

Holy Metropolis of Glyfada
Letter of Metropolitan Pavlos, to the Synod of Greece
September 28, 2010.
Translated by CZ



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PRESS RELEASE

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To

The Holy and Sacred Synod

Of the Church of Greece Iasi 1 115 21 ATHENS

ANNOTATION

**“CONTEXTUAL”, “POSTPATRISTIC” , AND OTHER
“THEOLOGICAL QUESTS”
AT THE CONFERENCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL
ACADEMY OF VOLOS**

The "Academy for Theological Studies" of the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias, Volos, organized and hosted a theological conference with the following topic:

“NEOPATRISTIC SYNTHESIS OR POST-PATRISTIC THEOLOGY. THE QUEST OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY IN ORTHODOXY.”

This conference was a "radical theological surprise" in the negative sense, for the listener who had not been adequately prepared to listen to a highly "distorted" neotheological language. And it was not difficult for this "language" to be heard by many, since the conference was broadcast on the internet TV station www.intv.gr. with parallel translation in English and Greek. Some of these unorthodox distortions heard during the course of this conference will be presented a bit further down. It is necessary however to initially offer our observations on two key conditions that lead this "theological gathering" to a "theological shipwreck".

First, the term "synafeiaki [contextual] Theology."

The conceptual content of this term seems vague and not easily understood. Perhaps it can be seen as a glossy lingual neoplasm in order to express some concepts that arise from the need of formulating some new social realities. This couldn't be further from the truth. The term "synafeiaki Theologia" is known for at least forty years in inter-Christian literature and expressed in English as "Contextual Theology" or "Cohesive Theology". The term became widely known by the "World Conference on Mission and Evangelism" which was organized in 1972 in Bangkok. The dominant trend in this conference was for the various Christian confessions to work against being seen divided, before non-Christians, as a result of doctrinal differences, and to further show unity by placing a priority on issues of social justice and oppression of social classes. This

would steer the missionary and preaching effort to give first priority to the formulation of methods of restoring social injustice as opposed of spreading the truths of the Gospel. No one can deny the need for social justice, but this can only become a reality by living the truths of the Word of God as expressed through the doctrines of the Ecumenical Synods of the God-bearing Fathers of the Church. The basis and the prospect of "Contextual Theology" was " the conversion of missions into a community of churches in mission" (<http://www.mission2005.org>).

In Orthodox theology however, we do not have "community of churches" but "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church." The appearance of Christian missions emerging from a "community of churches" degrades the "One Church" to a group of denominations that does not reveal the only Truth and further degrades missionary work to a sociological instead of a soteriological perspective. The "contextual theology" introduced in Bangkok has greatly expanded its horizons according to the internet site (<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/empowermentsanctuary /blog/2008/04/15/about-holistic-theology-empowerment-sanctuary> :

"The goal of contextual theology is to enrich the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical experience of life, by exploring various teachings and concepts found in spirituality, metaphysics, in quantum physics, religion, the advisory of life, secular trends and scientific understanding, and then to synthesize all these together in a flowing and dynamic contextual sum...we offer to provide you with a variety of tools designed to help you in your personal growth and development ... **and all these regardless if you are involved with Angelic Support, Universal Law, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Christianity, or any secular, scientific or intellectual experiences in spirituality.** "

Here arises a crucial question: Did the organizers of this conference have

any knowledge of the history of the term “contextual theology”? If they did not, why did they use it? To make an impression or to pioneer modernism? But if they knew, then we can rightly speak of an attempt to "distort theology."

Second, the term "post patristic Theology."

This term, outside of being novel, is also unbiblical and unorthodox. Unbiblical, because it contradicts the very basis of the patristic theology of our Church. The Lord Himself has said:

"And the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:26).

"But when the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." (John 15:26)

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...." (John 16:13).

The Holy Fathers are the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Fathers therefore are called God-bearing, because they are the vessels and the organs of the Holy Spirit. With persistent asceticism and strenuous neptic struggle, they subjugated the spirit of the flesh to the will of God. In Orthodoxy there cannot be Theology without asceticism and Theology without Fathers. The Fathers with their theology fulfill the aforementioned words of our Lord. The Fathers do not say anything novel, nor do they write new philosophical theories, but because they are spirit-filled and live in the Light of God, they interpret the truths revealed by Christ, empowered by His light.

The Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, leads the Fathers of the Church "to all the truth." This means that there can be no period in the life of the Church that Fathers do not exist. This would mean that the Paraclete stopped "holding fast" "the entire institution of the Church" (Vespers of Pentecost). All this leads to the obvious conclusion that the term "posts patristic" theology is totally baseless. It is impossible to have a period after the Fathers, since the Church will always grow theologically with the Grace of the Holy Spirit through the God-bearing Fathers. We do not deny the term "neo-patristic theology" because new Fathers will always emerge over time. But we reject the term "post patristic theology" because it leads us straight to Protestantism. The Church without Fathers would be a "falsified Christian Protestant formulation" without any relation to the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."

Were the organizers of this "theological" conference not aware of the fundamental and basic principles of Orthodox Theology?

If that is true, how do they dare organize "theological" conferences under the auspices of a carrier bearing the grandiose name "Orthodox Academy," while the prefix/title suffers from theological unorthodoxy? But if they were aware, then we have every reason to speak about a sinister willingness to corrupt and distort the basic structures of Orthodox Theology.

Apart from these basic directives set by the conference and expressed by the general title, there were in the course of meetings a plethora of problematic points posited by the speakers which created deep concern regarding their Orthodox content.

We herein quote some of these troublesome positions:

-**"The juxtaposition between East and West must stop"** (Marcus Plested, Second Session 4/6/2010 and deacon Pavel Gavriilyuk, Fifth Session 06/04/2010).

- "In their scholastic approach to Scripture that is so dear to fundamentalists, they believe that every sentence of the Bible is inerrant" (John Fotopoulos, Fourth Session 06/04/2010).

- "Thanks to Jung we can finally understand the dual theory of the Cross" (George Dimakopoulos, Fifth session 04/06/2010).

- "The contextual method helps us to compare the Fathers with the non-Orthodox" (Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyef of Volokolamsk, Third Session 06/04/2010).

- "The focus of Fr George Florovsky on the minds of the Fathers reveals a weakness in his methodology and interpretive" (John Behr, Second Session 06/04/2010).

- "A view that claims the only truth is imperialist" (George Dimakopoulos, fifth Session 06/04/2010).

- "Theology must conform to liberal ways of thinking so it can depart from the patristic tradition" (Alexei Nesteruk, Fifth session 06/04/2010).

- " Trembelas is ignorant of all three volumes of the Dogmatics of Barth" (Father Dimitrios Bathrellos, Fifth Session 06.04.2010). Comment: It is certainly true that in the Dogmatics of Trembelas there are omissions, but the omission or ignorance of the Protestant system of dogmatics can hardly be held as a serious critical evaluation [in a supposedly Orthodox conference].

- "Tradition can not be a guarantor of truth. If the interpretive [method] of Gadamer could be accepted it would help Orthodoxy to not hold tradition as a fortress of truth" (Assaad Katan, Sixth Session 05/06/2010).

- "We must search for the seeds of post patristic theology in the Fathers themselves" (Deacon John Manousakis, Sixth Session 06/05/2010).

- **"It is time to do away with stereotypes and myths from theology"** (Daniel Ayuch, Fourth Session 04/06/2010).

- **"From the eighth century [Orthodox] theology lacks originality and theological production"** (Daniel Ayuch, Fourth Session 04/06/2010). Comment: Mr. Ayuch seems to be uninformed about [several theologians, especially] St. Gregory Palamas.

- **"Church is all the other Christians"** (Father Emmanuel Klapsis, Tenth session 06/06/2010).

- **"It is necessary to go above and beyond the Fathers since they compromised with the spirit of the world"** (Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Tenth Session 06/06/2010).

- **"We need to go beyond the Fathers"** (Deacon Pavel Gavriilyuk, Fifth session 04/06/2010).

- **"The Orthodox [theological] schools should invite non-Orthodox theologians to teach"** (Deacon Pavel Gavriilyuk, Fifth session 06/04/2010).

"We must see the western fathers such as Thomas Aquinas as co-workers worthy of our attention" (Deacon Pavel Gavriilyuk, Fifth session 06/04/2010).

- **"We must attempt to move toward an Orthodox theology of religions"** (Father Emmanuel Klapsis, Tenth Session 06/06/2010).

- **"Spouses should be able to receive Holy Communion without spousal abstinence on the eve of Divine Liturgy" and "Holy Communion should be offered to women during the period of menstruation"** (Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Tenth Session 6/6/2010 and Helen Kasselouri-Chadjivassiliadis, Sixth Session 5/6/2010).

Comment: We emphasize here that St. Timothy of Alexandria has adequately responded to these issues in his canonical questions and answers, as recorded in the Rudder and validated by the Fourth, the Sixth and the Seventh Ecumenical Synod.

- **"There must be a reinterpretation of our dogmatic tradition"** (Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Tenth Session 06/06/2010).

- **"The theory of evolution does not conflict with the doctrine of creation"** (Father Andrew Louth, Seventh Session 06/05/2010).

- **"The Fathers have transcended the Archaic Christian theology ... and we must now transcend [go over and above] the Fathers"** (Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Tenth Session 06/06/2010).

- **"Every birth has birth pangs, but out of it will come something new"** (His Eminence Metropolitan of Demetrias and Almyros Ignatius, Conference closing remarks , Tenth Session 06/06/2010). Comment: It must be emphasized here that the dogmas of the Church were, in fact, a result of a painstaking ascetic, neptic and theological process, and as every child is born only once likewise the dogmas do not need not be reborn or, as it was stated many times in the Conference to be "redefined".

All of the above [highlighted] selections of some of the positions of the speakers at this conference are in need of thorough explanations.

We do not deny freedom of speech in the field of Orthodox theology, but we can not accept freedom of reasoning to end up a Protestant reasoning. The organizers of the conference are required to come up with adequate explanations in order to avoid unnecessary clashes for fruitless "births."

Our Theology needs to increase in the Grace of the Holy Spirit. And this

can be done through the Saints, who are always present in the Church.

Awaiting the Hierarchy to intervene accordingly regarding this scandalous offense against the flock of Christ, I remain yours,

With the deepest respect,
The lowest among the bishops
Metropolitan
†of GLYFADAS PAVLOS