

St. Gregory Palamas and the Pope of Rome

...[P]alamas' writings on the Filioque...[cannot]...be reconciled with [Roman] Catholic dogma on the Procession of the Holy Spirit. His position was clear enough: "We will not receive you Latins in communion with us as long as you say that the Spirit is also from the Son." ...However..., regarding Bishop Chrysostomos' allegation regarding Palamas' direct "condemnation of the Pope" and his universal jurisdiction in the Church[,] ...I had hoped...that proof would be forthcoming.... Surely now there should be a retraction printed in Orthodox Tradition. Today a number of "Orthodox Bishops" and theologians no longer regard the Filioque as a "Latin heresy." You may call them "Crypto-Papists," but you can not avoid the question of how...you can remain in "resistant" communion with them. (J.L., NY)

Ecumenism, which claims to preach religious tolerance, is, as we have often pointed out, possessed of a tyrannical spirit, such that differences of opinion, subtlety, and delicate questions must succumb to its notion of *minimalism*, or else be set aside. Such a sophomoric approach, which champions a spirit of simplicity and superficiality, is foreign to our traditionalist witness and its uncompromising search for the truth, which occasions no kind of triumphalism or fundamentalism, but a sense of sobriety and circumspection. The question at hand, sent to us by a Roman Catholic and an active ecumenist, shows how easily the spirit of religious syncretism can lend itself to an unthinking, intolerant approach to very complex historical and theological matters, if not a certain priggery ("Surely now there should be a retraction...").

St. Gregory Palamas was occupied, for the majority of his active religious life, with the defense of Hesychasm and the Orthodox text of the Symbol of Faith against the attacks of what he called his "Latin-minded" detractors, who supported both a distorted view of spiritual life and of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Not only did he consider the Latins heretics (in his first treatise on the Holy Spirit, he introduces his subject by accusing the Latins of heresy in their very understanding of God, reckoning even ostensibly small errors in such an area the source of ever-expanding misbelief

[*Ἑλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ*, ed. P. Chrestou (Thessaloniki: 1981), Vol. I, p. 71]), but he deemed, by extension, the Latin hierarchs, the Pope included, to be in heresy and under anathema, given the events of 1054 and the failure of the union attempts in the century before him. In writing against the heresy of the Latins, he did not specifically dedicate treatises to the subject of the Papacy (since he did not separate the Latins from their Papacy), an institution that he would no doubt, however, like his modern Serbian counterpart, the Blessed Justin of Chelije, have accused of “demonic, anti-ecclesiastical pride,” had he separately addressed it.

Our purpose here, let us emphasize in a spirit of honest examination and research, is not to condemn Roman Catholicism or to engage in institutional competition. It is to describe the witness and faith of a Father who is *par excellence* an Orthodox opponent of the deviant spirituality that developed in the Christian West after the separation of the Patriarchate of Rome from the other Roman Patriarchates (a spirituality that leads directly to the unreasonable precepts of Papism); to portray accurately a great Saint who condemned the heresy of Roman Catholicism, not out of some misguided institutional loyalty, but because of his profound personal knowledge of the genuine dimensions of the true Christian religion and the soul-destroying, demonic effects of the misperceptions of Latin spirituality. This caricature of St. Gregory Palamas as the chief Orthodox protagonist against Roman Catholic heresy is a universal one in the Orthodox world. Professor Nikos Matsoukas characteristically notes that the disputes between Palamas and the Latins, in the fourteenth century, brought to focus, as has nothing else, “the difference between Western and Eastern theology” (N.A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία* [Thessaloniki: 1990], I, p. 137). Likewise, in his monumental *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία: Ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μέχρι σήμερον* (Athens: 1947), B. Stephanides identifies St. Gregory Palamas and the Hesychastic Controversy with the clear distinction between Eastern and Western Christianity that contemporary ecumenism wishes to pass over as a matter of semantics or conflicting theological “systems” (pp. 434-435, *pass.*). It is thus almost impossible for anyone who has studied St. Gregory’s writings to imagine that a Latin Christian—ecumenist or not—could entertain the idea that this great Father believed in the universal jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome in the Christian Church.

In the first place, Papism as it was known at the time of St. Gregory—let alone with such accretions as “Papal infallibility” or notions of administrative “collegiality” under the aegis of the Papacy, which some naïve observers wrongly consider compatible with an Orthodox ecclesiology—is impossible within the theology of Hesychasm, which attributes to spiritual transformation, and not institutional prerogative, whether “on” or “off” a given Episcopal Throne, the source of correct doctrine. Those who are enlightened by God know Him truly, as did some of the Orthodox Popes of Rome before that Church’s fall, but this knowledge is solely the product of union with Christ, both in the case of the pauper and the Pope, as St. Gregory so eloquently argues in his essay “Περὶ Θείας καὶ Θεοποιοῦ Μεθέξεως” (Chrestou, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 212-261). The very structure of Palamite theo-

gy disallows any attribution of universal jurisdiction or authority, except in the traditional sense of “honor” and “eminence,” to anyone in the Church. St. Gregory resolutely and unequivocally identifies true teaching and all authority with spiritual enlightenment, which, in turn, is the product of a true and genuine encounter with God shared by *all* enlightened individuals in common and equally. *Hesychasm is a direct condemnation of Papism.*

In the second place, one can, if forced to do so, demonstrate that St. Gregory Palamas included the Roman Catholic Church, its chief See, and, logically, its chief prelate in his accusations of heresy against the Latins. In several places, he is very clear about this. To “the Church of the Latins,” he attributes, in his second essay on the procession of the Holy Spirit (“Περὶ τῆς Ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, Λόγος Β’”), a “failure to return from heresy, ...although it was the greatest and the leader of the Patriarchal Thrones of outstanding eminence” (Chrestou, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 183). Eminence and honor notwithstanding, he considered the Latin Church and its Throne to be in heresy. In his first essay on the Holy Spirit, St. Gregory says that, “...even if it were not blameworthy to say that the Spirit proceeds also from the Son, it should not have been added to the Faith by the Latins.” “Indeed, the leaders of Old Rome” (so called because Constantinople, the “New Rome,” was granted an equal status of honor with Rome by the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Synods), he continues, “did not add to the Symbol anything that might have even proved *to be* Orthodox.” Therefore, the Saint concludes, “it is right to demand that they [the Latins] remove the addition and not, by reason of the eminence of some living Pope, cease loving those who ended their lives with a death attested by God.” In other words, for St. Gregory Palamas, any question of Papal authority—albeit academic in his day, when the Church of Rome and its Throne had already fallen—*lay in the adherence of the Roman Bishop to Holy Tradition and the common phronema of the Fathers, while the criterion for the spiritual authenticity of his teachings was verified, not by the eminence of his See, but the “attestations of God”* (*ibid.*, p. 169).

It is unfortunate that so few of St. Gregory Palamas’ writings are available in English. Even those texts which the late Father John Meyendorff translated into French, since he could not easily deal with the difficult and complex Greek of St. Gregory, are faulty and, at times, misleading. Thus ecumenists can, in the spirit of “Biblical literalism,” challenge us to demonstrate that this great Orthodox Father did not accept the universal sovereignty of the Pope. But no honest student of Palamite theology would, even after cursory reading in the many works of this Father, find the slightest evidence of a spirit that might accept such an institutional absurdity. Rather, St. Gregory’s theology constitutes the very antithesis of the theological thinking that leads to and supports the tyranny and blasphemy of Papal monarchy.

With regard to our position of resistance and the *filioque* clause, our reader is once again tainted by his ecumenical associations. No “Orthodox” Bishop can accept or believe in this heresy. If he does so, he ceases to be Orthodox in his confession, since he thereby places himself outside the consensus of the Church. Now, when an Orthodox Bishop admits to believing in this heresy, then the Canons require that we *cut off communion* with him, resisting his errors until such time as he is condemned by the Church and, re-

fusing to repent, wholly separates himself from the Body of Christ. In our resistance, we have, therefore, *cut off communion* with those who, having no regard for the Truth and no sympathy for the heterodox whom they are confirming in their errors, would dare to question—and *this in the service of ecumenism and false union with the Latins*—the age-old condemnation by the Orthodox Church, and this unanimously in Church Synods and the writings of the Fathers, of the Latin heresy of the *filioque*, which brings souls to destruction and distorts not only our understanding of the nature of God, but of love, communion, union with Christ, and Church authority. We maintain no *resistant* communion with such individuals, but are *walled off* from them.