

Can a Conference of Orthodox Bishops Impart Ecclesiality to the Heterodox?

The Challenge of the Upcoming Great Council - [Dr. Demetrios Tselengidis](#), translated by Fr. Nicholas K. (June 4, 2016) Retrieved on June 12, 2016

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Standing here I feel an obligation to publicly thank, from the bottom of my heart, our gracious host, the intense warrior and good shepherd, who has been honored time and time again with the reproach that Christ spoke of in the Beatitudes, Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus, for taking the responsibly to organize this excellent Pan-Hellenic Theological Conference for the enlightenment of the Church's flock, especially at this crucial moment in time. Because the topic we are dealing with here transcends the bounds of our local Church and concerns the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church throughout the earth.

It seems, at this point, based on the proceedings and the issues at hand, that the Holy and Great Council which will soon convene, is anything but Holy and Great.

To be sure, we could make the case that it is only making a show at being Holy. And we say this based on the lack of actual conciliarity which it exhibits. Primarily, this is due to ***the severe lack of Orthodox ecclesiastical consciousness*** by which it is ruled. This great lack of Orthodox ecclesiastical consciousness is particularly and unquestionably proved by the erroneous ecclesiology which is proposed by the text: "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World," which has been put forward for ratification. From what has been said it is clear that the Council in question is not "following the Holy Fathers." Consequently, it can't be Holy.

Furthermore, it is also making a show only at being Great. Rather, it should be self-distinguished as minor, since only a few chosen bishops will even be present. In reality it is an expanded Council of Primates. The great majority of local Orthodox bishops will be absent, without the possibility of voting and unable to express the dogmatic consciousness of their Church's faithful. Specifically, less than one third of the bishops of the Church of Greece will be present, whereas the Church of Russia will not even have ten percent of its bishops at the Council. In reality, not even the bishops present at the Council will have a direct vote, since their vote will be expressed only through the Primate, and that only if it is a majority of the representatives of the Local Autocephalous Church. A phenomenon clearly anti-Canonical and unprecedented in the history of the Church. What we have before us is rather a parody of a Pan-Orthodox Council, at which all of the Orthodox bishops will not be present. Thus, we are unwittingly reminded of the Council "according to merit" [ἀριστινδην] which took place under the dictatorship! Yet, it even surpasses that Council in **anti-canonicity**.

The straight and honest answer to the title of our talk, "Can a Council of Orthodox bishops give ecclesiality to the heterodox" is an unequivocal "no." No Pan-Orthodox Council is able to impart ecclesiality to the heterodox if it wants to infallibly express the Orthodox identity throughout the ages, as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic

Church, consistent with the definition of the Second Ecumenical Council, the well-known Symbol of Faith.

The dogmas of the Church, as believed and lived by the faithful, are salvific. That is to say they have a soteriological character, because they express succinctly the Holy Spirit-filled content of the life of the Church. The life of the Church is divine-human and is sacramentally transmitted to its body by its life giving and sanctifying Head, the Son of God, one of the Holy Trinity.

Our bishops do not attend councils to ratify that which other bishops and theologians prepared for them and in their absence, let alone to sign already drawn up statements. This act is a mockery of the Church's conciliarity and of the Holy Spirit. Bishops attend councils, as the highest ecclesiastical leaders of the local churches, to establish ("on equal terms" with their fellow bishops) the right teaching of the faith and to express the divine life of the Church, to confront the new controversies and challenges within the new conditions of life, always humbly and "following the Holy Fathers." In this way they act in accordance with the Holy Tradition of the Church.

Here we must clearly and unequivocally observe that never in the history of the Orthodox Church was there a bishop "First without equals" (*primus sine paribus*). The "First without equals," that the Metropolitan of Brusa, Elpidophoros, uttered, introduces monarchy into the Church, something which in essence *presupposes the abolition of the divine function of conciliarity*. For this reason, any bishop who projects this title on the Ecumenical Patriarch irrevocably confuses the "Honor of Presiding" with a papist understanding of the Primacy and finds himself in dogmatic error and "wretched delusion." This notion is completely without witness in our Church's History. When, however, it is expressed, as it has been lately, we are reminded of the Papal Primacy, as we have stated. What is more tragic is when there is an endeavor to establish this Primacy on the Dogma of the Holy Trinity by the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself. This doctrine is clearly heretical since, like a western forgery, it introduces hierarchical order in the Holy Trinity, which is without question "above all order," according to St. Gregory Palamas.

In our recent epistle to all Orthodox bishops throughout the world, on February 3, 2016, we maintained that the "initiators and authors" of this specific text "are attempting the institutional and official ratification of Christian Syncretistic Ecumenism by means of a Pan-Orthodox Synod." If this text, "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World," is ratified, it will create a colossal problem of ecclesiastical existence, not only for those bishops who will ratify it, but also for those members of the Church that will actively accept it. And this is because this irresponsible dogmatic error has to do with a dogmatic decision of an Ecumenical Council. In other words, this text imparts ecclesiality to the heretics and the heterodox of the West (Roman Catholics and Protestants) and arbitrarily broadens the canonical boundaries of the Church.

To be more specific, this erroneous text is a virtual denial of a specific article of the Symbol of Faith of the Second Ecumenical Council which clearly defines that, as Orthodox Christians, we believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the

Acts of the Second Ecumenical Council we find the ecclesiological consequences of those who do not absolutely accept it's Symbol of Faith. "If anyone adds or subtracts one word from this Symbol-Definition let him be anathema, defrocked and excommunicated." That is to say, he is literally cut off from the Church as a heretic. The later Ecumenical Councils reiterate these anathemas.

When we assert the above, we are not arbitrarily threatening anyone. We are simply "following the Holy Fathers," presenting, with pain and humility, the clear ecclesiological ramifications, which the Ecumenical Councils irrevocably decree for those who transgress the Church's dogmatic teachings. The sixth article of this text introduces a spiritual crime against the Church Herself, because it tries to corrupt the saving dogma of our ecclesiology. On another occasion in the past we wrote to one of our Church's representatives to the Joint Theological Dialogues. In that letter we touched at length upon the ecclesiological character of this issue. I will recall some points of this letter, as they maintain their relevancy and interpret the methodology of our Church's representatives.

We asked at that time: "With what sense of ecclesiological self-awareness do the representatives of the Orthodox Church take part in these Joint Theological Dialogues? More specifically, does the Orthodox Church take part, through these representatives, as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? Or, as the divided Church, which seeks it's ontological union in a reunion with those heterodox from which it has, from time to time, been cut off? In the Symbol of Faith we confess that we believe in 'One...Church.' It is clear from the formulation of this Symbol of Faith that, unity, as a fundamental attribute of 'one', in this case as an attribute of the One Church, is the one certain fact of our faith. In the conscience of the body of the Church, it's unity is an ontological fact, thoroughly and irrevocably guaranteed by the Head of the Church, Christ Himself, through the continual presence in Her of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost. The Church's unity, as dogmatic truth, makes manifest both Her ecclesiastical self-understanding and Her spiritual experience. If, however, the Church is One, according to the Symbol of Faith, then, *in the strict and literal ecclesiological sense*, there can exist no heterodox churches, neither mother, sister, daughter or grand-daughter churches. *Neither, of course, is the Ecumenical Patriarchate the Mother Church, in the strict ecclesiological sense of the term. The One and only (and always undivided) Church, as a spiritual mother, mystically gives birth, "through water and the spirit" to Her members. She does not give birth to other churches. The local Orthodox Churches comprise the manifestation 'in time and place' of the One and only Church.* Neither, of course, can the Church be both One and divided, because division means the splitting of a whole into two or more parts. Consequently, the notion, today, of a divided Church is contrary to the clear and express formulation of the Symbol of Faith, something which implies, according to the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils, defrocking and excommunication, depending on the case, to anyone who persists in this conviction."

We say this now, because the sixth article of this text, which is up for ratification at the Great Council, presents the Orthodox Church in a contradictory and completely un-theological way. On the one hand, the Orthodox Church is presented as the

“One...Church,” and on the other hand there is the opinion that there exists other “churches,” heterodox of course, whose historical existence the Orthodox Church recognizes and with whom it seeks unity. In other words, the Orthodox Ecumenists believe the heterodox religious communities to be parts of the divided Church and desire a supposed reunification of the Church, instead of working for the return of the heterodox to the Church. They seek unity with them, despite the fact that the heterodox have not, to this day, expressed any desire to renounce their dogmatic departures from the One and only Church. This is the spiritually putrid and most evil pan-heresy of syncretistic Ecumenism in action. *This is why we are being very precise theologically when we speak of the cacodoxy of Ecumenism, which should be condemned in council.*

What is especially saddening (when it happens that one also knows the history of these documents), is that almost all of the texts of the Fifth Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, which arrived as topics of the Great and Holy Council, are driven, more or less, by the cunning spirit of Ecumenism. For this reason they are full of contradictions and deliberate ambiguities, which are susceptible to many interpretations. This is in clear contrast to the saving dogmas of the Church, which are distinguished by their clarity, precision and fullness of their theological concepts.

The dogmas of the heterodox Christians are a summation of an impious way of life, as, correspondingly, the saving and Holy dogmas of the Orthodox Church are a summation and definition of faith and life in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, while the ecclesiological – that is dogmatic – text up for ratification: “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” is clearly ecumenist and not Orthodox, as such it works only to corrupt and existentially abolish the Orthodox Church Herself, along with her Spirit filled life. Therefore, speaking from this theological conference, we clearly state with boldness, “following the Holy Fathers” – and with full knowledge of what we speak – to our most Reverend Bishops who will take part in the upcoming “Great and Holy” Council: despite the respect for you personally and for the institution which you represent, we will not accept the ratification of this ecumenist text, nor any other texts which are contrary to the diachronic and pious mind [φρόνημα] of our Most Holy Church. This is because piety flows and follows from the purity and preciseness our dogmatically defined Faith.

More specifically, the sixth article of this text, “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” which is up for ratification by those bishops who will take part in the upcoming “Great and Holy” Council, essentially introduces a type of “secular marriage” with heterogeneous contracting parties. To be more precise, what we have here is an unnatural marriage. And for this reason the contracting parties are unable to become one organic body, and especially one spirit, which is the goal of an ecclesiastical Christian marriage. Here, specifically in this sixth article, a type of spiritual co-habitation – i.e. union – is introduced between the Church’s Spirit of Truth and the unclean and evil spirits which govern the so called heterodox “churches,” due to their institutional apostasy from Orthodoxy’s pious dogmas. Nevertheless, this kind of “ecclesiastical marriage” is totally unacceptable, as it is incompatible with the Church’s identity, today and throughout the ages.

Absolutely no one, personally or institutionally, has the right to otherwise delineate the boundaries of the Church which have been irrevocably defined by the Ecumenical Councils. It is theologically inconceivable for those religious communities, who continue to believe the same as those heretics, who were defrocked, excommunicated and once and for all cut off from the One and only Church, to be called and recognized as churches. If the arch-heretics were explicitly called “spiritually insane” by the God-bearing Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils, and “as incurably ill” by the Church’s hymnography, how should we refer to those Orthodox who promote the official recognition of the so-called heterodox churches (which are, in fact, pseudo-churches) as equal to the local Orthodox Churches?

Consequently, it is completely preposterous, theologically – ecclesiologically and spiritually – for a Pan-Orthodox Council to grant ecclesial recognition to the heterodox. This is both theoretically and practically self-destructive for the Church that is confessed in the Symbol of Faith. The Church, however, cannot commit suicide, not only because this is something irrational, but because it contradicts the Church’s identity as the Theanthropic, Life-giving, Mystical Body of Christ, Who defeated death and built His Church so that the “gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,” (Matt. 16:18) according to His own steadfast reassurance. Therefore, this present struggle pertains to us directly, as Orthodox faithful, and our duty to confess Christ, and not the Church per se.

St. Paisius the Athonite, in a letter to the Patriarch Athenagoras on January 23, 1969, writes: “Our Orthodox Church lacks nothing. The only lack that is presented is a lack of serious hierarchs and pastors with patristic standards. The chosen are few, but this is not alarming. The Church is Christ’s and He guides Her.”

The heterodox are institutionally “in a distant country,” far from the Father’s house. The only way for them to be found in the paternal “land of the living,” is to return, in repentance, to the place from whence they left. They must deny their heterodoxy in order to be united to the Life-giving, Mystical Body of Christ.

If the future Council does not explicitly condemn Ecumenism, but instead ratifies the texts as they now stand, or, if the texts are changed, but in a manner that doesn’t alter the secular and ecumenist character by which they are ruled, then there is no possibility that the faithful of the Church, who always desire to “follow the Holy Fathers,” will accept it. The Council’s decisions which are made within the ecumenist spirit will remain empty words for the faithful, who, according to the Synodical Decision of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848, are the guardians of the Church’s faith.

If this is the case, then history will remember this Council as a Pseudo-Synod, as it does the Council of Ephesus in 449, the council of Lyon and the council of Ferrara-Florence.

We pray, with pain in our heart, that a contemporary witness of the Orthodox Faith will be given by the bishops, to the glory of the Triune God and to joy of His faithful people.

The twentieth article of the text: “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” is also relevant to our topic under discussion: “Can a Council of

Orthodox bishops give ecclesiality to the heterodox." This article is cunningly ambiguous and creates theological confusion, on account of the implied misinterpretation of the canons which it calls upon. What exactly does this article state?

"The prospects for conducting theological dialogues between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches and confessions shall always be derived from the canonical criteria of established Church Tradition (Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council and Canon 95 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council)."

We will briefly refer to these canons in relation to our topic. In other words, this article speaks of the Ecclesiastical Tradition as it was fashioned by the criterion of canon seven of the Second Ecumenical Council and ninety-five of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council. However, these canons very specifically refer to the method of incorporation of those heretics who deny their heresy, who express their desire to be united to "the portion of the saved," namely the Orthodox Church, the only place wherein man is saved.

For this reason, it is clear, that the implied expression of the twentieth article: "The prospects for conducting theological dialogues between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches and confessions," is organically connected to the sixth article, which speaks of the Theological Dialogues "pursuing an objective goal," as it characteristically notes, "to tread the path to unity." The strange thing is that in no article of the text that is up for ratification is there mention of any presuppositions or standard of reception and incorporation of these heterodox interlocutors into the Orthodox Church. Since the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, which we mentioned, clearly lay down these presuppositions and standards for cases both where strictness should be applied and where economy could be employed, as careful readers of this text it is apparent to us that the proponents of this controversial text implicitly refer us to the so-called "Baptismal Theology." That is to say, they suppose that our Roman Catholic and Protestant interlocutors are baptized Christians. But, there exists no recognition of mysteries outside of the Church. There are simply graduated ways for the reception of heretics into the Church.

The seventh and ninety-fifth canons propose the reception of heretics, when we are speaking of reception by economy [κατ' οἰκονομίαν], with the foundational presupposition-criterion that the exact form [ἀκριβεία τοῦ τύπου] of Baptism has been kept, namely the three-fold immersion and emersion. It is exactly this presupposition that our Western Christian interlocutors do not observe. Western Christians, according to their Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563), instituted (instead of triple immersion) baptism by the sprinkling or pouring of water over the head in substitution of the Mystery of Baptism.

Consequently, the principle of Economy cannot be applied to Western Christians, because they have not retained the necessary presuppositions, that is the keeping of the form [τύπος] of Baptism, the three-fold immersion and emersion in the water of the Mystery of Baptism. In addition, however, the principle of Economy cannot be applied to all Western Christians (Roman Catholic and Protestant) due to the filioque, which, introducing the peculiar "Fatherhood of the Son" in the procession of the Holy Spirit,

reminds us of the “God-fighting diminution of Sabellius,” according to St. Gregory Palamas, or of the “dogma of Sabellius,” according to St. Mark of Ephesus (Mansi 31A, 832C), or “of another half-sabellian monster,” according to Photius the Great (PG102, 289AB). And all of this is being said, based upon and in agreement with the ninety-fifth Canon of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council, which, referring to Sabellians who are converting to Orthodoxy, recommends – with good reason – that they be baptized as are the pagans. This canon specifically stipulates:

“The Eunomeans also, who baptize with one immersion; and the Montanists....and the Sabellians, who consider the Son to be the same as the Father...all of their number who are desirous of coming to the Orthodox Faith, we receive as pagans....we exorcise them, at the same time also breathing thrice upon their faces....and then we baptize them.”

We are of the opinion that the grounds for Economy for the entrance of the Western Christians into the Church have been eclipsed. On the other hand, as we stated earlier, the grounds for applying the Exactitude [ἀκριβεία] of these holy canons are doubled. Western Christians should be catechized, should renounce their heretical delusions, should be exorcised and baptized, in order to be incorporated into the “portion of the saved.” We see from examination of the Acts of the Holy Councils that the Church never accorded ecclesiality to the heretics, She never gave validity [recognition per se] to the mysteries of the heterodox and She never applied Economy to the dogmas.

In every era, as in our own, only a Council which is truly Pan-Orthodox-Ecumenical, and which is clearly “following the Holy Fathers,” can decide, in the Holy Spirit, if in this case (under new circumstances) that the rule of Economy can and should be applied. The Council at hand, however, does not fulfill the above-mentioned agiopneumatikes [ἀγιοπνευματικὲς] presuppositions [presuppositions in accord with that laid down by the Holy Spirit], as we have proved many times over. We, “following the Holy Fathers” of the Ecumenical Councils and being actuated by their way of thinking, remain firm in the Orthodox Faith and steadfast in the Church.

Therefore, just as those who refused to accept the Robber Council of 449 in Ephesus did not fall into schism, and just as St. Maximos the Confessor did not become schismatic for not accepting the dogmatically false Monothelite teaching of all of the Eastern Orthodox bishops, and just as St. Mark of Ephesus did not fall into schism when he alone, in opposition to the Pseudo-Council of Ferrara-Florence, refused to sign the Acts of the Pseudo-union, so we will remain faithful to the Church of the Holy and Ecumenical Councils and we will reject, with disgust, every possible Syncretistic-Ecumenistic teaching officially promulgated by this problematic Council.

And this is because we humbly believe, as did the rightly named theologian Gregory, that, “It is better to have discord for piety’s sake, than harmony full of the passions” (Oration 6, PG 35, 736). We will pray daily, with pain of heart, that the Triune God will not allow this Council to take place, because it is clear from its composition and subject matter that it will create more problems than it aspires to resolve. Let us not, officially and institutionally, tempt and grieve the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the Church’s birthday. Pentecost is a feast of the Spirit of Truth and It’s unifying and glorifying uncreated

energy and not of the spirit of confusion and guile of Ecumenism. It is this selfsame evil spirit which the Hypostatic Truth, the Theanthropic Head, has come to overthrow with the work of His Divine Economy and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The way in which this Council is being convened and its subject matter does not express the Spirit of Pentecost.

We see that, on this Holy and symbolic day, there are plans to impose the spirit of Ecumenism, which, as the spirit of guile, stands opposed to the unifying Spirit of Pentecost and thus will be disruptive to the true unity of the Church in the Holy Spirit. Still, we pray that God will manifest a new St. Mark of Ephesus, to preserve the ecclesiastical reputation and the dignity of the Episcopal office, as the bearer of the glorifying energy, according to St. Dionysius the Areopagite. The weight of responsibility for the Hierarchs of every Local Autocephalous Church before the dogmatic consciousness of the fullness of the Church is massive. This is even more so the case before Christ Himself, for the lack of canonical conciliarity of the Pan-Orthodox Council. And this is because the Hierarchs of the Local Churches, from the preparatory up to the final stages, were purposefully kept uninformed. More specifically, the Local Synods did not convene in order to give to their representatives their decisions on the proposed texts, with which the Pan-Orthodox Council would occupy itself. Neither did they meet afterwards, during the preparatory stage, in order to decide if they agree or disagree with these texts. [Editor's note: This talk was given before the hierarchy of the Church of Greece met in May, just weeks before the Council, to discuss the proposed texts.]

The worst part of it is that, during this final stage not all the Bishops were called to take part in the Pan-Orthodox Council. How can a Council be Pan-Orthodox when it begins by excluding many hierarchs, who are the representatives of their Local Churches? If all the bishops are not invited, how can we speak of a genuine representation of the fullness of the Church? How can we speak of a genuine representation of the entire Church when all of the clergy, Abbots and monks are not invited, as we read in the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils, where they were even allowed to speak (e.g. Seventh Ecumenical Council)?

Usually, at Pan-Orthodox Councils, the Church as a whole, represented by the Hierarchs, define and defend the faith against the contestation of the heretics.

Today, the exact opposite is taking place. That which happened at the Pseudo Councils is happening now. The faith of our Church, delineated in an Orthodox manner, is being put in danger by its own representatives and official guardians. They are trying to introduce into the Church the heresy, or more accurately the pan-heresy, of profane and putrid Ecumenism in the highest and most official way, namely through a Pan-Orthodox Council. Orthodoxy and Ecumenism, however, are "an immiscible mixture, and a grotesque monstrosity (St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *The Rudder*, pg. 349).

We wonder, what is happening? There is nothing left for God's faithful people to do but to condemn this kind of Council, because the Orthodox Church is under obligation to remain at its noetic heights, as the spotless "bride of Christ" (Eph. 5:27). We are

thoroughly convinced that, if the intended Council proceeds consistent with its current specifications, it will be annulled as a Pseudo-council by the next Orthodox Council, as were the decisions of the Pseudo-councils of Ephesus, Lyon, and Ferrara-Florence by those Orthodox Councils which follow them.

Reverend Bishops,

Because the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece has not [yet] convened, in order to take a position on this text which is up for discussion and ratification, I would like you to take into account another important issue. For a century now, Ecumenism in Orthodoxy has had as its origin, benefactor and leader, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, namely the Ecumenical Patriarch and his Synod. From this source proceeds the unclean spirit of Ecumenism. This spirit, however, unfortunately, not only rests in almost all of the Local Autocephalous Churches, but also in the numerical majority of Hierarchs. In this way it continues unchecked, like a serpent inside the bowels of the Orthodox Church, to poison the body of the Church throughout the world. Ecumenism, according to a revelation "from above" of Christ given to the Holy Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, is dominated by evil and unclean spirits. It is a historical fact, that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has exhibited the "primacy" in its ecclesiastically and spiritually harmful ecumenist declarations and actions (for example: common prayer with the heterodox, and even other religions, vain ecumenist flattery, etc.)

Under the current historical circumstances, where the spirit of Ecumenism prevails in the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the bishops of Greece should (in our humble opinion) think seriously if they should ratify the text: "Autonomy and the Ways of Declaring It." And this is because of the idiosyncrasy of the relations between the so called "New Lands" [of northern Greece] and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. There is a real danger for the "New Lands" to come under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as an Autonomous Church. On account of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Ecumenist policy, we Northern Greeks wish to remain in the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Autocephalous Church of Greece. We don't want to be ruled by the foreign ecumenist spirit of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The ecclesiastical and spiritual responsibilities of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece, on this matter, are of great historical importance. This is why we humbly implore you, as our spiritual fathers, to heed our heartfelt cry.

Thank you for your attention and patience.

[Dr. Demetrios Tselengidis](#)