



Current Greek Orthodox Attitudes to Ecumenical Relations

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Fr Maximos Lavriotes is a theologian and historian specialising in Hellenistic Judaism and Patristics. During his 14-year period as a Mount Athos monk he was alerted to issues regarding ethnic minorities. His report Human Rights on Mount Athos (1989) induced the Greek government to change its policy on the non-Greek monastic minorities on Athos.

Two recent documents clearly illustrate the mentality prevailing amongst conservative Orthodox clergy and laity in Greece, the Balkans, Russia and the Greek diaspora on ecumenical relations and non-Orthodox denominations. They were originally published in Greek and have been translated by Fr Maximos. Pan-Orthodox Conference on Ecumenism (Thessaloniki, 20-24 September 2004) This Conference was organised by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Thessaloniki and hosted some 800 representatives of various religious, monastic and ecclesiastical bodies mainly from Greece but also from Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Cyprus, Jerusalem and Mount Sinai. Sixty speakers, mainly monastics, bishops and academics, examined aspects of the theme 'Ecumenism: emergence, expectations, disillusionment'. In their final communique the participants declare their conviction that the ecumenical movement is attempting to impose 'inter-religious syncretism' on all Christian Churches and the Orthodox Churches in particular. They call for all Orthodox Churches to boycott all ecumenical dialogues and to renounce their membership of the WCC. They demand that any Orthodox clergy taking part in any ecumenical activities be excommunicated by their own church authorities and they conclude: Ecumenism is not a spiritual movement. It is utterly secular, selfish and anti-Christian. On grounds of Christian charity we reject ecumenism simply because we wish to offer to non-Orthodox and non-Christian folks precisely what the Lord has so abundantly granted to us all: the opportunity to become members of His Body, namely members of His Holy Orthodox Church. As no one can be saved without pristine doctrinal clarity expanding even in the minutest details of Christian faith and practice, we caution the non-Christians and non-Orthodox alike not to throw their own salvation into jeopardy by remaining active in ecumenical syncretism which hinders the former from seeing Christ as the sole way to salvation and the latter from seeing the Orthodox Church

solely as The Church. Greek Orthodox Anti-Ecumenism in Britain The second document comes from the minutes of the 2003 Annual Clergy Meeting in London of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, published in the latter's official periodical *Orthodox Herald*, no. 174-75, April 2003, pp.8-13. One of the speakers, in his capacity as the Archdiocese's representative to the British ecumenical bodies CTBI, CTE and the Group for Evangelisation in particular, reported on the current state of relations between the Greek Orthodox and non-Orthodox denominations in Britain. After referring to other representatives as 'the diplomats of non-Orthodox churches who sometimes seem to exude sluggishness and the disputatious air of academe, exactly as Arius, the heresiarch, did - according to Emperor Constantine's rebuking letter to him', the Greek representative embarks on a comparative description of similarities and differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox denominations. Under the subtitle 'Who prevails, where' he writes: In our inter-Christian contacts we have inevitably to make some comparisons between our Orthodox Church and the other Christian denominations. From these comparisons as well as from study and contacts, we can arrive without bias at the following conclusions: 1) Theological truth and precision, the right doctrine, Patristic traditions, church custom and liturgical efficiency are very very clearly and almost exclusively the prerogative of our Holy Orthodox Church. 2) We must, nevertheless, acknowledge with humility the superiority of other denominations in matters of ecclesiastical order, functionality, educational level, social responsibility, methods of evangelisation, participation in worship etc. In the light of these findings I would like to suggest the following course of action: 1) We must organise ourselves properly in order to resist successfully, and according to our interests, the ever-increasing trend of mixed marriages. We must become friendly and open to society at large, but simultaneously come to know and define the limits of our social integration regarding - especially - our young generation. 2) We must achieve a constant and dynamic presence in all inter-Christian organisations from the very small and insignificant to the very important national bodies. An appropriate representative of our Church must be present everywhere so that the Orthodox views are made manifest We may have to support financially such organisations on certain occasions, thus showing commitment to their aims and purposes. 3) We must insist on proper representation. Orthodoxy cannot be randomly defended. St John Chrysostom once replied to the question: 'who is the right person to converse with heretics?' suggesting two qualifications of paramount importance to the defender: a) fervent faith so that he would not submit to pressure or compromise, and b) special knowledge so that he might be able to offer the word of truth to non-Orthodox people. 4) It is imperative for our Holy Archdiocese to dedicate a special conference on this particular question so that we may exchange views and ideas on this significant issue. My closing remark is that Orthodoxy is utterly confessional and rightly so. This should not hinder us, however, from participating in inter-Christian meetings so that we may be able to convey the truth of Orthodoxy to non-Orthodox Christians, who have definitely erred from the right way. These meetings allow us also to

acknowledge - without exaggerating - the non-Orthodox Churches' contributions to several social and spiritual causes as well as to ourselves and our communities, to which they so often have shown compassion, support and generosity.

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