

Elder Paisios

On Ecumenism



The Holy Mountain,
23 January 1969

Reverend Father Haralambos,

As I have seen a great deal of uproar at what is happening in our Church, that is in the various movements of groups in favour of unification (with Heterodoxy), as well as in the relations of the Oecumenical Patriarch with the Pope, as a child of the Church I was pained. Therefore I considered it a good thing to send together with my prayers a small thread (which I have as a poor monk), that it too may be used as a means of stitching together the many-layered raiment of our Mother. I know that you will show love and share it only with your religious friends. Thank you.

First of all, I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone for making so bold as to write something, when I am neither holy nor a theologian. I trust everyone will understand me, that my writing is nothing more than an expression of my deep pain at the unfortunate stance and worldly love of our father Patriarch Athenagoras (+July 7, 1972).

It appears he has loved another modern woman - who is called the Papist Church - because our Orthodox Mother has not made an impression on him at all, for She is so modest. This love, which was heard coming from Constantinople, caused a sensational impression of sorts among many Orthodox, who nowadays live in an environment of such meaningless love, in cities all over the world. Moreover, this love is of the spirit of our age: the family will lose its divine meaning from just such kinds of love, which have as their aim break-up and not union.

With just such a worldly love, the Patriarch takes us to Rome. While he should have shown love first of all to us his children and to our Mother Church, unfortunately he sent his love very far away. The result, it is true, has delighted secular children who love the

world as those who have this worldly love - but it has completely scandalized us, the children of Orthodoxy, young and old, who have the fear of God...

With sadness I must write that among all the 'unionists' I have met, I have never seen one who had even a drop or shred of spirituality. Nevertheless, they know how to speak about love and union, while they themselves are not united with God, for they have not loved Him.

Tenderly I wish to beseech all our unionist brothers: Since the issue of the union of the Church is a spiritual matter, and we need spiritual love, let us leave it to those who love God greatly and are (genuine) theologians, like the Fathers of the Church, and not to the legalists. Let us leave it to those who have offered and continue to offer themselves up in service to the Church (instead of just buying big candles) and who were and are lit by the fire of love for God, rather than by the lighter of the church sacristanâ€¦

We should recognize that there exist not only natural but also spiritual laws. Therefore, the future wrath of God will not be averted by a meeting of sinners (for then we shall receive double the wrath), but by repentance and adherence to the commandments of the Lord.

Also, we should be clearly aware that our Orthodox Church does not have even one shortcoming. The only apparent insufficiency is the shortage of sober hierarchs and pastors with a Patristic foundation. 'Few are chosen'. This should not, however, upset us. The Church is Christ's and He governs Her. It is not a Temple built by the pious from rocks, sand and cement, which is then destroyed by the fire of barbarians; the Church is Christ Himself. 'And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder' (Matt. 21, 44-45).

When He needs to, the Lord will bring forth the Mark of Ephesuses and the Gregory Palamas, in order to bring together

all our scandalized brethren, to confess the Orthodox Faith, strengthen the Tradition and give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

In times past we have seen that many faithful children of our Church, monastics and laypeople, have unfortunately broken away from Her on account of the unionists. In my opinion, separation from the Church whenever the Patriarch makes a mistake is not good at all. From within, close to the Mother Church, it is the duty and obligation of each member to struggle in their own way. To cease commemoration of the Patriarch; to break away and create their own Church and continue to speak insultingly to the Patriarch, that I think, is senseless.

If, on account of this or that occasional deviation of the Patriarchs, we separate ourselves and make our own Churches - may God protect us! - we shall surpass even the Protestants. It is easy to separate but difficult to return. Unfortunately we have many 'churches' in our times, created either by big groups or even just one person. Because there happened to be a church in their kalyve (I am speaking about things happening on the Holy Mountain), they considered that they could create their own independent Church. If the unionists gave the Church the first wound, the aforementioned give the second. Let us pray that God will illumine all of us, including our Patriarch Athenagoras, that union of these 'churches' will come about first; that peace will be made within the scandalized Orthodox fold; so that peace and love will exist among the Orthodox Churches. Then let us think about union with other 'confessions' - and only if they sincerely desire to embrace Orthodox Teaching.

I would further like to say that there does exist another, third group, within our Church. They are the brethren who remain as Her faithful children, but who do not have spiritual concord among themselves. They spend their time criticizing one another, and not in the general good of the struggle. The one monitors the other

(more than himself) to see what he will say or write so as to ruthlessly nail him. However, if this person had said or written the same thing, he would certainly have supported it with numerous passages from the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers.

Great harm comes of this - for while the one injures his neighbour, the other strikes him back before the eyes of all the faithful. Often, disbelief is sown in the souls of the weak, because they are scandalized by such people. Unfortunately, some of us make senseless claims against the others. We want them to conform to our own spiritual character. In other words, when someone else is not in harmony with our own character, or is only mildly tolerant - or even a little sharp - with us, immediately we jump to the conclusion that he is not a spiritual person.

We are all needed in the Church. All the Fathers, both the mild and the austere, offered their services to Her. Just as sweet, sour, bitter and even pungent herbs are necessary for a man's body (each has its own flavour and vitamins), the same is true of the Body of the Church. All are necessary. The one fills up the spiritual character of the other, and all of us are duty bound to endure not only the particular spiritual character, but even the human weaknesses we each have.

Again, I come sincerely asking pardon from all for being so bold as to write. I am only a simple monk, and my work is to strive, as far as I am able, to cast off the old man and to help others and the Church, through God, by prayer. But because heartbreaking news regarding our Holy Orthodoxy has reached even my hermitage, I was greatly pained, and thus considered it good to write that which I felt. Let us all pray that God may grant His Grace, and may each of us in our own way help achieve the glory of our Church.

With much respect to all,

Monk Paisios

This is the last known epistle sent by the Ever-memorable Elder Paisios. Its addressee, Archimandrite Haralambos Vasilopoulos, was Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Petraki, Athens, and founder of the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union and its newspaper Orthodoxos Typos.

