

The Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches

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Abstract

This article examines the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church on the occasion of Pope Francis' meeting with the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew in 2014. It considers *inter alia* the relationship of the so-called "dialogue of love" with the "dialogue of truth". Concerning the general ecumenical discussions and the participation of the Orthodox Church in these, the question is raised as to what the most important theological contribution of the Orthodox dialogue and the Roman Catholic Churches are at this stage of development? How can Orthodox theology affect the dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox understanding pneumatology? Furthermore, based on a recent Joint Statement of the Primates of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople it is necessary to further conduct discussions and focus on practical matters today which will aid the alignment of the two Churches.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Catholicism, dialogue, ecumenism, alignment

Introduction

The Schism of 1054 BCE between the Eastern and Western churches, has had unpleasant repercussions of often a long duration and these have also been very unpleasant and somewhat hostile. Before the final rupture in 1054 BCE, five other schisms had occurred during the first millennium of Christianity, each on different occasions¹ The unity of the Church, however, remained the objective of both sides and since the 20th century an attempt of rapprochement between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church has taken place through a protracted theological dialogue.²

The formal dialogue began in 1980 with Pope John Paul II, as representative of the Roman Catholic Church, and the then Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios. This dialogue actually began as early as the second half of the 20th century. The cultivation of 'brotherly' relations between the two Churches became a reality thanks to two later leading figures of the Churches, the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and the Roman Catholic Pope John XXIII.³

¹Despotis, S. (2008). **Orthodox in 20th century**. Vol. C' "The dialogue of Orthodox between East and West. The deepest causes of the Schism between East and West." Patra. p. 85

²Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 1.

³ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 2.

‘Dialogue of Love’ and ‘Dialogue of Truth’

The rapprochement of the two sides began with the strengthening of fraternal relations through the "dialogue of love" which it took various forms, such as the encounter between Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI and their embrace on the Mount of Olives in January 1964 as well as the lifting of mutual excommunications which dated back to 1054 BCE. The latter was by means of ecclesiastical acts in Rome as well as in the ‘Phanar’ (Orthodox Church ‘Headquarters’ in Istanbul, Turkey) on 7 December 1965. This "dialogue of love" continued and was strengthened by the exchange of visits on the Patronal feasts, and involved restoring remains to the Churches. It also focused to an extent on the organizing of academic conferences, the mutual offering of scholarships and any other appropriate event to the desired end.⁴

The "dialogue of love" was the beginning of the important rapprochement between the two Churches and constituted the means of eliminating what has been divisive interpersonal conflict that was characterized the theologians of both Churches. This served to ease at the heavy psychological climate that prevailed in the Orthodox Church owing to undue past behavior exhibited by the Roman Catholic Church. It was also the means that would help pave the way to proceed to a meaningful theological dialogue. In the "dialogue of truth", that followed, both sides had to come, not in arrogant fashion but rather in a spirit of humility and ‘fear of God’. It was to be in a decisive manner, and without offering any compromises on disparate positions.⁵

According to the Orthodox Church, the theological dialogue had to be "on equal terms" and would involve the "entire body" of the Roman Catholic Church, whilst ensuring that this dialogue was integrated into official bilateral theological dialogues conducted by Orthodoxy.⁶ Naturally, the theological dialogue began under the extreme weight of the unfortunate historical past and sad division between the two Churches. The definition of topics to discuss and the dialogue process were also important considerations.

The theological dialogue was conducted in three phases.

In the first phase (1982-1988), the theological dialogue focused on ecclesiological issues thus achieving the aim of avoiding certain points of conflict between the two sides⁷ and it sought to promote the essence of what is called ‘Church’ (sacrament, unity, holiness and grace). At the 1st plenary meeting of what became known as the Joint International Commission (JIC)

⁴ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century.** “The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church.” 2.

⁵ Vasiliadis, P. (2005) . **The perspectives of Dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. Athens.** 198.

⁶ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century.** “The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church.” 3

⁷ Filioque,

in Patmos and Rhodes in 1980, there was a plan for the establishment of a Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.⁸ The 2nd and the 3rd plenary sessions of the JIC in Munich (1982) examined the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Church standpoints in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and ecclesiastical unity, according to a common faith that is the continuation of the work of the Apostles. The 4th plenary session of the JIC in Bari (1987) addressed issues from the perspective of unity between the Churches. The 5th plenary JIC in New Valamo (1988) examined the issue of the mystery of priesthood and the importance of apostolic succession for the unity of the church.⁹

The second phase (1990-1993) addressed the issue of *Unia* (Union) This issue has created problems in the relations of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches as it verifies Christianity's controversial problems leading to "*agreto*" (aggressive heretical behavior) and to the disruptive mentality of the unity of faith which, as it turned out, was the strategic orientation of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰ During the 6th plenary JIC in Freising (1990), the issue of *Unia* was proposed as an urgent matter of discussion as it was deemed to have priority over all other aspects of the dialogue.¹¹ Later, at the 7th plenary meeting of the JIC in Balamand, Lebanon in 1993, there was a re-examination of the issue of *Unia* looking at its ecclesiological and more practical aspects. The 8th plenary JIC in Baltimore, USA, in 2000, failed to reach an agreement on the basic theological aspects of the immense problem of *Unia* so the bilateral dialogue was interrupted.

In the third phase of the theological dialogue (2005), the Joint Co-ordinating Commission of the JIC in Rome, dealt with normal and ecclesiological consequences of the sacramental nature of the Church in matters of authority and conciliarity.¹² In Ravenna, Italy in 2007, the 10th plenary meeting of the JIC dealt with the mutual interdependence of "primacy and conciliarity" as critical issues. The dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches has not been completed but is still open, with the "dialogue of love" continuing the effort to overcome difficulties in order to advance the theological work through the "dialogue of truth" and thus setting the path to *Unia*.

The main contribution of the Orthodox in the first period of the theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church

⁸ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialoque between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church."19

⁹ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialoque between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 9-10.

¹⁰ Kotsiopoulou. K.P. (1993) . **OUNIA in Greek Theological Bibliogrqa**phy. Historical, Theological and Social investigation. Orthodox study.Thessaloniki . 15.

¹¹ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialoque between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." . 12.

¹² Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialoque between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." .14.

Countless debates and controversies occurred within the Church, not only created by the clergy, but also by lay people, with the participation of the Orthodox Church and particularly of the Greek Church in theological dialogues with other Branches of Christianity.¹³ However, this concern must be eliminated by the fact that, with its involvement, the Orthodox Church fulfills its mission in the world for One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as espoused in the Nicene Creed, united through the dynamic testimony of its theological, operational and spiritual wealth.¹⁴

During the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic church, ecclesiological issues were raised from the very beginning of the dialogues that took place. The issue of ecclesiology was selected so as, on the one hand, to avoid issues that created disruption within the Church, and on the other hand, to deal with what the Church really is, and above all to participate in the sublime pleasure of a truly Eucharistic dinner.

The dialogue was oriented towards a Eucharistic ecclesiology in which ecclesiastical offices are the reflection of the eschatological Kingdom which is revealed in the Eucharist.¹⁵ The sacraments of the Eucharist and the Church are considered as a means of church unity, since, in their dialogue the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics declare that they are acting on the basis of the continuity of faith of the Apostles.

At the plenary JIC in Munich in 1982, local ecclesiology took precedence over global ecclesiology. In light of this, it is presumed that this meeting reflected the positions of Orthodox ecclesiology. Thus the local Church-Eucharist-completeness, with the Bishop as the carrier of unity, and the role of the Holy Spirit, are given utmost priority. Universality and Apostolicity are the two other major characteristics of the sought Church unity. According to the structure and the organization of the Church, only when every local Church duly celebrates the Eucharist will it enjoy ecclesiological completeness, that is universality, because only then will it consist of the full 'body of Christ'. According to Orthodox tradition, universality has become synonymous with the identity and fullness of the faith in its Ecclesiology. The universality of the Church is not quantitative or geographical neither does it depend on the spreading of the faithful throughout the world, for the Church was catholic in orientation even when Christian communities were indeed relatively small, few in number and widely scattered. For the Orthodox tradition, the universality of the Church is within the body of the local Church and not out of it.

¹³ Petrou-St. Tsomanidi- M. Gkoutzioudi.,(2013) **The Ecumenical Dialogue in 21st cent. Realities-Challenges-Perspectives**. Honoree offering to the to professor emeritus P. Vasiliadi. Edit. Vaniaw, Thessaloniki.264.

¹⁴ Petrou-St. Tsomanidi- M. Gkoutzioudi.(2013). **The Ecumenical Dialogue in 21st cent. Realities-Challenges-Perspectives**. Honoree offering to the to professor emeritus P. Vasiliadi. Edit. Vaniaw, Thessaloniki. 266.

¹⁵ Keramidias, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialoque between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." . 8.

The apostolicity of the Church does not refer to the apostolic succession as a phenomenon of transferring rights and properties to individuals and creating a class of officials outside the body of the Church. The Church is apostolic, created and sealed by the Holy Spirit given to the Apostles. The apostolic succession stems from the Church itself given that the bishop, who is the guarantor of apostolicity, is the successor of the Apostles and has received the gift of priesthood through the Eucharist that he himself regularly celebrates at the local Churches under his jurisdiction.¹⁶ The apostleship does not involve individual persons but the apostolic succession is the succession of eucharistic communities in which the bishop "as the primate of the Eucharist is the successor of the only high priest, speaking on behalf of Christ."¹⁷

At the next plenary session of the Duma in Bari, Italy, in 1987, the central theme was the prospect of unity between the Churches. The individual issues addressed were *Faith, Mysteries and Unity*. Faith is seen as a synergy which has an ecclesial and sacramental nature and which derives from the grace of the Spirit and *Mysteries and unity of the Church* since these mysteries help preserve the consciousness of salvation, freedom from original sin, the need to integrate into the Church and the connection with the Triune Godhead or the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, death and resurrection, as well as baptism that gives new life by immersion in water.¹⁸

During the last plenary meeting of the JIC that took place in 1988 in Neo Valamo, the issue of priesthood prevailed in the first phase of the theological dialogue. Several important views were expressed, including:

- a). The sanctification and unity of God's people and the expression of a triad society which are established by apostolic succession.
- b). Priesthood as a gift which is linked to the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God.
- c). The issue of apostolic succession and its transmission through the local Churches.
- d). The Churches, of both the East and the West, through their conciliar lives, have experienced forms of brotherhood amongst their many bishops.
- e) Lastly, in accordance with the 234th Apostolic Canon, recognition of the first among bishops was to be achieved.

In conclusion we could say that the contribution of the Orthodox Church in the dialogue between the two Churches, during the first phase, was important since its positions in the texts, as stated in documents which were drawn up during the plenaries, had been largely accepted. Another important element of the contribution of the Orthodox Church in the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church is the fact that there was definitely a mutual approach

¹⁶ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 199.

¹⁷ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 199.

¹⁸ Keramidas, D. (2014). **Releatios during the 20th century**. "The dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church." 10.

of the Churches as well as an equal identity of views on basic theological principles that would lay the foundations for building the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church that is desired.

The influence of the Orthodox conception of pneumatology in the dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Church.

During the 20th century, "Christomonism", a movement focusing on Christ and relegating the Holy Spirit, and even the Holy Trinity, to secondary importance, made its appearance in Western Theology. The movement did not aim at the denial of faith in the Holy Spirit and the Trinity but at rather diminishing or minimising their great importance when compared to Christ.¹⁹ Pneumatology instead, argues that the Holy Spirit has a crucial and unique role and there is an inseparable relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The participation of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movements resulted, on one hand, in realizing the problems of "Christomonism" and on the other hand, in restoring the importance of the Holy Spirit in Church teachings. The Holy Spirit is what releases Christ from the limits of creation through the Resurrection and simultaneously offers Him as a gift to humanity so that the latter will acquire the possibilities that have become realities in the person of Christ."Christology is in essence considered by many theologians to be somewhat inconceivable without Triadology. This is because Christology begins with the favorable disposition and approval of the Father, then essentially passes through the assumption by the Son of the fate of the fallen creation, and results in Christ, (that includes all of us, as well as the whole creation), in the form in which the Holy Spirit is released as a gift of Christ."²⁰

When participating in the theological dialogues the Orthodox Church does not only rely on the capacities of its representatives but mostly on the "supervision of the Holy Spirit in the grace of the Lord" who wishes "to unite everyone."²¹ The Orthodox Church's participation in the dialogue with the Catholics thus in a sense rejected the position of western Theology in the teaching of the *filioque* that supported the notion that Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and adopted the position of the Orthodox Church, that the Holy Spirit proceeded only from the Father. This position of the Orthodox Church thus ultimately preserves the uniqueness of each Person of the Trinity or Triune Godhead. Therefore, the

¹⁹ Papathanasiou, N.Th. (2014). **The turn of Ecumenical movement toPneumatology and her relation with Church's mission. Patra.** 10.

²⁰ Zizoulias of Pergamos. (St.) (1984-1985). **About Dogmatic and Dogma.** Lessons of Years 1984-1985.193.

²¹ Petrou-St. Tsomanidi- M. Gkoutzioudi., (2013).**The Ecumenical Dialogue in 21st cent. Realities-Challenges-Perspectives.** Honoree offering to the to professor emeritus P. Vasiliadi. Thessaloniki. 269.

Orthodox theologians maintain that there are two distinct "economies", that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit.²²

The Orthodox tradition is based on theological conditions such as these which follow, namely that:²³ Ecclesiology must be placed within the framework of triadic theology in which there should be a clear distinction of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Furthermore, Pneumatology must be a constitutive condition of Christology which recognizes the importance of the Holy Spirit but also determines how the Holy Spirit acts in view of the Economy of the Son. Resurrection is not a product of the characteristics of the two natures of Christ nor is it a miracle of His divine nature, but a result of the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

During the plenary sessions of JIC, Orthodox theologians expressed their views on the degradation of the role of the Holy Spirit which was supported by the Roman Catholic Church, the emphasis which is placed on its role by Lossky's pneumatological approach and what is termed to be 'Russian' theology, also George Hondres' view of the unique economy of the Spirit, but also the 'New Monism' conception by some present theologians who, out of their own interest in Pneumatology, proceeded to the issue of the separation of Pneumatology from Christology.²⁴

The formulations of Orthodox theologians in the dialogue between the two churches restored, to its proper dimension, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, and Pneumatology as an important aspect and condition of Christology.

The two Churches join forces in joint declarations by the Heads of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople.

The Schism between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches, the lack of a single expression of Christianity and the degradation of sacramental unity of Christians are the causes for which the United Europe bases its values on the principles and values of the Enlightenment, without reference to religious values.²⁵ Therefore, in order to restore the identity of the Church, the dialogue between the two churches is indispensable if we are to bring about its visible unity. The visible unity can be achieved through a "dialogue of love and truth," a meaningful dialogue between "sister churches" in the expression of St. Mark the Gentle.²⁶

²² Papathanasiou, N.Th. (2014). **The turn of Ecumenical movement to Pneumatology and her relation with Church's mission. Patra. 7.**

²³ Zizoulas of Pergamos. (St..) **The mystery of Church in Orthodox tradition.**

²⁴ Papathanasiou, N.Th. (2014). **The turn of Ecumenical movement to Pneumatology and her relation with Church's mission. Patra. 5.**

²⁵ Vasiliadis, P. (2005). **The perspectives of Dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. Athens. 196.**

²⁶ Vasiliadis, P. (2005). **The perspectives of Dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. Athens. 200.**

Despite objections and fears by a sections of the clergy and laity as regards the participation of the Orthodox Church in the dialogue, many Pan-Orthodox decisions have been taken during its participation in bilateral theological dialogues both at the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1976 in Chambesy, Geneve, and mainly at the Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference also held at the same venue in 1986. The decisions arose from the principle that the Orthodox Church is fully aware of its responsibility in the unity of the Christian world. Thanks to the universal spirit that characterizes the Orthodox Church, its participation in the Ecumenical Movement for the restoration of unity is a consistent expression of the apostolic faith occurring in new historical conditions and consistent with its historic route to address new existential demands.²⁷

The great Russian theologian and blessed Father, George Florovsky, has stated it correctly regarding the necessity of Orthodox participation in the dialogue: "I believe that participation is not only permissible and possible for the Orthodox, but is also a direct duty that emanates from the very essence of Orthodox consciousness and the obligation belonging to the true Church to constantly submit its testimony everywhere, before 'synagogues and authorities and powers."²⁸

In the efforts that are made to seek unity between the two Churches, it is important to emphasize the contribution of the recent joint declarations made by the Primates of the Church, Pope Francis representing the Roman Catholics and the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, in Jerusalem on May 25, 2014 and again at the *Phanar* on November 30, 2014. Their profound and joint declarations defined the areas in which unity of the two Churches will need to carefully focus today.

In their first joint statement in Jerusalem, the Primates made references to the brotherly Apostles, Peter and Andrew, founders of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, as well as many other references *inter alia*, the common path of unity between the two Churches under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the embrace between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem, thus starting a "dialogue of love" between the two Churches, the need for joint participation in the Eucharistic dinner, as true disciples of Jesus Christ, the fundamental contribution of the Joint International Commission for full communion between Roman Catholics and Orthodox, the task of the two Churches "to jointly build a just and humane society in which no one will feel excluded and marginalized", the protection of creation of the gift that the Creator has entrusted to people, the need for respect and dialogue with other religions, the situation of Christians living in the Middle East and particularly

²⁷ Martzelos, G (2013). **The participation issue of Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical dialogue under the light of Pan-Orthodox decisions.** Thessaloniki, 271.

²⁸ Martzelos, G (2013). **The participation issue of Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical dialogue under the light of Pan-Orthodox decisions.** Thessaloniki, 277.

²⁹ Athanasius, *Epist. Ad Serapion*, 28, PG 26, 593.

in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and modern times which are characterized by the phenomena of violence, fear, brutality, indifference and selfishness.

In the second joint statement at the *Phanar*, the Primates reiterated their decision for joint efforts with a view to full unity of the Christian world and stressed their continuous interest in the problems facing people, particularly Christians in the Middle East, Iraq and Syria, but also in the Ukraine and Africa.

Conclusion

Through the two Joint Declarations of the Primates of the Churches, many issues were highlighted which are of great concern to both parties, namely the theological and ecclesiastical issues that arose in every earlier meeting. Issues that the Christian Church is trying to solve through the "dialogue of love" and "dialogue of truth", and overcoming the many conflicts and bitterness of the past. Today, the churches need to focus on being closer to society in general and the everyday needs of all people, to being fully aware of the huge problems that have resulted from the advances of globalization, such as global warming and climate change, as well as terrorism, war, conflicts and population displacements such as those noted from especially Syria..

The concurrence and alignment of the two Churches must focus on the pressing and vexing issues of the protection of human dignity and the defence of human rights, on the institutions of both marriage and family, on fostering mutual respect and building trust with other religious traditions, on promoting globally accepted peaceful solutions to the conflict zones of the Middle East and especially a constructive dialogue with Islam on the basis of mutual respect, tolerance and friendship, as well as environmental protection issues.

The universality of the Christian Church accepts the existence of a universal state of sorrow and misgiving and Christians are called more than ever, to constant prayer, offering and solidarity to relieve the plight of the needy. The Joint Statement closes with an appeal to the Lord for the "gift of peace in love and unity to all the human family. "

It is indeed time for the significant and integral tradition of Christendom, and indeed of considerable ecclesiastical importance that the Churches reconcile as soon as possible. St. Athanasius the Great expresses this truth: "There is" he says "a primary tradition and teaching and faith of the catholic Church, which the Lord Jesus gave, the apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved: on it the whole church has been founded."²⁹ Tradition is thus also an ecclesiological element of Christian unity.

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