

TOO HEAVY TO LIFT

— Part One —

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In the Winter, 1968 issue of *THE GOYAN*, Father Theodore N. Thalassinos of the new calendar Greek Archdiocese wrote an article about Constantinople's "lifting of the anathema" against the Roman Catholic faith in December of 1965.

Father Thalassinos wrote:

The removal of the mutual excommunications between the two Churches *restores canonical relations between Rome and New Rome*. This restoration is a *canonical necessity* since *there is no possible third situation between ecclesiastical communion and its negation: ecclesiastical excommunication* (emphasis added).

Later on, he adds:

A final step is required for the full restoration of Christian unity, namely the inscription of the names of the top leaders of the one Church to the list of the other and concelebration of the Holy Eucharist. The former has practically been done the moment the one church recognized the ecclesiastical leader of the other as such. Both groups are now Churches, as parts of the Church of Christ, and their respective leaders are actual Bishops with full Episcopal power, brothers among themselves and equal in dignity and manifestation of love.

Is this which Father Thalassinos writes true, or is it just wishful thinking?

When the Church pronounces an anathema against somebody or some erroneous teaching, this signifies that these individuals or teachings are separated from God and the Church. We should understand that it is not the Church that separates someone from God by some official act; it is not the bishops who make him anathema, nor yet is it God who banishes a man from Him. It is man himself who makes himself anathema, who dismisses the grace of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit from within himself and flees far from God. It is only after this that the Church steps in to certify and proclaim this fact, with the purpose of protecting the faithful.

Also, we should understand that the anathema which was pronounced in the year 1054 against the Pope of Rome was *not* the result of one bishop harboring a grudge against another bishop. Serious differences of faith had emerged between Rome and the Patriarchates of the East. That is why the Anathema of 1054 was ratified by the Pan-Orthodox Councils of 1485, 1583, 1593, 1727, 1838 and 1895. Was the Orthodox Church wrong for all those years (some nine centuries) when it said that the Papacy was in error?

And, when you come right down to it, can an anathema against a false teaching *ever* be lifted?

Let us suppose that the Roman Catholic faith vanished from the face of the earth tomorrow. Could we then "lift" the anathema against the Papacy? The answer is no, because the anathemas against the Papacy (or any other false teaching) would remain forever in the memory of the Church, *just in case the error should ever reappear*.

So, an anathema against an individual *can* be lifted (because he may repent), but an anathema against a heresy *cannot* be lifted (because a heresy is an ideology, a soulless, abstract entity, a departure from God, an invention of Satan, which cannot "repent").

Anathemas against false teachings are too heavy to lift. And if you *do* try to lift them, they only fall on you!