, John Kitros and Theofylaktos of Bulgaria will be examined therein.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my catechist teacher, George X. Economos, the first one who taught me the Holy Canons in the lessons of the Middle Catechist School of Patrae.

Notes

[1] Matthew 7:15, Acts 20 & 29, II Corinth. 11:13, II Peter 2:1, I John 2:18, II John 7

[2] Titus 3:10, II John 10-11

[3] George Kapsanis, "Poemantic Ministry according to the Sacred Canons", Athens 2003, p.155-165.

[4] Saint Nectarios Kefalas, Eugene Bulgaris: Draft on Religious Tolerance, Athens 2000², p. 21.

[5] The struggles of the monks in favour of Orthodoxy, published by the Holy Monastery of Hossios Gregory, Holy Mountain, 2003, p.362.

[6] «Schismatics are those who are deviate from Catholic (overall) Church, not for dogmas of the faith, but for certain issues that are ecclesiastic in nature and easily healed.» Saint Nicodemus of the holy Mountain, an interpretation of the 1st Canon of Saint Basil, Pedalion, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 588. However, given that the dividing line between schism and heresy was not discernible, **«schism is confused with heresy and is often used in its place»**, fr.John Zizioulas, "The Unity of the Church in the Eucharist and the Bishop during the three first centuries", Athens 1990², p. 121.

[7] as above, p. 361-376.

[8] J. Stamatakos, Lexicon of the ancient Greek Language, Athens 1972, p.950.

[9] G.W.H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford 1961, p. 1290, 1325-1326.

[10] Of course the simultaneous presence in the same place without any other prerequisites designated, is not adequate for the performing of common prayer; for example: the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel with the priests of Baal (III Kings 18:36); the prophet Jonah in the ship going to Tharseis Jonah 1:5); the apostle Paul in prison, in the presence of other prisoners (Acts 16:25); the Russian representatives in the Holy Temple of Haghia Sophia in Constantinople, prior to the Christianization of the Russians.

[11] see Apostolic Canon 64 («to enter....in order to pray») and Canon 9 of Laodicea («for a blessing or therapy»).

[12] Apostolic Canon 45, **"to perform any act, as Clergymen"**.

[13] Epiphanius Theodoropoulos, "the two extremes" («Ecumenism» and «Zealotry») Athens 1986, p. 187

[14] Article by theologian Pan.Andriopoulos, titled «Patrae, the Catholics and fr.Cyril» in the newspaper NATIONAL HERALD OF PATRAE of 16.4.07 and on the Internet: <http://www.alopsis.gr/alopsis/andriop.htm> .

[15] Fr. Theodore Zisis, "On the common prayer of Patriarch and Pope: what Synod will impose canonicity?" Theodromia, 6 (2004) p. 174, also, «despite the fact that certain Canons of the Orthodox Church cause concern to certain Orthodox as to whether common prayer between heterodox is feasible, it was acknowledged that the

Orthodox Canonical tradition in its entirety is characterized rather by discretion and philanthropy. **The only Common Prayer that is strictly forbidden is the Eucharist one.**». (International Scientific Symposium» Thessaloniki, 1-3 June 2003 (Theodromia, 5, (2003) p. 302-303). After 2000 years of ecclesiastic history, once again **the significance of terminology** has led to conflict. **To responsible Orthodox, “common prayer” means common Divine Eucharist** - something that does not exist for the passionate faithful - and the “good-day” in the Dialogue appears to be a heretic one»; newspaper BEMA, 17.3.2002, p. A25, Article code: B13517A251.

[16] «They cannot be applied nowadays, and thus, the provisions that regulate the relations between the Orthodox and the heterodox and other religions must be amended. It is not possible for the Church to have clauses that ban entry into the temples of the heterodox and common prayer with them, when at this moment, through Her representatives, She is praying in common with them for the final union in the Faith, in love, in hope. Even more love will “irrigate” many canonical clauses “to bring them to life”. It is imperative that certain clauses be altered, towards becoming more philanthropic and realistic». Archon Bartholomew (current Ecumenical Patriarch), “On the coding of the Sacred Canons and the canonical clauses in the Orthodox Church”, Thessaloniki 1970, p. 73.

[17] «The opinion of the Saints is unanimous: PAPISM IS A HERESY! A reply to an article by Mr. Pan.Andriopoulos» on the Internet: www.alopsis.gr/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=592 & www.oodegr.com/oode/papismos/airesi1.htm and in the newspaper ALLAGE PATRON 3.5.07, newspaper IMERA PATRON 22, 24.5.07, magazine PARAKATATHEKE vol. 53/ Mar-Apr. 2007, p. 4-7. Also, in the issue: The struggles of the monks in favour of Orthodoxy, published by the Holy Monastery of Hossios Gregory, Holy Mountain 2003, p. 205-341, the views of a host of Saints and Teachers of the Church (more than 40 personages) are quoted, where they have condemned the heretic Papist innovations. In fact, some of them had even sacrificed their life blood for the Orthodox Faith. Equally comprehensive is the work by theologian Panagiotes Semates, “Is Papism Heresy? What do Ecumenical Synods and Fathers say? : A memorandum-inquiry addressed to the Canonical committee of the Holy Synod, Aegion 2007.

[18] «Schismatics are outside the Church and consequently one cannot consider their participation in the sphere of the Body of Christ. Here, **there does not exist any essential differentiation from an ecclesiological aspect, between schism and heresy ... both of them are found within the church** . Given that the Church is the only body of Christ, anyone who is found outside the Church is outside of Christ and outside of salvation», John Zizioulas, as above p.133.

[19] Acts 26:29, Romans 9:3, I Corinthians 13:7, 9, James 5:16, III John 2.

[20] «For it is not allowed for offerings to be performed in homes by bishops or by presbyters»; see also Canon 12 of the 1-2 Synod

- [21] Interpretation on the 45th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 129B, see interpretation of the 64th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 165A
- [22] Interpretation on the 6th Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1349B.
- [23] Interpretation on the 2nd Antiochian Canon, PG 137, 1281B.
- [24] 35th question of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Alexandria Mark and the reply by Theodore of Valsamon, in the constitution of Divine and Sacred Canons by Ralli-Potli, Athens 1859, 4th volume page 476.
- [25] Ralli-Potli 4th volume pages 459-460.
- [26] Interpretation on the 9th Canon of Saint Timothy of Alexandria, Ralli-Potli, 4th volume page 336.
- [27] Interpretation on the 46th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 129C.
- [28] Interpretation on the 64th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 165BC.
- [29] Interpretation on the 70th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 181BC.
- [30] Interpretation on the 6th Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1349B.
- [31] Interpretation on the 64th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 168A.
- [32] Interpretation on the 6th Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1349B.
- [33] Interpretation on the 39th Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1393B.
- [34] Interpretation on the 33rd Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1381C.
- [35] Ralli-Potli, 6th volume page 173.
- [36] Constitution versus element K, Ralli-Potli 6th volume page 334.
- [37] Interpretation on the 45th Apostolic Canon, Pedalion, Thessaloniki 1991, p.50-51.
- [38] Response to Potli-Ralli, 4th volume, p. 431d.
- [39] Ralli-Potli, 1st volume, pages 118, 261-274.
- [40] John Karmiris, The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church, Athens 1953, pages 905-925.
- [41] Encyclical to all the Primates of the Orthodox Churches (31 January 1952), Karmiris, p 962-963.
- [42] «What then? **Shall we feel revulsion for them or curse them ? Of course not.** We shall try with all our might to not pollute ourselves through ecclesiastic communion with them....but we must not consider them our enemies or hate them - even though they always rage against us - because they once used to be our brothers... **let us therefore show compassion towards them; let us love them and never cease to pray for them .»** (Hieromonk Job Iasites, in "The struggles of monks for the sake of Orthodoxy", publications of the Sacred Monastery of Hossios Gregory, Holy Mountain, 2003, page 230.
- [43] compare with the stance of the abbas Arsenios, Poemen and Lot, in the "Gerontikon", Astir publications, Athens 1970², pages 62, 92.
- [44] see 33rd Apostolic Canon. Also, "the dogmatic differences, inasmuch as they pertain only to the chapter of faith, leave free and unaffected the chapter of love. The dogma does not impugn love. Love gives itself to the dogma, because it always supports, always is patient. Christian love is unchanging, which is why not even the heterodox' ailing faith is able to alter the sentiment of love towards them...love

should never be sacrificed for the sake of any dogmatic difference», Saint Nektary Kefalas, Poemantic Lesson, Thessaloniki 1974, page 192.

[45] Kotsonis Hier., The Canonical view regarding communication with the heterodox (intercommunion), Athens 1957, pages 268-271.^[46] Saint Nektary, Eugene Bulgaris: An outline regarding Religious Tolerance, Athens 2000², page 21.

[47] Romans 12:5, I Corinthians 12:12-28, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12,16, 5:23, 25-27, Colossians 1:18.

[48] Milosevic Nedad, The Divine Eucharist as the center of divine Worship, Thessaloniki, 2001, page 334.

[49] Nicholas Kavasilas, "On the divine Liturgy", 14, Hellenic Fathers 22, 190.

[50] Theodoropoulos Epiphanius, p.46, Zizioulas John, The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the three first centuries, Athens 1990² page 211. Also, "the mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity", text of the 2nd Convention of the Combined Committee for the Theological Dialogue, Munich, 30/6 - 6/7/1982, and "Faith, sacraments and unity of the Church", text of the 4th plenary session of Orthodox and Roman Catholics, Bari 1987, in Ant.Papadopoulos' "Theological dialogue of Orthodox and Roman Catholics" (History-Texts-Problems), Thessaloniki, 1993, p.45-61 and 86-103.

[51] Kotsonis Hier., p. 89.

[52] Interpretation on the 6th Laodicean Canon, PG 137, 1349B.

[53] «...for the ancient Church, and in fact the Eastern one, **the correct faith comprised a necessary presupposition for participation in the Divine Eucharist of the Church**» W. Elert, Abendmahl und Kirchen gemeinschaft in der alten Kirche hauptsaechlich des Ostens, 1954, in Zizioulas, p. 116.

[54] Against heresies 18, 5, in PG 7, 1028.

[55] Zizioulas John, p. 116-117.

[56] Hieromonk Gregory, The Divine Liturgy, Comments, 1985², p. 250-252.

[57] Zizioulas John, p. 121.

[58] Kotsonis Hier., p. 101-107.

[59] It is characteristic, that the simple, epistolary communication of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1869 was evaluated by the Anglicans as a "most amicable and Christian-like acknowledgement on behalf of the Ecumenical Throne regarding the Church of England, **as a branch of the universal Church of Christ**», Kotsonis Hier., p. 197.

[60] Saint Nektary, p. 20.

[61] Saint John of the Ladder, Address 31 to pastor, para. 65.

[62] Kapsanis G., p. 160.

[63] Zonaras, Interpretation on the 70th Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 181BC.

[64] Valsamon, Interpretation on the 71st Apostolic Canon, PG 137, 181D.

[65] Address by the Rev. Metropolitan of Kalavryta to the Cardinal Walter Kasper (Athens, 11.2.2003), by fr. Theodore Zisis, "Disturbing developments", in "Theodromia", 5 (2003), p. 281.

[66] Kotsonis Hier., p 63.

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