

NUMBER IV IN THE SERIES

Contributions to a Theology of Anti–Ecumenism



THE HERESY OF ECUMENISM
AND THE PATRISTIC STAND
OF THE ORTHODOX

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of Oropos and Fili

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**The Heresy of Ecumenism
and the Patristic Stand
of the Orthodox**

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Contents

i.	The Heresy of Ecumenism and the Patristic Stand of the Orthodox	
	A. The Lawful Character of Anti–Ecumenism	
	1. “The More Fervent Part of the Church”	15
	2. The Heresy of Ecumenism	20
	3. Orthodox Resistance and Walling–Off	35
	B. The Sure Boundaries of Anti–Ecumenism	
	1. “In Agreement with and Following the Holy Fathers”	42
	2. “Sympathy for the Ailing, but a Defense of the Healthy”	52
	3. “Every Landmark of the Fathers Has Been Moved”	59
ii.	The Deadly Sin of Orthodox Ecumenists: Participating in the Interfaith Venture of the World Council of Churches	75

The Heresy of Ecumenism and the Patristic Stand of the Orthodox

A. The Lawful Character of Anti–Ecumenism

I. “The More Fervent Part of the Church”

In opening my presentation tonight, I would like to cite a very telling event from the life of St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople.

This will introduce us to our topic in a direct and easily understandable way, and, at the same time, clearly define its two dimensions: the perspective of faith, and the perspective of love towards those who are corrupting the Truth of the Church.

* * *

St. Gregory the Theologian’s father according to the flesh, who was also called Gregory, was Bishop of Nazianzos, a small city in Pontos.

He distinguished himself as an outstanding spiritual personality; we can readily comprehend this when we take account of the following facts:

a) He bequeathed five Saints to our Holy Orthodox Church; namely: himself,¹ his wife, Nonna,² and his three children, Gregory,³ Gorgonia,⁴ and Cæsarios,⁵ whom—it should be noted—he begat at an advanced age and after fervent prayer.

b) He struggled on behalf of the Church and Her people at very critical times, when the tempest of Ari-

anism was sweeping the East; it was he who, with profound spiritual judgment, vigorously strove to have St. Basil the Great appointed Archbishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia and Exarch of Pontos, in which endeavor he was ultimately successful, thanks to his untiring persistence.

c) He left us, as an inestimable treasure, his Holy Relics, which are preserved incorrupt to this day at Nea Karvali, in Kavala.

And yet, this venerable Elder, Bishop Gregory of Nazianzos, in a certain difficult circumstance, along with other Bishops from Asia, signed a semi-Arian creed, by reason of his simplicity.⁶

That is to say, he did not reject the Orthodox Symbol of Nicæa out of deep conviction; but, as an old man of about ninety, he was unable fully to grasp the subtle theological and dogmatic notions, such as the distinction between *homoousios* and *homoiousios*, which were convulsing the Church at that time.⁷

In spite of this, it was a dogmatic fall...

What was the attitude of the clergy and, indeed, of the monks in the vicinity of Nazianzos towards this fall of the elderly Bishop?

They broke communion with him; that is, they “walled themselves off” from him.

The Church of Nazianzos was confused and divided; a “storm” and “tempest” had arisen (see note 7).

When unity of Faith does not exist, we always have schisms.

At that time, the Bishop's son, Gregory, who was still a Presbyter and an assistant to his elderly father, endeavored to bring this dissension and schism to an end.

Finally, in 364, with the help of our Lord, he succeeded in making peace between the monks and clergy and his father; a fruit of his joy over this reconciliation is his *First Irenic Oration*.⁸

This moving *Oration* closes with the following exhortation:

As for those who think to the contrary, as corruptors of the truth, let us take them in and cure them, as far as we are able; but as for those who are incurably ill, let us repudiate them, lest we be infected by their sickness before we impart our own health to them.⁹

* * *

This instructive event allows us to draw the following preliminary conclusions:

a) Pious believers have, all along, been sensitive to matters of the Faith; St. Gregory characterizes them as “the more fervent part of the Church”;¹⁰ and they have not hesitated to distance themselves from Shepherds, even very virtuous ones, when the latter did not teach aright the word of Truth.

b) The purpose of this estrangement is to prevent the Faithful from being infected with sickness, namely the heretical mind-set of those who have deviated.

c) The heterodox are divided into those, on the one hand, who are *capable of being healed*, and those, on the other hand, who are *incurably ill*; and we “take

in and cure” the former, while we “repudiate,” that is, avoid, the latter.

* * *

Now, what does this incident from the life of St. Gregory the Theologian have to tell us today?

In our days, we confront—now at a global level—a new tempest: the heresy of *ecumenism* and *innovation in the Festal Calendar*.

We have Shepherds and, indeed, Patriarchs, who collectively and, moreover, out of conviction, uphold and propagate heretical beliefs; but we also have a flock that has not been made fully aware that the Faith and salvation are in jeopardy.

Thus, since 1920, and especially since 1924, zealots for piety have faced a twofold problem: the *perspective of faith*, and the *perspective of love* towards ecumenists and innovators.

The theological basis of this twofold *perspective* has been put to the test and has, unfortunately, divided the anti-ecumenist *Old Calendarists*.

That is to say, while they are all agreed that there is absolutely no room for any ecclesiastical relations and communion with *ecumenists*, they disagree, nonetheless, about the ecclesiological identity of those who are yet to be condemned as *innovators* and about the most appropriate pastoral attitude towards them.

This disagreement leads the moderate anti-ecumenists—and, in particular, our Synod, the Holy Synod in Resistance—to wage a struggle on two fronts:

—*on the one front*, we have to contend with *ecumenism* and, at the same time, put forth efforts to persuade our well-intentioned brothers who still adhere to the *innovation of the New Calendar* to assume their responsibilities and to fulfill their obligations towards their imperilled Faith;

—*on the other front*, we have to cope with deviations among the Orthodox, striving to preserve the sound ecclesiological foundations, as well as the correct theological presuppositions, of our anti-ecumenist endeavor, in order to ward off new and destructive innovations in the struggle against *innovation*.

These two fronts,¹¹ on which *Orthodox resistance* is escalating with ever-increasing intensity, determine also the two aims of my address on this important day and Feast of our most Holy Church.

I invoke your prayers and your attention, that, through the intercessions of the special Patron of our “Convocation” this evening, St. Theodore the Studite, we may be edified in Christ.

“Every Landmark of the Fathers Has Been Moved”

The author of this work points out the heretical character of ecumenism and the legitimacy of the struggle against ecumenism which the Old Calendarist Orthodox are waging.

He also sets forth the secure Patristic boundaries of this anti-ecumenist endeavor, which validate it and preserve it from hazardous deviations.

The ecumenists have upset the dogmatic and ecclesiological landmarks, the foundations and bulwarks, of the Orthodox Church. *“Every landmark of the Fathers has been moved; every foundation, every bulwark of dogma has been shaken”* (St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxii, col. 213A).

However, according to the author, there lurks a danger for the Old Calendarist Orthodox anti-ecumenists: their diverse oversights and excesses damage the credibility of their witness, since the “the right doctrine of true religion” is capable of being distorted *“in the direction of excesses or in that of deficiencies”* (St. Basil the Great, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxii, col. 213C).

In spite of this, we must continue the struggle against the panheresy of ecumenism with all might and sacrifice, casting our hope on Divine Providence.

Front cover photo: The Basilica of St. Peter, the Vatican, on the Patronal Feast of Rome, June 29, 1995. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is empowered to bestow a joint blessing with Pope John Paul II to the Papist congregation, on the basis of the official position of the ecumenists of the Phanar, that the Orthodox Church and Papism are “Sister Churches,” “working in the same field and in the same vineyard of the Lord.”