

**Announcement of the Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod
regarding the denouncement by Pope Benedict XVI of Rome of the
title "Patriarch of the West".**

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ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

ANNOUNCEMENT

Pope Benedict XVI of Rome denounces the title of “Patriarch of the West”

It is hereby announced that during its last meeting the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate discussed the importance and the consequences for the relations between the Roman-Catholic and the Orthodox Churches of the recent decision of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI of Rome, to remove from his titles that are mentioned in the Pontifical Yearbook (Annuario) of 2006 the title “Patriarch of the West”, and to retain titles such as “Vicar of Christ”, “Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church”, etc. Concerning this decision, as well as the comments and explanation on this matter given by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Unity of the Christians, Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Ecumenical Patriarchate would like to make the following observations:

1. The removal of the title “Patriarch of the West” from the Pontifical Yearbook of this year, as well as the retention of the above mentioned titles, have a particular importance for the relations between the Orthodox and the Roman-Catholic Churches, especially now in view of the reopening of the official Theological Dialogue between the two Churches, given that this Theological Dialogue will also deal with the issue of Primacy in the Church.
2. Out of all the titles that are used by the Pope, the only one that goes back to the period of the Undivided Church of the first millennium, and which has been accepted in the conscience of the Orthodox Church is the title of “Patriarch of the West”. In the beginning this was related to the institution of the “Pentarchy”, but, it became widely accepted in the East even after the Schism of 1054 AD. A proof of this is the fact that throughout the centuries the Ecumenical Patriarchate has avoided the founding of bishoprics in the West with titles that had been already used by bishops of the Church of Rome. Further proof is the protest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate any time the Church of Rome, especially after the 4th Crusade, including our own times, would found bishoprics within the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarchates with titles that were being already carried by Orthodox Bishops. The consciousness of the geographical limits of each ecclesiastical jurisdiction has never ceased to be a basic component of Orthodox ecclesiology.
3. The fact of course that the “Pentarchy”, which was based on the geographical structure of the

known “oecumene” during the time of the Byzantine period, has weakened ecclesiastically through the creation of other Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches within the Orthodox Church after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, is an undeniable historical reality. However, there was never a time that the Orthodox Church did not make a distinction between the so-called “ancient” Patriarchates, that go back to the institution of the “Pentarchy”, and the Patriarchates that have been added later on. Among the “ancient” Patriarchates, the first place belongs to the Patriarchate of the West, under the bishop of Rome, even though its communion with the Orthodox Churches has been interrupted after the Schism of 1054 AD. This fact remains always very important for the approach by the Orthodox of the primacy issue of the bishop of Rome in case of the restoration of full communion between the two Churches.

4. It is also an undeniable reality that in the recent past the term “West” has acquired a cultural context, and has expanded to areas unknown during the times of the ancient Church, such as the American continent, Oceania etc. It would, however, be unthinkable for the Orthodox ecclesiology to denounce the geographical principle and to replace it with a “cultural” one in the structure of the Church. The unity of the Church cannot be conceived as a sum of culturally distinct Churches, but as a unity of local, namely geographically determined, Churches. The removal of the title “Patriarch of the West” must not lead to the absorption of the clearly distinct geographical ecclesiastical “jurisdictions” by a “universal” Church, consisting of Churches which are distinguished on the basis of either “culture” or “confession” or “rite”. Even in today’s historical circumstances, the one Church must, from an ecclesiological point of view, be considered as a unity of full local Churches.

5. At this point it is of extreme importance to the Orthodox Church that Pope Benedict, while having rejected the title “Patriarch of the West”, retained the titles “Vicar of Christ” and “Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church”. These titles create serious difficulties to the Orthodox, given the fact that they are perceived as implying a universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over the entire Church, which is something the Orthodox have never accepted. By retaining these titles and discarding the “Patriarch of the West” the term and concept of “sister Churches” between the Roman-Catholic and Orthodox Church becomes hard to use. This concept which was first introduced by Patriarch Ioannis of Constantinople, the Kamatiros, as a response to the positions of Pope Innocent III, in the 13th century, has been repeated and promoted in our times by Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, both of blessed memory.

6. In view of the reopening of the official theological dialogue between the Roman-Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the discussion of the issue of primacy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate expresses its wish and prayer that no further difficulties may be added in the discussion of such a thorny problem, as that of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. In this connection we find it appropriate to recall the view of Professor Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, published some years ago, that “Rome cannot demand from the East regarding the primacy issue more than what has been expressed and applied during the first millennium”. If such a principle is accompanied by an ecclesiology of “koinonia – communion” through placing every aspect of primacy within the context of the synodical structure of the Church, this would greatly facilitate the effort to solve a very serious issue for the unity of the Church of Christ.

At the Phanar, 8 June 2006.
From the Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod.