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T H E S S A L O N I K I
T H E O L O G I C A L C O N F E R E N C E

ECUMENISM

ORIGINS, EXPECTATIONS, DISENCHANTMENT

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**THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
VIS-À-VIS ECUMENISM**

Ecumenism is a child of the 20th century. It was born at its outset, experienced a metamorphosis in the World Council of Churches around the middle of the century and by its end, it was on its last breath being fiercely rejected. Unfortunately, it survived this crisis, and continues to trouble the Church of God in the 21st century.

This theological conference on ecumenism, in our humble opinion, is long overdue but not hopelessly so. Therefore, we thank God, as well as all those who worked to make this eminent gathering possible, in order that the issue of ecumenism may be considered from various perspectives, which should be of great help to all local Orthodox Churches, as well as the Church as a whole and every faithful person. It will help the Church take the proper position toward this, not only the latest, but also the most dangerous ecclesiological heresy, which our well-known theologian, Fr. Justin Popovich, consequently called pan-heresy because it encompasses all heresies previously known in the history of the Church.

There has been and will be much more discussion at this esteemed gathering about the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church, as well as regarding the concept of ecumenism itself. Therefore, we will not dwell long on these concepts in our presentation. What we are going to discuss is the question whether or not, to what extent and in what manner the Serbian Orthodox Church opposes ecumenism; and through whom and in what manner this opposition has manifested itself and still manifests itself today.

The realization that not one local Orthodox Church has remained unblemished and unsullied by the ecumenical pestilence is a painful fact. Some have been more influenced, others less. But it is also consoling and encouraging that in every local Orthodox Church there have been and

still are shining and holy examples of individuals and groups who actively oppose, in speech and writing, the penetration of ecumenism into the fullness of Orthodoxy.¹ Perhaps there are not many of them, perhaps they are not connected sufficiently among themselves and united into a common defensive front but what is certain is that all of them are first united with the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ and with all the Saints of the Orthodox Church – who throughout the centuries labored and fought for the purity of the Orthodox Faith – and through the Saints, and by means of them, with each other. This may be the “little flock” the Lord consoled in His Gospel when he said “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32).

In the Serbian Orthodox Church the first and most consistent opponent of ecumenism was and remains Father Justin Popovich of blessed repose, who motivated others by his example, his words and his deeds, and inspired many to follow him. Fr. Justin succinctly expressed his Orthodox theological position on ecumenism in his well-known book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, first published in Thessaloniki in 1974. In this book, Fr. Justin gave a concise but comprehensive definition of ecumenism. According to him, “Ecumenism is a collective name for pseudo-Christianities, for the pseudo-Churches of Western Europe. All European humanisms, headed by Papism, have given it their wholehearted support. And all these pseudo-Christianities, all these pseudo-Churches, are nothing other than a collection of heresies. Their common evangelical name is pan-heresy.” Father Justin believed that he would best show all the abnormality and deformity of ecumenism as it appears in our time if we reflected it in the mirror of the One True Church of Christ. And that he did, presenting the Orthodox teaching (of the Orthodox Church) about the True Church of Christ, the Church of the Apostles and Holy Fathers, and Holy Tradition in the most meaningful and succinct way. Only if one has true and full knowledge of the teaching of Christ is it possible to readily discern and recognize all false and heretical teachings.

The origins of ecumenism as a movement to unite Christians, its historical progress and development, as well as the various traps into which many Orthodox Christians, including quite a few clergy and a good number of Bishops, fell, and continue to fall, was described and systematically reported by Hieromonk Sava Janjic of the brotherhood of the Monastery of Dechani in his book *Ekumenizam i vreme apostasije* [Ecumenism and the Time of Apostasy] published in Prizren (Kosovo) in 1995. In it ecumenism is clearly and primarily defined as an “ecclesiological heresy,” the purpose of which is to transform the Body of Christ (the Church) into an “ecumenical organization,” striking thus at very root of the Orthodox faith – the Church. Ecumenism, in fact, according to Fr. Sava, seeks to arbitrarily “correct” the theanthropic teaching of the Lord Christ, reducing it to the level of a social, humanistic and pacifistic idea, and attempting to replace Christ Himself with the atheistic and secularized European man.

On account of its clear anti-ecumenical position, Fr. Sava’s book was attacked by many and even banned from being sold in church bookstores; however, no one even attempted, let alone succeeded, in denying or contesting anything presented within it.

More recently, nonetheless, the main champion of opposition and resistance toward ecumenism in the Serbian Orthodox Church has been and remains *Sveti Knez Lazar* [Holy Prince Lazarus], a magazine published by the Diocese of Raska and Prizren for the past 12 years. This magazine carefully follows all ecumenical events and provides commentary, articles, reviews

¹ The only exception to this rule, unfortunately, is the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is in fact the promoter of all ecumenical events and trends globally. So far not one voice of opposition has been heard from within this local Church in opposition to the ecumenistic activity, in word and deed, of the head and representatives of this church. On the contrary, from there one could frequently hear only words of condemnation and attack against those throughout Orthodoxy who strive to preserve the “pledge of faith” unsullied by sick ecumenical belief.

and viewpoints of all those for whom the purity of faith and Orthodoxy is the primary matter in life, even more important than life itself. It publishes articles of rebuttal and translations of letters, decisions and the testimony of the monasteries of the Holy Mountain on various issues. When, in the field of theology or the domain of practical “ecumenizing,” in the dialogue between Orthodox and non-Orthodox, boundaries would be overstepped and result in the purity of the Orthodox faith and Church being brought into question, the voice of conscience would be heard, first from the monks from the Holy Mountain and then from individual students of theology and theologians from Thessaloniki, Athens, and other local Orthodox Churches. *Sv. Knez Lazar* would make such reviews, appeals and protests available on its pages, which greatly contributed to strengthening the resistance to ecumenism in the heart of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Among such texts were those critical of the decisions reached in Balamand, including the letter of the Holy Community of the Holy Mountain of Athos sent to His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the end of 1993; the Report of the Holy Community of the Holy Mountain of Athos on dialogue between the Orthodox and the anti-Chalcedonians held in Chambésy in November 1993, and many others

There were similar reviews and reproves from individuals and groups within the Serbian Orthodox Church itself. Worthy of mention is a text by novice-monk Ilija entitled “*Nešto gore i od ekumenizma*” (Something even worse than ecumenism), where he presents horrible testimony about ecumenical prayers by Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Muslims at the beginning of 1992 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In connection with this, we wrote a brief commentary, “*Bog se ne da ružiti*” (God cannot be corrupted) in which we point out that this kind of trampling on the traditions of the Holy Fathers and the canons of the Holy Orthodox Church leads directly, by God’s allowance, to inter-ethnic conflict and bloodshed.

The question of ecumenism and the attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church toward it, as well as the question of the membership of the S.O.C. in the World Council of Churches, was also a frequent topic of discussion in those years at the Holy Assembly of Bishops. We were most often the instigator and inspirer of these discussions with our communiqués, as well as articles published in our magazine *Sveti Knez Lazar*. This was the very reason why the Holy Synod of Bishops issued a decision at the end of 1994 (no. 3128 dated November 17, 1994) for us to prepare and submit a brief overview of the history of the WCC for the Holy Assembly of Bishops, as well as an examination of the Serbian Orthodox Church’s membership in it. Thus, in carrying out this decision of the Holy Synod in May of 1995 we submitted the following report to the Holy Assembly of Bishops from which, we hope, our personal position toward the WCC and toward ecumenism is clearly understood.

We explained, first of all, that the very name “World Council of Churches” is untenable, since the Holy Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council laid down the dogma that there is *one* Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and not many, out of which it would be possible to build or create some kind of “council” or “union” which would be a type of *super-Church*.

We then briefly presented the history of the creation of the WCC in 1948, showing that it has its roots in a modern heresy – the pan-heresy that is called ecumenism, which sprouted up in the lap of Protestantism at the end of the 19th century in order to meet its particular needs. Only later was this movement and its anti-ecclesial ideas (such as the so-called “branch theory”) gradually adopted and accepted by individual local Orthodox Churches, which joined the WCC and became an *organic* member.

The Serbian Orthodox Church long resisted this temptation of ecumenism. Finally, however, it, too, became a member of the WCC in 1965 and, making an effort not to lag behind the example of local Orthodox churches that became members earlier, took active part in all ecumenical dialogues and activities regardless as to what extent they were contrary to the tradition of the Holy Fathers and the canonical regulations of the Orthodox Church.

[What follows are excerpts from the report to the Holy Assembly of Bishops:]

The Creation of the WCC

1. The very name “World Council of Churches” contains the entire heresy of this pseudo-ecclesial organization.

The church is One and Catholic, and in it is all Truth, all Grace, and all that that the Lord brought with Him to the earth and gave to the people, and left among them for their salvation. The Church is One and Catholic because it gathers all who desire salvation into *one*, into *wholeness*, which is the Body of the God-Man Christ. Hence the very idea of a “council” or “union” of churches is unthinkable, inadmissible and unacceptable to the consciousness and conscience of the Orthodox person.

2. The World Council of Churches was born out of a modern heresy – the pan-heresy that is called *ecumenism*. Today the phenomenon of ecumenism is not anything new and unknown. Quite a bit has been written and said about it for decades, and it can be rightly said that it is a very complex phenomenon. Ecumenism is above all an ecclesiological heresy because it strikes at the very root of Orthodox faith – at the holy Church, attempting to transform it into an “ecumenical organization” stripped of all the theanthropic characteristics of the Body of Christ, thus preparing the path for the Antichrist himself.

The foundations of ecumenism were laid as early as the end of the 19th century, in 1897, at the conference of 194 Anglican bishops in Lambeth, England. The basic principles of the future ecumenical union of Christian “churches” were formulated at this gathering. The Lambeth conference defined a dogmatic minimum, stemming from the idea that unity should be sought in the lowest common denominator of theological teachings. This lowest common denominator should be sought in the Holy Scripture (but outside the context of the Holy Tradition), in the Symbol of Faith of Nicea and Constantinople, and in just two holy mysteries: Baptism and the Eucharist. In addition, there was an emphasis on the so-called “Principle of Tolerance” toward the teaching of other “churches” in preparation for the introduction of a “compromise of love.” The third invention of the Lambeth Conference was the famous “branch theory,” stemming from the assertion that the Church of Christ is supposedly a tree of many branches, all of whose branches are mutually equal and which represent the manifestation of the *one* Church only in their collective unity.

Once sown, the evil seed spread quickly. By the beginning of the 20th century, in 1919, the Protestant “churches” organized a World Mission Conference in Edinburgh where it was decided to organize a worldwide Christian movement to address issues of faith and church organization. Simultaneously active was the Life and Work movement, whose task was to realize the unity of Christians through their cooperation on issues of practical life. Out of these two exclusively Protestant movements and with their unification in 1948 at the first General Assembly in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches based in Geneva was created. Sadly, also present at this assembly, unfortunately, were some of the Orthodox Churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece and the Russian Metropolia in America (today the Orthodox Church in America).

3. Unfortunately, Orthodoxy did not resist this temptation of modernism and secularism for long but quickly became infected with it. Among the Orthodox Churches, the first to make a concession to ecumenism was the Patriarchate of Constantinople, from as early as January 1920, with its Encyclical “To the churches of Christ everywhere”. Not only does it refer to all local Orthodox Churches as “churches” but for the first time this name is equally given to the various heretical confessions.

Thus, at the very beginning of this unfortunate encyclical it is said: "...rapprochement between the various Christian Churches and fellowship between them is not excluded by the doctrinal differences which exist between them..." The Encyclical further appeals that it is necessary to work on "preparation and advancement of that blessed union"; it calls various heretical groups "churches that should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, as being a part of the household of Christ" and "fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ". (Eph. 3:6) As the first practical step in the building of mutual confidence and love, it is considered necessary for the Orthodox Church to accept the New (Gregorian) Calendar, "for the celebration of the great Christian feasts at the same time by *all* the churches." This was soon done by the Patriarchate of Constantinople (and later by some other local Orthodox Churches), which paid a high price: internal schism both within the Church and among the people.

Other Orthodox Churches resisted this evil temptation for a time. The Patriarchate of Moscow in particular demonstrated certain signs of caution toward ecumenism. The Conference of the bishops of local Orthodox Churches held in Moscow on 8-18 July 1948, on the occasion of the 500-year anniversary of the proclamation of autocephaly of the Russian Church bore witness to this. Representatives of the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Albania taking part in the meeting rejected participation in the world ecumenical movement and in the WCC, which had just been formed, condemning it as a heresy.

4. However, this zealotry of the Orthodox in teaching God's Truth about the Church, unfortunately, did not last long. Only four years after the formation of the World Council of Churches, in 1952, Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople issued an encyclical calling on all heads of local Orthodox Churches to join the World Council of Churches. In spite of the fact that the reasons for such exhortations were totally trite, clichéd and non-ecclesial (for example, "rapprochement of peoples and nations" for the purpose of "confronting the great problems which occupy the whole of humanity"), during the course of the same year (1952) individual Orthodox Churches rushed to join the WCC. The Ecumenical Patriarchate sent its permanent representatives to WCC headquarters in Geneva. In 1959 the Central Committee of the WCC met with the representatives of all the Orthodox Churches on the island of Rhodes. Since then, ecumenism has penetrated the walls of Orthodoxy and began like a cancer to consume it from within. After the Rhodes meeting, the Orthodox began to compete among themselves as to who would be the most ecumenical.

Beginning in 1961, Orthodox ecumenists began to convene one conference after another for the purpose of realizing their ecumenistic goals. Thus, in 1964, a Third Conference was held on Rhodes where the decision was made to conduct dialogues with heretics "on an equal basis" and each local Orthodox Church was obligated to establish, independently, "brotherly relations" with heretics. The ringleader in all of these ecumenical games was Patriarch Athenagoras, who began a series of meetings with the Pope of Rome, effected the mutual removal of anathemas from 1054, conducted common prayers, etc., later followed by his successors and assistants, Archbishops Iakovos of North and South America, Stylianos of Australia, Damascene of Geneva, and many others.

This work on the ecumenical agenda was also accompanied by independent statements by individual representatives of the Orthodox Churches, not only those from the Throne of Constantinople – statements which have nothing in common with the positions and teachings of the Holy Fathers. The boundaries established by our Fathers between truth and falsehood, light and darkness, Christ and Belial had been violated. The fundamental task of all the outpourings of sentimental (in essence, mutually hypocritical) love supposedly manifested in these statements

was to develop a consciousness among Orthodox Christians that they were brothers *in Christ* with the un-Orthodox, and members together of the one and true Church of Christ.

This was stated at meetings and conferences, printed in magazines and books, and broadcast on radio and television. And all this was supposed to lead to “a common Cup”, i.e. to common communion (*intercommunio*), which is the basic goal of the so-called “dialogue of love”. According to Father Justin Popovich, this is in fact “the most evil betrayal of the Lord Christ, the betrayal of Judas, and the betrayal of the Church of Christ as a whole”.

The Serbian Orthodox Church joins the WCC

Following the example of the other local Orthodox Churches, especially the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Serbian Orthodox Church from the very beginning made an effort to keep in step with the times. Although it was not yet formally a member of the WCC, it inaugurated close and frequent contacts with this “council of heresy”, as Father Justin has referred to it, and began to receive official visits from members of the WCC, above all individuals responsible for sending inter-ecclesial assistance, such as Mr. Tobias, Mr. Maxwell, and Ms. Meyhoffer, and finally, the General Secretary, Mr. Visser't Hooft.

Although it is true that the Serbian Church did not have an official representative-observer at the WCC's Second Assembly in Evanston, U.S.A. in 1954, or at the Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, it had a three-member delegation (headed by Bishop Visarion). At this assembly, there was a complete turnabout with regard to the participation of local Orthodox Churches. Apparently under the pressure from the Communist Soviet government, the Moscow Patriarchate and all of the Churches in the satellite countries along with it became members of the WCC. Joining at that time were the Patriarchates of Moscow, Georgia, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as the Churches of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

The Serbian Church became a member of the WCC by way of the "back door" and somewhat dishonorably. Namely, the WCC General Secretary, W.A. Visser 't Hooft paid a visit to Serbia and proposed that the Serbian Orthodox Church become a member without necessarily signing certain theological documents that were dogmatically and canonically unfounded. The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church at that time (not the Assembly of Bishops), with Patriarch German as its head, decided that the Serbian Church should become a member. This was accepted and made official at a meeting of the WCC's Central Committee in Africa, in 1965.

Subsequently, the Serbian Church, like the other local Orthodox Churches, has become an *organic* member of the WCC. Through our official representatives (bishops and theologians), we took part in all later assemblies, conferences, symposiums, meetings, prayer gatherings and everything else that occurred to the WCC, to which we agreed without question. The result of this participation was reflected in certain material aid which the Serbian Orthodox Church periodically received from the WCC in the form of medicine, medical care and rehabilitation of some individuals in Switzerland, student scholarships, and financial donations for certain concrete purposes and needs of the SOC, such as, the construction of a new building for the Theological School. We paid for these crumbs of material assistance by losing, on the spiritual plane, the purity of our faith, canonical consistency and faithfulness to the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

The presence of our representatives (and Orthodox representatives in general) at various and sundry ecumenical gatherings has no canonical justification. We did not go there in order to boldly, openly and unwaveringly confess the eternal and unchangeable Truth of the Orthodox Faith and Church but in order to make compromises and to agree more or less to all those decisions and formulations offered to us by the non-Orthodox. That is how we ultimately arrived

at Balamand, Chambésy, and Assisi, which taken as a whole represent infidelity and betrayal of the Holy Orthodox Faith.

During this entire period of the decline and ruin of the Church of Saint Sava in every respect, the only voice that could be heard was that of Father Justin of Chelije, who was and remains the vigilant and unchanging conscience of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Deeply feeling and liturgically experiencing the spirit of Apostolic and Patristic Truth, he wrote, regarding the ecumenical "labor" of Patriarch Athenagoras: "And the Patriarch of Constantinople? By his neo-Papist behavior, his words and deeds, he has scandalized Orthodox consciences for decades, renouncing the unique and all-saving Truth of the Orthodox Church and Faith, acknowledging the Roman Pontifex Maximus with demonic pride..."

These words clearly express a mature, sincere and patristic position toward a heretical Patriarch and a precise diagnosis of the basic intentions of Constantinople, which the successors of Patriarch Athenagoras are carrying out to this day under the eyes and with the silent acquiescence of officials from the other Orthodox Churches.

And what would Father Justin say today?

The only good thing in this whole affair is that our official representatives and participants in various ecumenical gatherings are not writing or publishing anything in the church press upon their return home that would poison the Orthodox people. Frequently, even we Bishops gathered in Assembly receive no official reports from our brother Bishops who represent us, which I consider unacceptable.

Taking into account everything we have stated above, on the one hand, and the eternal and unerring evangelical measure "that every tree can be recognized by its fruits" on the other, it is as clear as day what we should do.

At this same Assembly, we must pass a *decision* that the Serbian Orthodox Church must withdraw from the WCC and from all similar organizations (such as the European Council of Churches and others) and put an end to its participation in all ecumenical and atheistic gatherings.

This must be done for the following reasons:

1. Out of obedience toward the Holy Apostle Paul, who counsels and commands: "As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him." (Tit 3:10)
2. Because it is consistent with all the holy Canons of the Orthodox Church against which we have now grievously sinned.
3. Because there is not a single one among the Holy Fathers of the Church who by his teaching, life and deeds could serve as an example for us that would justify our joining and continuing to remain in the non-ecclesial organization of the WCC and others like it.
4. For the sake of the salvation of our souls, of the souls of the flock entrusted to us, which we have severely scandalized and spiritually harmed by our ecumenizing to date, as well as for the sake of all those who are still outside the Ark of Salvation – the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, whom such a decisive and clear action on our part can help more in seeking and finding the truth and the path to salvation than the continuation of our colorless and godless association with them."

The Decision to Withdraw

Two years after our report, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church decided at its council of May-June 1997 that the Serbian Church should withdraw from the WCC, that is, it decided that the Serbian Church should no longer be an organic member of this

organization. In the explanation of this decision, the Bishops stated that the World Council of Churches was created as an expression of the desire for the establishment of a unified Church, especially among the fractions of the Protestant world (beginning in 1910). As we have seen, the Orthodox Churches, each in its own way, regularly participated in the so-called Ecumenical Movement, especially after 1920, in order to realize Christ's commandment "that they may be one" (Jn. 17:11).

In the beginning eminent theologians took part in ecumenism, including the Holy Bishop Nikolai of Zhicha, Bishop Irinej (Ciric) of Backa, Bishop Irinej (Djordjevic) of Dalmatia, Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky, Dumitru Staniloae and others. At every opportunity they witnessed to Eternal Truth and the position of Orthodox theology that "without unity of faith there is no unity in the Church as the theanthropic organism of Christ, and there cannot be". At all ecumenical meetings and assemblies, they separated their Orthodox positions and decisions in separate conclusions. Only later, with the forming of the WCC, this principle was gradually abandoned, and Orthodox representatives increasingly melted into the common (essentially non-Orthodox) conclusions and decisions. This is especially demonstrated by the justification presented at the council of the Serbian Orthodox Church explaining and justifying the decision to withdraw from the WCC, as follows:

- *Because in its activities the WCC has begun to neglect its original position regarding the unity in faith as a precondition for the unity of the Church;*
- *Because this Council has begun to have the nature of a super-Church and to behave in this spirit, practically accepting in its activities the Anglican "branch theory", which is unacceptable to Orthodoxy, and more recently called the theory of "Christian traditions", according to which the "traditions" of some Protestant sects (created, for example, in the previous century) are equated and considered equal with the living Tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which has existed in continuity since apostolic times;*
- *Because the WCC is increasingly influenced by secularism;*
- *Because of the very organization of the WCC, where Protestant communities hold the overwhelming majority, the Orthodox Church is always outvoted, and consequently the Orthodox Church cannot influence the WCC's decisions nor be adequately represented;*
- *Because questions of faith and order and unity in faith and the One authentic Church of Christ are being increasingly neglected in official circles of the WCC because of pragmatism and everyday secular policies;*
- *Because official circles of the ecumenical movement are dominated by the spirit and organization of religious syncretism in practical expression and implementation (especially after the general assemblies in Uppsala and Canberra);*
- *Because instead of trying to reduce existing dogmatic and canonical differences in the spirit of ecumenism, some of the most important members of the WCC (for example, the Anglican Church) are introducing new "church" traditions and practices that they dogmatically justify, customs that imperil the ethos of the Gospel, and the entire Christian tradition of East and West (ex. the ordination of women "bishops" and "pastors"), creating a radically new order, ecclesiology and morality in the "church";*
- *Because the WCC tolerates some Christian communities among its members that accept and bless unnatural and anti-natural sexual practices (the marriage of persons of the same sex – lesbians and homosexuals) that are "shameful to even hear".*
- *Because this ecumenical, syncretistic and secularist spirit is also being transmitted to certain Orthodox circles, especially among the Diaspora and mixed areas, where intercommunion and prayer meetings with the non-Orthodox have become a frequent*

practice – a practice which denies the very ethos and the patristic manner of thinking and life in the Church (meaning it has a negative impact on the Church itself);

○ *Because organic membership in the WCC causes scandals and serious polarization among local Orthodox Churches within the Fullness of Orthodoxy (meaning that instead of contributing to pan-Christian unity, this type of membership directly endangers unity within the Orthodox Church itself, let alone the ecclesiological unacceptability of these kinds of memberships!);*

○ *Because of all the reasons given above, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the faithful witness and guardian (together with the other local Orthodox Churches) of the faith and ethos of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, announced its withdrawal from the WCC; and its resignation as an ORGANIC member of this organization (as has also been done by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Georgian Church). In doing so, however, the Serbian Church does not withdraw from continuing to work on the “unity of all” and continuing to cooperate with all, including work with the WCC in the humanitarian field, as well as in other areas of inter-Christian responsibility for peace, justice and unity among the peoples and states of the world.*

● *Taking into account, however, that this is a far-reaching decision that affects not only the life and mission of the Serbian Church but of Orthodoxy in general and its salvific mission in the world, the Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Church has decided that prior to its final resignation, it will first forward its position and rationale to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and to all heads of local Orthodox Churches with the proposal and request that a Pan-Orthodox Conference be convened as soon as possible with regard to further participation of Orthodox Churches in general in the World Council of Churches. Only after this consultation would our own local Church adopt its final position on the issue and share it with the public”.*

The Decision Sabotaged at the “Thessaloniki Summit”

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that the concluding points of this decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church Assembly annulled all the aforementioned compelling reasons for a final and permanent withdrawal from membership and partnership with the WCC.

The Thessaloniki Summit of the representatives of all of the Orthodox Churches was soon held and its “conclusions” prevented the Serbian Orthodox Church from carrying out its 1997 decision to withdraw from the WCC. It was as if the purpose of the consultation was to water down and invalidate the Serbian Orthodox Church’s decision. And sure enough, the very next year, in 1998, the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church offered a new answer to the submitted question. This second answer, according to the interpretation of Orthodox Canonist Zeljko Kotoranin, “was not theological but political.” It consisted, first of all, of the unwillingness of the Assembly to protect its decision of the previous year from falsification, denial and a failure to implement it, and second, of the adoption of the conclusions reached in Thessaloniki and the sending of a delegation of the Serbian Church to the WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. On the other hand, the essence of the conclusions of the Thessaloniki gathering was to seek a radical reorganization of the Council, which did not occur in the next seven years to the present day. These “conclusions,” therefore, remained “a dead letter.” The WCC did not reorganize itself in any respect and become closer to the Orthodox Church of Christ, nor did any local Orthodox Church (including the Serbian Church) withdraw from membership in the WCC as a result of this. The reasons and justifications for withdrawing from membership from the WCC (as presented in the decision of the S.O.C. Assembly) are also still

valid, as are, unfortunately, the harmful ecclesiological consequences that follow from that membership.

Thus by its second response the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, abandoning its earlier decision (from 1997) and its justification, continued and extended its *organic* participation as an equal member of the World Council of Churches, guiding itself and its flock down the path of ruin. Quite simply, extending the membership of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the WCC is not and cannot be pleasing to God. Those most responsible in the Body of the Church – the Bishops – are drawing God’s fury upon themselves and their flock by circumventing Church dogma and violating canon law. The heretical concept of “evangelical ecumenism” – the Gospel without Christ, salvation without the Church – is unacceptable to the Orthodox consciousness.

The Sopocani Appeal

It is consoling that in the Serbian Orthodox Church despite the inconsistencies shown by the Holy Synod of Bishops there are still those who have not reconciled themselves to this outcome and who continue to openly and boldly come forward against distorted ecumenism and against those who support it, frequently exposing themselves to open persecution by individual Bishops. It is worth mentioning some names that are well-known to the Serbian people. In addition to Zeljko Kotoranin whom we have already cited, we have Rodoljub Lazic, Miodrag Petrovic, Vladimir Dimitrijevic, Presbyter Boban Milenkovic and others. The brave monks and nuns of almost all of the Dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church are especially consistent in their opposition to ecumenism “in practice”.

The common voice of all of the fighters for the purity of faith and faithfulness to the Orthodox Church could be heard at the Sopocani Monastery Meeting, which was held in February of 2001. From this gathering of monastics, priests and faithful children of the Orthodox Church, guided by concern and love toward the tradition of St. Sava in their mother Church, an “*Appeal-plea*” was sent to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which reads as follows:

- *That it carry out its decision from 1997 regarding the withdrawal of our Church from the WCC without delay, pointing out that every local Orthodox Church has the authority to make and carry out such a decision for itself, as they joined the WCC individually. The conclusions of the Thessaloniki Summit are not and cannot be an obstacle to this;*
- *That it re-examine its attitude toward Roman Catholicism, which all the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church, from Photius the Great to Mark of Ephesus and Justin (Popovich) of Chelije consider a heresy, not a “sister church,” and to stop all common prayer with the Roman Catholics and the Pope of Rome under the guise of “brotherly love”;*
- *That under no circumstances should it accept the frequently announced visit of the Pope to the Serbian Church and that certain (frequently heard) motions toward the introduction of the New Calendar in our Church be stopped because such an attempt would result in a great schism within our Church, as in all local Orthodox Churches that have introduced the New Calendar;*
- *That a inter-church dialogue be initiated in the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding all contested issues of spiritual life and theology, because it is the lack of well-intentioned dialogue that leads to internal divisions among the people into followers of various liturgical, theological and pastoral schools, some of which introduce innovations foreign to the Holy Tradition.*

Conclusion: A Gathering of Trumpeters

Finally, the Sopocani Meeting ends its *Appeal* by quoting the words of the Holy Bishop, Saint Nikolai (Velimirovich) regarding the need for zeal and alertness in the battle for the salvation of our soul:

“...If someone says: The danger to our Church was in the past, and today the danger is gone, he is terribly wrong. He is a trumpeter who plays to put us to sleep. And in this age we need as many trumpeters as possible who will play to awaken us, to arouse us, to prepare us, to defend ourselves. For the Unmentionable, whom our sacred people and their clergy prevented from becoming 'embodied in the form of law' [referring to the Concordat of 1937] nevertheless still walks upon this earth like a ghost, like a specter - agitating, agitating, agitating.”

We would like to conclude our presentation with the prayerful wish that our Thessaloniki symposium, the Inter-Orthodox Conference on Ecumenism, become a gathering of *trumpeters* who by their testimony and their zeal will awaken the slumbering consciences of the representatives of all of the local Orthodox Churches, so that all together or each individually, following its internal voice, withdraw from the World Council of Churches, stop prayerful and practical participation in the heresy of ecumenism, and thus attest before the face of the entire world that the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church was, is and will forever remain the Orthodox Church, and that outside it, there is no Church, and that without the Church and unity with the Church, there is no salvation.

This is the only true service to our neighbor, to those close to us, the only true love toward all non-Orthodox or heterodox individuals and peoples in the modern world because, according to Father Justin, “The only true love is that which ensures those close to us life eternal.”

Bishop ARTEMIJE
Of Raska and Prizren

Translated by Snezana Ivanisevic De Berthet



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