

NUMBER VI IN THE SERIES  
Contributions to a Theology of Anti–Ecumenism



THE DRAMATIC CRISIS IN THE ECUMENICAL  
MOVEMENT AND THE AWAKENING OF  
ORTHODOX ANTI-ECUMENISM

Archimandrite Cyprian  
Agiokyprianites

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# The Dramatic Crisis in the Ecumenical Movement and the Awakening of Orthodox Anti-Ecumenism

## I. ORTHODOX RESISTANCE AND WALLING-OFF

### 1. Persistence and Hope

I invoke your prayers, that, through the intercessions of our Most Blessed Lady *Theotokos* and St. Athanasios the Great, under whose special patronage we have placed our “Convocation” this year, I may deal clearly and fully with the topic which has been entrusted to me in my unworthiness.

I wish to begin from precisely that point on which our Most Reverend Metropolitan concluded his presentation last year from this podium.<sup>1</sup>

It was a truly hopeful conclusion, and one, moreover, in keeping with all of the proclamations and testimonies of our struggling and anguished Orthodox Church.

His Eminence said, at the culmination of his very important address: “Our Synod, the Holy Synod in Resistance, with anguish and brotherly love, calls on Her spiritual children *to remain, with unwavering loyalty, in agreement with, and followers of, the Holy Fathers*”; that is, to remain faithful to the struggle against ecumenism and to the correct theological foundation thereof, and also to the genuine ethos of self-reproach, humility, and love.

“At the same time”, His Eminence continued, the Holy Synod calls on her spiritual children “*to pray unceasingly for the unity of the Orthodox anti-ecumenists of the Old Calendar, as also for the unity in general of the Orthodox Church, that the world might believe.*”<sup>2</sup>

“Only on such conditions,” His Eminence concluded, “will we celebrate a new Sunday of Orthodoxy, a new triumph of Orthodoxy; may this come to pass very soon, by the intercessions of our Lady *Theotokos* and of all the Saints. Amen!”

What are the two primary characteristics of this truly inspired conclusion?

They are persistence and hope: *persistence* in the correct and sound presuppositions of Orthodox walling-off; and *hope*, that by means of this unwavering loyalty to Patristic Tradition, the anti-ecumenist endeavor, that is, the struggle against ecumenism, will have a favorable outcome.

It is around these two poles, therefore, persistence and hope, that I would like to develop my topic this evening.

\* \* \*

I will begin with an introductory discussion of the theological and practical basis for persistence and steadfastness in the struggle against ecumenism, appealing to more recent evidence from Holy Tradition.

To the reasonable question, as to why we must unceasingly return to the Patristic and Synodal grounding of our anti-ecumenist stand and manifesto, we would give the following concise reply.

*In the first place*, it is necessary for us to have constant recourse to our Patristic and Synodal foundations for the sake of the pious Orthodox of the Old Calendar, who are in need of encouragement.

Human weakness frequently lets us down; whether because of ignorance or because of the unrelenting warfare of the innovators, our fighting spirit gives way and our sacrificial dedication to the exactitude of the Faith and the vision of unity slackens.

On this subject, there is a marvellous and very perceptive letter by St. Basil the Great; he addresses it to those monks who had been harassed by the Arians, and consequently needed encouragement and consolation.

At that time, the heretical Arians, with the help of Emperor Valens, who shared their beliefs, had virtually overrun the local Churches; throughout the East, great confusion prevailed. The subtle distinctions of theological terminology in the crucial dogmatic issue of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father were not fully understood, and particularly by the simple people. The intensity of the persecutions went unabated; monks were the main target of these inhuman persecutions, and their monastic institutions were burnt down. They were evidently in danger of making concessions, on account of their fatigue, and of altering their Orthodox convictions.

St. Basil the Great hastens to console and encourage them; he endeavors to strengthen the “monks who are being harassed”:

- he reminds them that death for the sake of the truth is Martyrdom;

- he urges them not to grow weary in their afflictions, but to increase their zeal;
- he tells them that even if Bishops are driven from their Churches, this should not disturb them;
- even if traitors arise from among the clergy themselves, this should not undermine their confidence in God;
- and though they are few, he tells them that they should not be afraid, since it is not the great multitude who are saved, but the elect of God;
- and in the event that only one man is saved, St. Basil avers, he ought to abide unshakable in right judgment, with his hope founded on Christ.

*“For if even one should be saved,” says the Saint, “he ought to abide in right judgment, keeping his hope in Christ unshaken, for the Lord will not forsake His holy ones.”*<sup>3</sup>

*In the second place*, it is necessary for us to go back to the Fathers and the Synods and provide a strong foundation for our anti-ecumenist endeavor, for the sake of our well-intentioned Orthodox brethren, who suppose that it is possible to exist in the realm of innovation and heresy and at the same time to be anti-ecumenists; namely, that it is possible to fight against the heresy of ecumenism while being in communion with this most grievous heresy.

These brethren of ours need to be persuaded, as our Most Reverend Metropolitan has insisted quite rightly in his recent works,<sup>4</sup> that Orthodox resistance and walling-off not only do not involve schism and a departure from the Church, but constitute *the only way*



of resistance known to the Tradition of our Most Holy Church, which struggles against every adulteration of the Truth.

It is significant—and I would ask you please to pay particular attention to this point—that the Holy Fathers were not simply uncompromising when it came to heresy, by not accepting communion with heretics; but they *also* characterized *as heretics* even those who displayed laxity in the face of a newly-manifest heresy and thought it a matter of indifference to be in communion with its carriers.

*“If anyone should not rank this heresy with the other heresies,”* declares St. Theodore the Studite with unquestionable authority concerning the heresy of his age, *“as equally leading to separation from God, but should say that communion with [heretics] is neither here nor there, he is a heretic.”*<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, *The Heresy of Ecumenism and the Patristic Stand of the Orthodox* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxii, col. 948B (Epistle 257: “To the Monks Harassed by the Arians,” §2). He offers similar consolation in Epistle 256, “To the very well-beloved and reverend brethren the Presbyters Akakios, Aëtios, Paul, and Silvanos, the Deacons Silvinos and Loukios, and the rest of the brethren, the Monks,” and in Epistles 220 and 221, “To the Berœans” (in Syria).

<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan Cyprian, *Heresy of Ecumenism*, pp. 35-41 (§A3: "Orthodox Resistance and Walling-Off"); *idem*, "'Schism' or 'Walling-Off'? The Calendar Question and the Heresy of Ecumenism: A Pastoral Epistle" (supplement to *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. xv, No. 4 [1998]).

<sup>5</sup> St. Theodore the Studite, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xcix, col. 352B ("First Refutation of the Iconoclasts," §20).

## The New Orientation of the WCC and the Anguished Critique of the Orthodox Anti-Ecumenists

Since the differences between divided Christians in the context of the ecumenical movement, “differences of a spiritual, ecclesiological, and theological nature,” still exist and certainly cannot be overcome, because of disregard for *the charismatic way* and *the prophetic solution of repentance*, the ecumenical movement is forced constantly to alter its visions and orientations, thereby drawing Orthodox into areas that are utterly foreign to Orthodoxy and its traditional framework.

After three successive phases of reorientation—pre-war, post-war, and post-communist—, always on the basis of pure secularism and with reference to never-ending societal changes, the WCC is now once again feeling the need for a *new orientation and vision*.

Its spectacular opening towards other, non-Christian religions; its acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit is at work in them; and its recognition of them as other, supposedly legitimate, ways of salvation parallel to Christianity, form the basis of the *interfaith syncretism* that is being promoted as the “new vision” of the WCC and, more broadly, of the ecumenical movement.

Unfortunately, these syncretistic perspectives of the *broadened ecumenical vision* have been accepted by the Orthodox ecumenists, who promote different versions of them in theological fora.

The Orthodox anti-ecumenists who follow the Old Calendar agonizingly focus their critique precisely *on this deadly peril*: continued participation by the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement and the WCC will corrupt their ecclesiological self-understanding more and more deeply and *will entrench in the domain of the Orthodox Churches a variety of theological viewpoints, which constitute the pan-heresy of inter-Christian and interfaith ecumenism*.

*Front cover photo:* The Pope’s first visit to an Orthodox country, Romania, May 7–9, 1999. “Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Teoctist of Romania *jointly blessing* the crowds who gathered in Izbor Park, Bucharest.”