

AN ENCYCLICAL CONCERNING THE BALAMAND STATEMENT

—A WARNING TO THE FAITHFUL—

“Let these offences, introduced by Ecumenical Patriarchs Sergius, Pyrrhus and Paul into the Church, be removed; let those who have introduced them be deposed; and then the path to salvation will be cleared of all barriers, and you will walk on the smooth path of the Gospel, cleansed of all heresy! When I see the Church of Constantinople as she was formerly, then I will enter into communion with her without any exhortation on the part of men. But while there are heretical temptations in her, and while heretics are her bishops, no word or deed will convince me ever to enter into communion with her.”

Saint Maximus the Confessor’s reply
to Theodosius, Bishop of Caesarea
in Bithynia

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It was with deep sorrow, my beloved Orthodox Christians, that we read the “Balamand Agreed Statement,” issued by the “Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church ” in its Seventh Plenary Session at the Balamand School of Theology in Lebanon. This Commission met from the 17th to the 24th of June, 1993; the Statement was endorsed by the papal representatives and the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Russia, Romania, Cyprus, Poland, Albania, and Finland.

We waited over one year to see what “World Orthodoxy’s” reaction would be to this Statement, this latest step away from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith.

Clergy of our own Archdiocese, both in Greece and abroad, have written articles against the Balamand Statement. Responses have also appeared on the part of jurisdictions that call themselves “traditionalist,” although they officially maintain full communion with ecumenistic “World Orthodoxy,” which has for some time officially espoused synodically condemned heresies.

New calendar periodicals and newspapers have also published sharp protests. For example, the new calendar newspaper *Orthodoxos Typos* (March 18, 1994) presented a very detailed letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, signed by all the representatives of the monasteries of the Holy Mountain, Athos, refuting and denouncing the Balamand Statement. According to *Orthodoxos Typos*, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew — ostensibly out of administrative concerns, but actually because of the letter — was “provoked to wrath” and demanded that the monks repent of their action and ask his forgiveness. After a series of “defrockments” and other unveiled threats on his part, the Athonite monks capitulated.

One new calendar priest, Fr. John Romanides — whom I and several clergy of our diocese had as professor of dogmatic theology at Holy Cross Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts — also wrote a statement critical of the document adopted at Balamand.

Other new calendar clergy and theologians have written protests. But — as is always the case — none of their bishops, the hierarchs of “World Orthodoxy,” have sided with them.

Finally, after almost a year, a bishop under the Ecumenical Patriarchate wrote an article concerning the Balamand Statement. In *The Illuminator* (March-April, 1994), Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh of the new calendar Greek Archdiocese of North and South America came to the whole-hearted defense of the aforementioned Statement, as might be expected of a bishop belonging to an ecumenistic jurisdiction. In his “Introductory Note,” Bishop Maximos explains that his defense of the Balamand Statement was necessary especially for those who “cannot understand some of the theological terms and the fine connotations that only trained theologians can understand.” He then offers to guide his readers “through some of the ‘rough spots’ of the Balamand Statement, which are often misunderstood and misinterpreted by untrained theologians and lay people.”

By assuming this patronizing approach, Bishop Maximos evidently feels that he can sweep away the protests of traditional Orthodox Christians, monastics, and even his own new calendar colleagues (“untrained theologians and lay people”).

Such being the case, perhaps the best response to Bishop Maximos would be one written by a “trained theologian” (even though this term, somehow, has an un-Orthodox ring to it). We have already mentioned the critique of Fr. John Romanides, who is Professor of Theology at Balamand Theological School in Lebanon, Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology at the University of Thessalonica, and former Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Holy Cross Orthodox Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts. Aside from Fr. John Romanides’ short article, there is a very extensive, detailed, and excellent refutation and condemnation of the Balamand Statement written by the Reverend Protospresbyter Theodore Zeses, Professor of the Theological School of the University of Thessalonica,

whose theological credentials, together with those of Fr. John Romanides, appear to be considerably superior to those of Bishop Maximos.

What follows is a summary of Fr. Theodore's argumentation.

As this professor of theology demonstrates in the March 16, 1994 issue of *Ekklesiastike Aletheia* (an official publication of the new calendar Church of Greece), ever since the Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue officially began in 1980, the Orthodox representatives have consistently demanded that the "Eastern-rite" Uniate churches be repudiated by the Papacy. This repudiation and condemnation was officially espoused, in fact, by both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic representatives at the meetings held between them at Vienna (January, 1990), and especially at Freising near Munich (June, 1990). Nonetheless, Rome was not pleased with these decisions. Indeed, even at Freising, Cardinal Willebrands would not endorse the repudiation of Uniatism. Furthermore, the Vatican's official publication, *Osservatore Romano*, which normally gives full reports of all these proceedings, suppressed any news concerning the decisions taken at Freising, and the Polish papal theologian and representative Wl. Hryniewicz, who sided with the Orthodox in condemning the Unia, was dismissed from his post by Rome (*Ekklesiastike Aletheia*, April 16, 1994).

In contrast, the recent Balamand Statement, signed by the papal delegation and all the Orthodox representatives present, overturns all the former decisions and for the first time fully accepts and legitimizes the Unia, and even accepts the Uniate hierarchy as participants "in the dialogue of love."

In matters of doctrine also, as Fr. Theodore Zeses points out, there were serious compromises of the Orthodox Faith. Previous theological dialogues between Orthodox and the Roman Catholics dealt only with "those things that unite" rather than "those that divide." Nonetheless, when the document "Faith, Sacraments, and the Unity of the Church" was discussed at Crete (1984) and Bari (1986), the papal representatives sought to raise the matter of the Orthodox Church's practice of baptizing the non-Orthodox. However, the Orthodox at that time maintained that the subject of baptism should be discussed at some future date. Now, however, in the Balamand Statement, without any previous discussion of the subject, says Fr. Theodore, *all* the sacraments "of each Church" are mutually and fully recognized, and, in addition, "a new ecclesiology" is proposed.

"This creates a very serious problem," as Fr. Theodore Zeses correctly observes, "because it makes the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Church equal, insofar as [the Balamand Statement] considers both possessors of the true Apostolic Faith, of sacramental grace, and Apostolic succession . . . Orthodox theologians are denying that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church — because the statements made in the [Balamand] text signify that the Orthodox Church, together with the Roman Catholic Church, constitute the One Church, and that both in common are responsible to this One Church for the maintenance of the Church of God. The teaching of the great Saints and Fathers of the Orthodox Church concerning the fact that the Latins are schismatics and heretics is now forsaken and set at naught." And he continues, "Are, then, the *filioque*, the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope, purgatory, unleavened bread, created divine grace . . . and the multitude of other innovations, all elements of the Apostolic Faith? Have we returned again to the false council of Ferrara and Florence? Is this how the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox have become 'Sister Churches'?" he asks. Indeed, he says, "confessional syncretism and ecumenistic ecclesiological confusion have begun to bear fruit."

If the Papacy is a "Sister Church," as the Balamand Statement maintains, "then what are the local autocephalous [Orthodox] Churches which are of one doctrine, which are united in the same Faith, worship and administration, and partake of the one cup?" writes Fr. Theodore.

"And what is this 'theology of communion,' which the text [of the Balamand Statement] frequently mentions?" asks Fr. Theodore Zeses. "There do not exist 'degrees' of ecclesiastical communion, so that one could speak [as the Balamand Statement does] of seeking for 'full communion,' as though there could be a partial or incomplete communion. One either partakes or does not partake of the Body of Christ. Of course, it is well known that Roman Catholic ecclesiology is quite elastic, and can accept degrees of a community's 'ecclesial nature' according to one's recognition of and relationship with the bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter and head of the entire Church. According to this [papal concept], a community's 'ecclesial nature' can exist even in heresy and schism, and can achieve wholeness and full communion when various Christian groups become members of the 'Catholic Communion' and recognize the primacy of the Pope. This is the 'full communion' that Roman Catholics signify and seek as regards us Orthodox also — and not the unity in faith and doctrine [that we Orthodox espouse], so that being united in concord and peace, with one heart and one mind, we might in oneness partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. This is obvious from the fact that even 'heretics' can be received into the 'Catholic Communion' through the Unia; all that is necessary is that they recognize the pope's primacy."

These are a few of the observations expressed by Protopresbyter Theodore Zeses in *Ekklesiastike Aletheia*, in a series of articles which began on March 3, 1994.

The perennial question remains, however: will there once again only be words and no action? Will these "trained theologians" follow through with their protests over this latest betrayal of the Orthodox Faith? Will they finally separate themselves from their bishops, who have ceased being Orthodox? Or will this continue to be yet another "paper war" of written protests and then capitulation and silence, as in the case of the monks of the Holy Mountain?

Some laymen, indeed, have expressed concern over the “seduction of Orthodoxy” by ecumenism. From every official indication, however, “World Orthodoxy’s” hierarchy has acquiesced not only to the seduction, but the complete and shameless ravishment of Orthodoxy.

Many have concluded that there is no longer any point in appealing to the conscience of such bishops. Nevertheless, my beloved, we *must* appeal to the conscience of individuals who are found in innovationist jurisdictions, because many of them are sincere and good people who are being betrayed by their own bishops.

How can we appeal to their conscience? By patiently endeavoring to educate these unsuspecting Orthodox, through preaching, through writing, through our publications, and especially through our own practice of the Holy Orthodox Faith. But of course — and above all — only the grace of our Saviour can touch their hearts and their conscience and lead them to the path of salvation.

Simply by their silence, the bishops of “World Orthodoxy” have betrayed Orthodoxy — another betrayal in a chain of former betrayals, in which either the hierarchs keep silence before flagrant violations of the Canons and the spirit of the Faith, or in which they will not apply the measures ordained by the Holy Ecumenical Councils, that is, breaking off communion with their erring colleagues.

The Ecumenists have succeeded in silencing and quelling any active resistance from within. Whenever they cannot suppress a protest, as Patriarch Bartholomew did with the monks of Mount Athos, they hurriedly say that these statements are mere proposals, or that these actions are mere courtesy with no theological import. The Balamand Statement contains merely “strong recommendations,” they say. Yet, how could any faithful Orthodox even propose that the Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, the Canons, the whole life and history of the Church be abrogated in this fashion? Their “strong recommendations” demonstrate that in their hearts they have already renounced the Faith. Do not their proposals express their own beliefs? Furthermore, these proposals are never retracted — or even discussed; but history has proved that as soon as the rumblings have quieted or been stilled, the Ecumenists proceed to further enormities, as if what they called proposals were already approved and confirmed decisions. These tactics of the Ecumenists appear to have succeeded in breaking all opposition from within.

This is the very reason, then, why we have felt it imperative to issue this warning: a warning for us to stand fast in every way, a warning against this most recent betrayal, a warning against feeling any sort of discouragement. Rather, we must prepare ourselves for even greater struggles, and cultivate within ourselves even greater devotion to the “Faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

After completing his paralogical “Introductory Note” to the Balamand Statement, in which he attempts to deny what the document actually says, Bishop Maximos writes with elation, “The Balamand Statement . . . is a feather on the hat of those Orthodox theologians who are on the international Orthodox-Roman Catholic team! They are to be commended for a fine piece of work.” Such an assessment might indeed be expected from a bishop who, after all, received his theological training and formation at the hands of Roman Catholic professors.

Protopresbyter Theodore Zeses, on the other hand, writes that the Balamand Statement brought “despondency and bitterness to the Church’s faithful.”

Obviously, this is a matter that the clergy of “World Orthodoxy” will have to settle among themselves. For our part, my beloved Orthodox Christians, following the example of Saint Maximus the Confessor,^{1*} we are grateful to God that we have no portion, or part, or communion with those who are betraying our most holy Orthodox Faith, and we pray that our Saviour and God may ever preserve us from such a betrayal, by the intercessions of the three great Pillars of Orthodoxy, Photius the Great, Gregory Palamas, and Mark of Ephesus, and of all the Saints. Amen.

Dormition of the Holy Theotokos
15/28 August, 1994

Your fervent suppliant unto God,
+ Ephraim, Bishop of Boston

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¹ * See *The Life of Our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, 1982.