

Neo-Papism

With open disrespect for the head of the Orthodox Church and the leader of its Bishops, you call Patriarch Bartholomaios of Constantinople a neo-papist. ...There are no grounds for this and you should apologize. It gives your important work a bad name. (A.K., NJ)

The present Ecumenical Patriarch has carefully and meticulously created the impression—particularly in the news media—that the Orthodox Church’s hierarchical structure is similar to that of Roman Catholic Papism. We have criticized the Patriarch’s efforts, in this sense, with charity and have certainly attempted to avoid showing any personal disrespect for him, despite His All-Holiness’s absolutely vulgar and disgusting public and clandestine attacks against Orthodox traditionalists, and in particular the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (which Constantinople once recognized as the true voice of Russian Orthodoxy) and Metropolitan Cyprian and our Synod of Bishops. It is unfair indeed for anyone to accuse us of disrespect in our observations about the present Ecumenical Patriarch, in the face of what he—a “messenger of Christian love and church unity,” to quote a recent portrayal of him by a well-known ecumenical publication—has said about us and what he has done to us. He has publicly called us “heretics” and “schismatics”; has undertaken *absolutely no efforts* to try to address our grievances or to open dialogue with us (and our Synod’s Bishops, at least, have always been willing to meet with the ecumenists, as long as our personal safety is insured and we are treated in a respectful manner); has secretly worked to compromise our work, as we have now learned from reliable contacts in the United States government; and has allowed at least one of his Bishops to express the opinion that *violence* may ultimately be the only effective tool in quelling the anti-ecumenical protests of the “ultra-conservative” Old Calen-

darists.

As for our accusations regarding the Patriarch's neo-papal pretensions, you inadvertently confirm our accusations with your own words. The Patriarch of Constantinople is *not* the "head of the Orthodox Church." Christ is the Head of the Orthodox Church. Nor is he anything but another Orthodox Bishop, holding no primacy whatsoever, save one of "honor." The first Shepherd and the Leader of the Orthodox Episcopate is, again, Jesus Christ, as even our Iconographic tradition avers. In describing the Œcumenical Patriarch as you have, you have given us a classic formula for Papism. And this is precisely our point. What Constantinople is now doing is tantamount to the creation of a neo-Papist mentality and administration within a Church that lays claim to primacy and Apostolic roots essentially because *it rejects* Papism and its precepts, whether as formulated in Rome, with its fanciful notion of Petrine ascendancy, or as concocted in Constantinople, with its new, anti-Orthodox, and blasphemous concept of a "Mother Church" modeled on the Latin understanding of that term and of what is essentially an "Eastern Pope" with administrative and spiritual authority throughout Orthodoxy—even to the point, apparently, of claiming jurisdiction over the autocephalous Orthodox Churches and their Patriarchates!

If there is any doubt about what we have said, we cite here an excerpt from the address of Patriarch Bartholomew at the service of the "Lesser Mandate" (as it is clumsily translated in the Phanar's official English text)—one of two such traditional announcements—, following the election of Metropolitan Spyridon of Italy as Archbishop of America (see a related note in the "Church News" section of this issue of *Orthodox Tradition*), on the heels of what is described in the Patriarch's address as "the voluntary retirement" (which is hardly an accurate portrayal of the circumstances involved) of former Archbishop Iakovos. We would ask the reader to keep in mind, as he reads the following, that at their Consecrations Bishops swear to uphold, *above all else*, the sacred Canons and holy teachings of the Orthodox Church and to separate, if necessary, from other Hierarchs (whether Bishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, or Patriarchs), if the latter fall to heresy or distort the Faith. No Church and no Church leader deserves the loyalty of his fellow Bishops or of the other clergy and Faithful, if he deviates from Orthodox teaching. The ultimate fidelity of any Hierarch is to the Truth, not to individuals. The obedience to which the Œcumenical Patriarch refers in his address is appropriate to the monastic life and is an indispensable element in the sacred relationship that exists between an Elder and his disciple. That it should be applied to Church administration and the relationship between two Bishops and Churches of *wholly* equal rank—again, Constantinople's primacy is simply one of *honor*—is, however, shocking and bodes ill for the future of Orthodoxy. The Patriarch's words, then, retaining the poor syntax and awkwardness of the Phanar's official English text (*emphasis ours*):

You bear many qualifications, the crowning qualification of which is your *unlimited fidelity and devotion to this venerable Œcumenical Throne*, to the *Moth-*

er Church which nourishes our pious people and *all the pious and Orthodox Christians under heaven*. It was to this last virtue of yours *over all the others that the Mother Church looked when reaching her decision*. For even if one of her hierarchs has every talent, every qualification, and all the other virtues, but does not have *unlimited devotion* and *blind loyalty* and lifelong gratitude, he is nothing, nothing is gained, he is but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (cf. 1 Cor. 13).