

An Interview with His Eminence,
Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili,
President of the Holy Synod in Resistance

Anti-Ecumenism: The Great Challenge for the Orthodox*

I.

Your Eminence, you have been in resistance for many years.... Many people do not understand the nature of your resistance.... Could you talk to us about this topic in such a way that even simple people might be able to understand the basis of your resistance?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to clarify this serious and fundamental issue, and thereby dispel misunderstandings.

Within the boundaries of the Church, those who express doubts and objections, who show opposition, and who reject and fight against a heresy or an innovation in defense of the truth of Orthodox Tradition, are characterized as resisters.

Since 1924, when the New Calendar was implemented in the Church [as well as the Greek state—*Trans.*], one faction of the Orthodox in Greece—and in other Orthodox countries, too—not only did not accept this ecclesiastical innovation, but also broke off all communion with the New Calendarists.

This rupture of communion in our ecclesiastical Tradition is called “walling-off” and it constitutes only one part of the more general struggle of Orthodox resistance.

The concept of ecclesiastical resistance comprises three stages: it starts with walling-off, continues with the theological refutation of error, and concludes with the condemnation of a heresy by a general Synod.

And in conclusion, it should not be forgotten that every Ecumenical Synod was the culmination of Orthodox resistance and walling-off.

II.

Now that you mention the boundaries of the Orthodox Church, Your Eminence, is “resistance” a conventional theological term, or is it your own invention and a theological coinage?

Look, both the words “to resist” and “resistance,” and the actions which

they denote, are certainly neither new nor our own invention.

They have been very widely used in our Holy Tradition, and indeed, with a particular meaning during periods of anti-heretical struggles in the Church.

I would remind you, for example, that St. Basil the Great praises St. Meletios of Antioch for his “persistent and unyielding resistance,” that is, for his strong and uncompromising opposition to the Arian heresy.

But it is St. Theodore the Studite who refers with especial frequency to “resistance,” “resisters,” and, in general, to “Orthodox and God-pleasing resistance,” when speaking about struggles against the heresy of Iconoclasm.

III.

But why, Your Eminence, have you chosen this term as the distinguishing mark of the Synod which you lead? Is it perhaps in order to differentiate yourselves from the other Old Calendarists in Greece?

Please pay heed. All those who struggle against a heresy that threatens the Truth of Orthodoxy are, and are called, resisters. There is no question of any special theological term. Orthodox have always been in resistance to error and this action of theirs has always been called “resistance.”

Now, during the years 1984-1985, our Synod published a theological document entitled “An Ecclesiological Position Paper for Orthodox Opposed to the Panheresy of Ecumenism.” This document defined our ecclesiological identity, and because it did in fact differentiate us from others who follow the Old Calendar, ever since then the word “resister” has been endowed with a specific ecclesiological connotation.

That is, although, in general, all of the Old Calendarist anti-ecumenists are, and are called, resisters, nonetheless, it has become *de rigueur* for our Synod to be characterized as the “Synod in Resistance,” because we rest our anti-ecumenical struggle on a different base than the others do.

IV.

I see, Your Eminence, that you are now discussing new concepts, which are equally unfamiliar or not sufficiently clear to the general public. You have gone from the New Calendar to ecumenism, and you are talking about anti-ecumenism! Maybe some clarifications are in order?

Gladly. There is real confusion on this point. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, there first appeared in the Protestant world a movement which aimed at coöperation between different Christian confessions with the ultimate goal of uniting them. Thus did the groundwork begin to be laid for

an ecumenical and worldwide coöperation between all Christians.

This inter-Christian movement was called the “ecumenical movement,” and all who agreed with its agenda were called “ecumenists.” The theory and practice of the ecumenical movement underwent a marked development in the twentieth century; it took the form of a strong current and a dangerous ecclesiological deviation: the heresy of ecumenism.

Orthodox participation in ecumenism began in an official and spectacular way with the Encyclical of 1920, which was issued by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is symptomatic that the first proposal of the 1920 Encyclical for achieving inter-Christian rapprochement was the adoption of a unified calendar by all Christians, so as to bring about, primarily, unity in the celebration of Church Feasts. Thus, when the New Calendar was implemented in 1924, the first practical step for ecumenism in the realm of Orthodoxy was accomplished. The connection between ecumenism and the calendar issue is clear and indisputable.

The characterization of those in resistance to ecumenism as “Old Calendarists” does not express their identity fully or clearly. In literal terms, we are Old Calendarist anti-ecumenists. On the one side, there is the heresy of ecumenism, within which the calendar question is included as a particular issue. And, on the other side, there are the anti-ecumenists, who oppose this heresy that has arisen in recent times.

Ecumenism, then, is the larger issue, and anti-ecumenism is the great challenge for the Orthodox of our time.

V.

Excuse me, Your Eminence, but maybe ecumenism should be regarded as a positive challenge, since it is, supposedly, attempting to realize, by means of dialogues, the truly sacred demand for the union of divided Christians?

Your question really is a very interesting one. Those who are ignorant of the true nature of ecumenism think that it serves the very desirable cause of unity.

In order to have a clear picture of things, we need, first of all, to discuss how the ecumenical movement works. From the very outset, it developed in three concentric circles.

The first circle encompassed rapprochement between Orthodox and heterodox by means of a very broad spectrum of coöperation at all levels.

The second circle encompassed the development of a special theology, so-called ecumenical theology, on the part of Orthodox ecumenists.

The third circle encompassed theological dialogues *per se*, bilateral and multilateral.

Unfortunately, these three circles of the movement’s activities have led

the Orthodox ecumenists into many serious deviations at a dogmatic and canonical level.

VI.

Could you perhaps be more concrete, please, because you are now presenting us with a picture of ecumenism quite different from what we suspect it to be.

Certainly, although it is not easy to condense so many important issues.

The broadest spectrum of inter-Christian coöperation, which was inaugurated and promoted by the first circle of ecumenism, unfortunately with the Patriarchate of Constantinople as its ringleader, sanctioned a syncretistic hobnobbing between Orthodox and heretics, despite the fact that this is strictly prohibited by Holy Tradition. Such coöperation led the Orthodox ecumenists to proclaim that, notwithstanding unbridgeable dogmatic differences, they could serve the world jointly with the heretics and give a common witness of faith. But in the end, who is it that saves the world: the whole Christ and His unadulterated Truth, as They exist and are experienced in Orthodoxy, or a defective Christ and his adulterated truth, as they exist in heresy?

Now, the second circle did not work out any better. The development of a so-called ecumenical theology by the Orthodox in essence placed heretics within the boundaries of the One and unique Orthodox Church. The ecumenists have thus given clear expression to Baptismal theology, and also to the theology of Sister Churches, the theology of the “Wider Church,” the theology of cultural pluralism, the theology of common service, and interfaith theology. The false teachings of these theologies have created a syncretistic framework for a *de facto* union.

Finally, the circle of theological dialogues has also been a total failure and has disappointed people’s hopes. The dialogues have not only run aground, but have also led to impasses and have proved to be devoid of credibility; and, more importantly, they have deviated dogmatically. The Orthodox ecumenists have, from time to time, signed joint statements with heretics, statements which represent soft-pedalling and compromise in matters of Faith.

VII.

Consequently, Your Eminence, given the seriousness of the situation, what is it, ultimately, that differentiates you from the other Old Calendarists and, at the same time, sums up your stand against ecumenism?

Well, in general terms, the so-called Old Calendarists have officially proclaimed, and continue to proclaim, that all who follow the New Calendar

and who belong to the official ecclesiastical jurisdictions which have joined the ecumenical movement have, all of them, fallen away from the Truth and unity of the Church, do not have Grace or Mysteries, and are fully and in actuality heretics.

Our Holy Synod has a different perspective. By the Grace of our Lord, we have provided theological substantiation for the following positions, which, on the one hand, give shape to our particular ecclesiological identity within the body of anti-ecumenists, and, on the other hand, define the foundations and goals of Orthodox and God-pleasing resistance.

[1] The position of ecumenists in the Church should be viewed in terms of the question of heretics who have not yet been brought to trial in the Church.

In other words, the members of the Body of the Church can be ailing, that is, they can be in error regarding the Faith. But even as ailing members, they are not dead, and continue to belong institutionally to the Body.

[2] The mortification of ailing members and their decisive alienation from the Body occur in two ways: either through schism, in which case they are cut off by themselves from the Body and form a clearly distinct heretical community; or through a synodal verdict, in which case, following a specific procedure, they are expelled from the Church as being incurably ill.

In the first case [1, above], the innovating ecumenists, insofar as they have not yet been brought to trial, are ailing members of the Church. The healthy part of the Church, however, should not have communion with them, but should wall itself off from them.

This rupture of communion, or walling-off, has very concrete goals: that we should not become sick ourselves; that we should make the other members of the Body aware that they should likewise break communion, so as not to become diseased themselves; that we should aid in the repentance and cure of the ailing members with brotherly love; and that we should contribute to the convocation of a competent synodal body of the Church, which would take suitable measures to prevent the disease of heresy from spreading to the entire Body.

VIII.

If I understand your thinking correctly, Your Eminence, there is a very serious theological rift between the Synod in Resistance and the other Old Calendarists. So, is there no hope of surmounting it or of union among the various anti-ecumenists?

Quite honestly, my heart is deeply grieved over the fragmentation of the anti-ecumenists in Greece, which is, moreover, exploited in an unbrotherly way by all who wish to do us harm.

Unity among the Old Calendarists will come about, by the Grace of our Lord, only when we all agree on the correct ecclesiological basis of our anti-ecumenist endeavor.

This may appear unattainable, humanly speaking. But I believe that, when we work in a sober and responsible manner for the unity of the Church on a broader scale, when we accordingly live out the ethos of humility and love, and when we repent and pray, then the Holy Spirit will show us miracles.

Let me just express a sincere wish: until we are counted worthy of the miracle of unity, let us at last “discover” humility and love. Let us desist from antagonism and warfare against our brothers. Orthodoxy (right belief) by itself does not save us; *orthopraxia* (right conduct) is also required.

IX.

I see, Your Eminence, that the vision of Church unity on a broader scale does not elude you. I detect an unusual moderation in your words about the other Old Calendarists. Is it true, Your Eminence, that these positions of yours are having an effect on both the Old and the New Calendarists?

Thank you for ascertaining the essence of what we propose, which is certainly nothing other than the unity of the Church on a broader scale. Besides, that is where the center of gravity of our Synod’s witness is to be found—a witness of quality and not of quantity. For this reason, our administrative structure is also modest. We avoid titles and activities which give rise to mistaken impressions.

Knowing our limits, recognizing our weaknesses, with humility, without triumphalism, with an attitude of self-sacrifice, we serve Christ’s small flock, which wants to be kept far away from the pernicious workings of ecumenism.

I believe that a witness of Orthodox Truth and life is the priority. The Builder of the Church and His All-Holy Mother will take care of the rest. This balanced position of ours, I believe, which also constitutes our pastoral “program,” has indeed had an impressive effect. On a daily basis we witness a substantial influence, which is constantly expanding.

X.

In spite of this, Your Eminence, I have in view that certain circles of Old Calendarists have profound doubts about you personally. They have doubts about your witness and about the purity of your intentions. They have reached the point of reproaching you for creating a kind of “New Calendarist Unia” in the domain of the Old Calendar Church. How would you respond to such a grave accusation?

Well, these doubts about me as a person are old and well-known. At the beginning, they distressed me. Later on, when I found out who was expressing them, I ignored them.

The Grace of Our Lord has strengthened me to belong with complete conviction to the community of the Old Calendarist anti-ecumenists for thirty-two years.

This walling-off of mine from the New Calendar Church has been very costly for me. It is significant that even now we are dragged into law courts by New Calendarists.

We have no communion with the ecumenists. We are unwavering in our theological critique of the ecumenical movement. We assist Orthodox everywhere who desire not to have relations with the ecumenists.

With the help of the *Panagia*, we have contributed decisively to an awakening of anti-ecumenism at a pan-Orthodox level. Anti-ecumenist communities are constantly growing in all of the local Churches. The anti-ecumenist witness of our Synod, which transcends the borders of our homeland, has provoked the wrath of the ecumenists, which is vented against us without any pretenses; they want our heads on a platter.

When anyone has doubts about the purposes of such arduous, many-sided, essential, and fruitful, but also hazardous anti-ecumenist activity, notwithstanding all of our weaknesses, then...we simply pass him by, praying and reproaching ourselves. "New wine must be put into new bottles."

XI.

Now that you mention transcending the borders of our homeland, Your Eminence, how are you managing financially? You have undertaken a task of international dimensions without any subsidies from the State.

Yes, indeed, and this is something that never ceases to amaze us. We do not have financial resources at our disposal. We are not supported by wealthy individuals.

It is a miracle. Our Lord blesses the humble offerings of His blessed paupers. We have never placed our hopes on human beings and state subsidies; we do not receive any remuneration. In this particular respect, we vividly experience the Apostolicity of the Church. May Our Lord not deprive us of this blessing!

Our experience has shown that when we strive to fulfill our obligations to the Vineyard of the Church with faith, self-denial, and altruism, then the Lord of the Vineyard takes care of His humble laborers.

XII.

Your Eminence, I would like to ask you also about your valuable experience regarding exorcisms against magic. What are the results? Do those who come to your monastery receive help?

This service of ours, a service of Christian love towards our brethren, does, in truth, detract somewhat from the Hesychastic life of the monastery. But we do not complain; we do it gladly, submitting to the will of God.

The Patron Saints of our monastery, the Holy Martyrs Cyprian and Justina, have the gift of destroying every demonic activity and every magic spell, and, in general, of curing bodily and psychological ailments.

We have witnessed many miracles.

We make a special pastoral effort to help the Faithful understand a very important point: the standard prayers of exorcism, though absolutely indispensable, do not work independently of the life of the Church; they do not work in any magical way.

In other words, both the sufferer and his family members should have recourse to the Saints with deep faith, sincere repentance, forthright confession, communion of the Immaculate Mysteries, fasting, love, and humility. Exorcisms are effective only within this ecclesiastical context.

I feel great joy in Christ, because by means of this pastoral activity countless souls, especially those of young people, have become profoundly bound up with the life of the Church.

XIII.

Now, since I have wearied you, Your Eminence, I would like to conclude with a discussion of a current issue. How do you see the visit of the Pope to Greece?

We have already taken a highly official stand on this very serious subject. In addition, our views have been published in the March 2001 issue of *Ἐορθόδοξη Κατάθεση*.

We should never forget that the Pope has always been, for the Orthodox, a symbol of heresy, absolutism, and secularization.

Consequently, the consent by the leaders of the innovating New Calendar Church to the Papal visit to Greece and their active participation in the Pontiff's program constitute a colossal ecclesiastical and historical blunder and yet another magnificent victory for Papal diplomacy.

In the context of the ecumenical movement, the Orthodox ecumenists have made many very weighty concessions to panheretical Papism. These

concessions constitute very serious affronts against the Synodal and Patristic Tradition of the Orthodox Church. Their consent to the Papal visit is one more link in the chain of these very serious affronts.

Yet, the deep anxieties of the Faithful, who, since 1924, have been undertaking God-pleasing resistance and walling themselves off from the innovating New Calendarist ecumenists, are hereby fully justified for the umpteenth time.

XIV.

In other words, Your Eminence, do you detect a direct link between ecumenism and the Papal visit? Do you view it as part of the ecumenist agenda?

Well, there is no other way in which we can view it. The dynamic of the ecumenical movement is “corrosive.” Either you completely break communion with it, or it leads you into situations that are beyond your control and antithetical to Orthodoxy.

The coming of the Pope is a “natural” and “necessary” consequence of Greek participation in the ecumenical movement. The New Calendarist authorities have been in “communion” with the Pope since 1965, when the mutual anathemas were “lifted.”

I will, in fact, make so bold as to talk about hypocrisy, given the announcement that the Archbishop of the New Calendar Church will not eat with the Pontiff, supposedly in order to avoid joint prayer, which is forbidden. They say this while simultaneously hushing up the fact that the innovating New Calendar Church of Greece recently participated, on 24 January 2001, along with nine other Orthodox Churches, in a very solemn ecumenical service in Rome at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity! Pope John Paul II presided and representatives of thirteen other heterodox confessions took part.

And, naturally, this was not the first time. Of course, the innovationist Church of Greece has never protested about the ecumenist antics of the Phanar either. For example, at the recent Patronal Feast of Constantinople, on 30 November 2000, Cardinal Cassidy was present at the Liturgy, at the end of which he and Patriarch Bartholomew both blessed the congregation together.

XV.

I thank you sincerely, Your Eminence, because your views are both impressive and insightful. They help us to approach the critical situation in the Church with different criteria. Would you like to place a “seal” on our

conversation?

First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity which you have given me to communicate to you, with the help of Our Lord, my views on issues that are much discussed, but rarely clarified.

My humble “seal” on our edifying conversation cannot be anything other than the radiant greeting: “Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!”

Orthodoxy is the Church the Resurrection, of Light, and of Hope. And it must remain grounded in the Truth and life of Patristic practice and theory, so that it will continue to be the Light and Hope of the world.

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!

* The present text, entitled “Anti-Ecumenism: The Great Challenge for the Orthodox,” is an interview which His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, gave to the journalist Apostolos Kapsalis and which was published in the Greek newspaper *Ἐκθόδοξη Κατάθεση* (April 2001), pp. 18-19.