

A REPLY TO ONE WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS THE LATIN CHURCH

Regarding the unjust glorying of the papists in the imaginary dignity of their Church

St. Ambrose of Optina



This letter was written by St. Ambrose of Optina at a time when the educated classes in Russia were reading more about religion in French than in their native Russian. Ties with people of other confessions often caused people to doubt their own Orthodox faith. The letter is no less useful today for those who grapple with the difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

In vain do some of the Orthodox marvel at the current propaganda of the Roman Church, at the feigned selflessness and activity of her missionaries and at the zeal of the Latin sisters of mercy, and incorrectly ascribe to the Latin Church such importance, as if by her apostasy from the Orthodox Church, the latter remained longer such, and has the necessity to seek unification with the former. On rigorous examination, this opinion proves to be false; and the energetic Latin activity not only does not evoke surprise, but, on the contrary, arouses deep sorrow in the hearts of right-thinking people, who understand the truth.

The Eastern Orthodox Church, from apostolic times until now, observes unchanged and unblemished by innovations both the Gospel and Apostolic teachings, as well as the Tradition of the Holy Fathers and resolutions of the Ecumenical Councils, at which God-bearing men, having gathered from throughout the entire world, in a conciliar manner composed the divine Symbol of the Orthodox Faith [the Creed], and having proclaimed it aloud to the whole universe, in all respects perfect and complete, forbade on pain of terrible punishments any addition to it, any abridging, alteration, or rearrangement of even one iota of it. The Roman Church departed long ago into heresy and innovation. As far back as Basil the Great, certain bishops of Rome were condemned by him in his letter to Eusebius of Samosata, "They do not

know and do not wish to know the truth; they argue with those who proclaim the truth to them, and assert their heresy."

Apostle Paul commands us to separate ourselves from those damaged by heresy and not to seek union with them, saying, *A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself* (Tit. 3:10-11). The catholic [universal] Orthodox Church, not two times, but multiple times tried to bring to reason the local Roman Church; but, despite all the just attempts at persuading the former, the latter remained persistent in its erroneous manner of thinking and acting.

Already back in the seventh century, the false philosophizing that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son was conceived in the Western Church. At first, certain popes rose up against this new reasoning, calling it heretical. Pope Damasus proclaims in a Council resolution: "He who thinks rightly about the Father and the Son but improperly about the Holy Spirit is a heretic" (Encyclical § 5). Other popes, such as Leo II and John VIII, also affirmed the same thing. But most of their successors, having been carried away by rights of domination and finding many worldly benefits in this for themselves, dared to modify the Orthodox dogma about the procession of the Holy Spirit, contrary to the decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, and also contrary to the clear words of the Lord Himself in the Gospel: *Which proceedeth from the Father* (Jn. 15:26).

But just as one mistake--which is not considered a mistake--always brings another one in its train, and one evil begets another, so the same happened with the Roman Church. This incorrect philosophizing that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son, having just barely appeared in the West, already then gave birth to other similar offspring, and instituted little by little other novelties, for the most part contradictory to the commandments of our Savior clearly portrayed in the Gospel, such as: sprinkling instead of immersion in the mystery of Baptism, exclusion of laypersons from the Divine Chalice and the use of unleavened bread instead of leavened bread in the Eucharist, and excluding from the Divine Liturgy the invocation of the All-Holy and Life-Giving and All-Effectuating Spirit. It also introduced novelties that violated the ancient Apostolic rites of the Catholic Church, such as: the exclusion of baptized infants from Chrismation and reception of the Most-Pure Mysteries, the exclusion of married men from the priesthood, the declaration of the Pope as infallible and as the locum tenens of Christ, and so on. In this way, it overturned the entire ancient Apostolic office that accomplishes almost all the Mysteries and all the ecclesiastical institutions--the office, which before had been preserved by the ancient holy and Orthodox Church of Rome, being at that time the most honored member of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (Encyclical § 5, item 12).

Nevertheless, the main heresy of the Roman Church is not in subject matter, but in action; there is the fabricated dogma of supremacy, or rather, prideful striving for dominance of the bishops of Rome over the four other Eastern Patriarchs. For the sake of this dominance,

supporters of the Roman Church placed their pope above the canons and foundations of the Ecumenical Councils, believing in his infallibility. But history truthfully testifies as to just what this papal infallibility is. About Pope John XXIII, it was stated in the decision of the Council of Constance, which deposed this pope: "It has been proved that Pope John is an inveterate and incorrigible sinner, and he was and is an unrighteous man, justly indicted for homicide, poisoning, and other serious crimes; a man who often and persistently before various dignitaries claimed and argued that the human soul dies and burns out together with the human body, like souls of animals and cattle, and that the dead will by no means resurrect in the last day." The lawless acts of Pope Alexander VI and his sons were so monstrous that, in the opinion of his contemporaries, this pope was trying to establish on Earth the kingdom of satan, and not the Kingdom of God. Pope Julius II reveled in the blood of Christians, constantly arming--for his own purposes--one Christian nation against another (Spiritual Conversation, No. 41, 1858). There are many other examples, testifying to the great falls and fallibility of popes, but there is no time to talk about them now. With such historical evidence of its impairment through heresy and of the falls of its popes, is it warranted for the papists to glory in the false dignity of the Roman Church? Is it just that they should abase the Orthodox Eastern Church, whose infallibility is based not on any one representative, but on the Gospel and Apostolic teachings and on the canons and decisions of the seven Ecumenical and nine Local Councils? At these Councils were God-inspired and holy men, gathered from the entire Christian world, and they established everything relating to the requirements and spiritual needs of the Church, according to the Holy Scriptures. So, do the papists behave soundly, who, for the sake of worldly goals, place the person of their pope above the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, considering their pope as more than infallible?

For all the stated reasons, the Catholic Eastern Church severed its communion with the local Church of Rome, which had fallen away from the truth and from the canons of the catholic Orthodox Church. Just as The Roman bishops had begun with pridefulness, they are also ending with pridefulness. They are intensifying their argument that allegedly the Orthodox Catholic Church fell away from their local Church. But that is wrong and even ridiculous. Truth testifies that the Roman Church fell away from the Orthodox Church. Although for the sake of imaginary rightness papists promote the view that during the time of union with the Catholic Orthodox Church, their patriarch was first and senior among the five patriarchs, this was true only for the sake of Imperial Rome, and not because of some spiritual merit or authority over the other patriarchs. It is wrong that they called their Church "Catholic", i.e. universal. A part can never be named the whole; the Roman Church before its fall from Orthodoxy, comprised only a fifth part of the one Catholic Church. Especially since it rejected the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils the Roman Church should not be called catholic, as it follows its own incorrect theorizing.

To some, the sheer numbers and widespread distribution of adherents to the Latin Church is eye-catching, and therefore those who unreliably understand truth deliberate: should it not

be for this reason that the Latin Church be called Ecumenical or Catholic? But this view is extremely erroneous, because nowhere in Holy Scriptures are special spiritual rights ascribed to great numbers and large quantity. The Lord clearly showed that the sign of the true Catholic Church does not consist in great numbers and quantity when he spoke in the Gospels, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Lk. 12:32). There is another example in Holy Scripture which does not favor quantity. Upon the death of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided in the presence of his son, and Holy Scripture presents ten tribes as having fallen away; whereas two, having remained faithful to their duty, had not fallen away. Therefore, the Latin Church in vain tries to prove its correctness by its multitude, quantity, and widespread distribution.

At the Ecumenical Councils, a completely different indication of the Ecumenical Church was designated by the Holy Fathers, i.e. determined in council: to believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and not simply in a universal, or everywhere-present church. Although the Roman Church has followers everywhere in the world, since it did not maintain inviolate the catholic and apostolic decrees, but rather deviated towards innovation and incorrect philosophies, it does not at all belong to the One, Holy and Apostolic Church.

Those well-disposed towards the Latins likewise extremely erroneously reason that, firstly, upon the falling away of the West from Orthodoxy, something as if became lacking in the Catholic Church. This loss was replaced long ago by all-wise Providence--it was the foundation in the North of the Orthodox Church of Russia. Secondly, they think that allegedly for the sake of the former seniority and size of the Roman Church, the Orthodox Church has need of union with it. However, we are speaking not of a human judgment, but a judgment of God. Apostle Paul clearly says, *What communion hath light with darkness?* (2 Cor. 6:14) — i.e., the light of Christ's truth can never be combined with the darkness of heresy. The Latins don't want to leave their heresy, and they persist, as the words of Basil the Great testifies about them what has been proven over many centuries, "They do not know the truth and do not wish to know; they argue with those who proclaim the truth to them and assert their heresy," as stated above.

Instead of entertaining the above-mentioned thoughts, those supportive of the Latins, would be better off thinking about what's said in the psalms, *I have hated the congregation of evil-doers* (Ps. 25:5), and to pity those who, for the sake of domination and avarice and other worldly aims and benefits, scandalized almost the entire world through the Inquisition and cunning Jesuit intrigues, and even now outrage and abuse the Orthodox in Turkey through their missionaries. Latin missionaries don't care about converting to the Christian faith the native Turks, but they strive to pervert from the true path the Orthodox Greeks and Bulgarians, using for this purpose all sorts of unpleasant means and schemes. Is this not craftiness, and is this craftiness not malicious? Would it be prudent to seek unity with such people? For the same reason, should one be surprised at the feigned diligence and selflessness

of such figures, i.e. the Latin missionaries and sisters of mercy? They are downright pitiable ascetics. They strive to convert and lead people, not to Christ, but to their pope.

What should we say in response to these questions: can the Latin Church and other religions be called the New Israel and ark of salvation? And how can one understand the Eucharist of this Church of Rome? Only the Church of the right-believing, undamaged by heretical philosophizing, can be called the New Israel. Holy Apostle John the Theologian says, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all were not of us* (1 Jn. 2:19). And Holy Apostle Paul says, *One Lord, one faith* (Eph. 4:5), i.e. one is the true faith, and not every belief is good--as those having separated themselves from the one true Church recklessly think, about whom Holy Apostle Jude writes, *How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit* (Jude 1:18-19). Therefore, how can these, who are alien to the spirit of truth, be called the New Israel? Or, how can they be called a haven of salvation for anyone, when both one and the other cannot be effectuated without the grace of the Holy Spirit?

In the Orthodox Church, it is believed that the bread and wine in the mystery of the Eucharist are transubstantiated by the invocation and descent of the Holy Spirit. But the Latins, as mentioned above, considered this invocation unnecessary and excluded it from their Liturgy. Thus, he who understands--let him understand about the Eucharist of the Latins.

And another question: if, as it is said, except for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is called the Orthodox Church, salvation in other religions is doubtful, then why is this truth not preached openly in Russia? To this question the answer is very simple and clear. In Russia religious tolerance is allowed, and the heterodox occupy important posts along with Orthodox: heads of educational institutions for the most part are heterodox; leaders of provinces and districts of cities are often heterodox; regimental and battalion commanders are not infrequently heterodox. Wherever a clergyman starts openly proclaiming that outside of the Orthodox Church there is no salvation, heterodox of religious rank take offense. From such a situation, Russian Orthodox clergy have acquired the habit and engrained characteristic of talking about this subject evasively. For this reason, and from continual interaction with heterodox, but more from reading their works, perhaps some began to be lax in their thoughts about the hope of salvation and other religions.

Despite the Orthodox Church's spirit of meekness and the love of peace and patience of her pastors and followers, in the West there has been published during the preceding centuries by followers of different Christian creeds, and predominantly in our times, such a multitude of books against the teaching of the Eastern Church that not only would it be difficult to appraise their merit, it would be hard to enumerate them. And although such books in general are filled with slanders, fables, blame, obvious inventions and lies, and especially mental poison-

creating cobwebs, with the obvious goal of forming in Europe a spirit hostile to the Eastern Church, and especially to our homeland, and, having shaken the faith of our Orthodox Church, to seduce her followers from the path of truth. But since they are published under tempting names, in agreeable forms, with such typographical neatness that they unconsciously lure the curiosity of readers, not a few of whom are found in our homeland, where these works penetrate by dark paths, and who, having a superficial understanding of the subjects of Christian doctrine, cannot help but be carried away by thoughts contrary to the truth. The writers of the Latin Church have now especially armed themselves against the Orthodox, proclaiming the supremacy of their pope and local Roman Church over all governments and local Churches and nations of the world. Predominantly at the current time those busy with this are the Jesuits in France, who, using the omnipresence of the French language, are intensifying some sort of feverish activity by means of works in that language to implant their manner of thought everywhere against the doctrine and hierarchical structure of the Eastern Church--not ashamed for this purpose to create the most heinous fictions, obvious lies and shameless distortion of historical truths. Many of the educated Orthodox, reading these works in the French language, and not reading their own in Russian about the Orthodox faith, can easily believe the fine-spun lies instead of the truth, which they do not know well.

For those who wish to know in detail the reasons why the papists have deviated so far from Orthodoxy, it's useful to read a recently published work by Avdii Vostokov [late nineteenth century] about the Roman Church's relationship with other churches. In the second part of this book are particularly striking passages about the oath of Latin bishops to their pope and about slanders of papists against the Orthodox (p. 49, 60 and 137).

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