



TOWARD *the*
HOLY *and* GREAT
COUNCIL
Theological Reflections

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2.10.

RELATIONS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH WITH "UNIATES":
A PLEA FOR REMOVING ONE MORE SKANDALON
IN AN INCREASINGLY SCANDALIZED WORLD

by V. Rev. Peter Galadza*

Allow me to begin by suggesting that today's "new circumstances and challenges" referenced in the Draft Document "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" (par. 24) require a radical *kenosis* among Christians. The rapid rejection of Christ's truth in the West, and the equally widespread secularization of the educated classes in the East, demand a new commitment to "modeling the new man in Christ" (*cf.* par. 23). This "new man in Christ" blesses those who curse him and does good to those who hate him (*cf.* Mathew 5:44). This kind of love shatters secularism's self-assuredness.

In 1987, the Primate of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky, publicly asked forgiveness of the Russian Orthodox Church in the following words: "Following the Spirit of Christ, we extend our hand of forgiveness, reconciliation and love to the Russian nation and the Moscow Patriarchate. We repeat the words of Christ that we spoke during our act of reconciliation with the Polish nation: 'Forgive us, as we forgive' (Matthew 6:12)"¹⁵. Unfortunately, this gesture has remained unanswered to the present day. Can Orthodox and "Uniates" not begin a new era of relations by having their Prot hierarchs send – and respond to – such letters on a regular basis?

The present Primate of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, has continued his predecessor's legacy. Contrary to some perceptions, he welcomed the recent

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meeting of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis.¹⁶ The concerns he expressed related only to the phrasing of three paragraphs of the otherwise superb Havana Statement (pars. 25, 26 and 27). These presented a distorted interpretation of the situation in Ukraine, and belittled the ecclesial status of the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Statement referred to them as “ecclesial communities,” a term in Catholic parlance reserved for Protestants. Moreover, the fact that Greco-Catholics were informed of their “right to exist” (par. 25) was viewed as a patronizing concession to what is actually a Church of true martyrs. In any case, the Balamand Agreed Statement had already asserted this right almost 25 years ago. Notwithstanding this, Ukrainian Greco-Catholic hierarchs sincerely hope to see encounters like the Havana Meeting occur more often – and at different levels – so that each successive gathering might bring the participants closer to the Truth.

Recent history provides striking examples of Orthodox-Eastern Catholic rapprochement. In the mid-1960s Patriarch Athenagoras declared to Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV, that the latter had “spoken for the Orthodox” at Vatican II. In the USA, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School welcomed Melkite Greek Catholic seminarians for years – with wonderful results evident to all. In Canada, the Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies has hired not only a long list of Orthodox scholars as adjunct faculty, but was blessed to have the current chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America as a full-time, tenured professor. Finally, the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv frequently hosts presentations by scholars of the Moscow Patriarchate, and hires lecturers of various Orthodox Churches.

Eastern Catholics understand the sense of vulnerability that prevents many Orthodox from reciprocating such gestures. However, in the meantime, we hope for at least a change in attitude among those Orthodox who continue to view Eastern Catholics as either “traitors

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to Orthodoxy,” or “heretics.” The question of “treason” is too broad to be discussed here. However, as regards “heresy,” it is odd that while Eastern Catholics accept the same teachings as Roman Catholics, they are frequently treated with far greater disdain.

In any case, more Orthodox need to understand the reasons that so many Eastern Catholics remain Catholic. In part, at least, it relates to some of the unresolved issues that continue to generate division *within* Orthodoxy. Eastern Catholics have found them resolved as a result of union with Rome – imperfect as that union has been. Jurisdictional strife, for example, is essentially absent from Eastern Catholicism. Also, the ethno-phyletism that plagues parts of Orthodoxy is challenged by communion with a universal primate. Of course, Eastern Catholics can be just as guilty of the same ethno-phyletism (though, ironically, its proponents within Eastern Catholicism insist that they simply want a “national Church” – “just like the Orthodox”). However, as culpable as Eastern Catholics may be of this ecclesiological heresy, they nonetheless recognize the right of the Bishop of Rome to reprove and/or discipline Catholic leaders who would foment or tolerate nationalist hatred. And while the Pope’s admonitions may not always be heard, no one in the Catholic Church questions his right to exercise universal primacy in this way. These problems are not adduced here to point to “Orthodox failings.” They are only mentioned to illustrate why even those Eastern Catholics who passionately love Orthodoxy remain Catholic.

In conclusion, two concrete initiatives for strengthening the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3) – and thus removing hindrances to the gospel – seem quite feasible:

1. The creation of an international theological dialogue involving official representatives of the Byzantine Catholic (or, Greek Catholic)

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Churches on the one hand, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches on the other. Presently, the Eastern Catholics who participate in the International Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue do so as delegates of the Vatican – not their own Synods. In any case, theological meetings of Eastern Orthodox and Catholics of the Byzantine tradition would facilitate focused discussions of issues particularly germane to these Churches. Such a dialogue could develop, for example, a common historiography of the 1946 Pseudo-Synod of Lviv. Some of the same Orthodox who appropriately decry proselytism continue to champion the Synod as a legitimate “return to Orthodoxy.”

2. The publication by the Holy and Great Council – or a subsequent Conciliar commission – of theological and practical principles for Orthodox relations with Eastern Catholics. Naturally, different regions will adapt these principles according to diverse sensibilities. But certain uncharitable attitudes and behaviors, witnessed occasionally even in North America, would hopefully be declared unacceptable.

Finally, to end where we began: The concluding paragraph of the Draft Document reads: “The Orthodox Church is aware of the fact that the movement for the restoration of Christian unity takes new forms in response to new circumstances and new challenges” (par. 24). In the present circumstances of global strife and antipathy towards our Churches, truly committed Christians within Eastern Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy will “cleanse out the old leaven... the leaven of malice” and become new dough heated by the Holy Spirit so that we might again celebrate together “in sincerity and truth” (I Cor. 5:8).

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3.4.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING FROM MORE THAN JUST FOOD

*by Adam A.J. DeVille**

It is good to see that the upcoming Great and Holy Council is giving as much serious consideration to fasting as it is. Almost alone today among Christians, the Orthodox Church has attempted to maintain this practice, which “is as old as humanity itself” as St. Basil reminds us in the opening paragraph. In an era in which we are finding more people more conflicted than ever over food — with some overweight and in poor health and others making little less than an idol out of food — the simple act of fasting becomes a radical one indeed.

As the document succinctly puts it, with welcome and refreshing bluntness, the “spiritual life is unattainable without the endeavor of fasting.” Let those who chatter vacuously today about being “spiritual but not religious” note this point well! I have attempted, for more than a decade, to remind non-Orthodox Christians of how venerable fasting is, and how vital today for one’s individual spiritual health — as well as the wider health of the Church.

The practice of fasting was increasingly abandoned in most Western Christian traditions by the 20th century, and was largely destroyed in the Latin Church following Vatican II. I have written numerous essays trying to reacquaint Western Christians with this practice, pointing to traditional Byzantine Orthodox practice as a model to guide the West in re-acquainting itself with a tradition it had foolishly jettisoned. I was an unapologetic apologist for a strict, “traditional” fast, especially during Great Lent. This, I assumed, should be immediately adopted