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**Holy Community, Holy Mountian Athos  
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The recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the occasion of that Throne's feast-day celebration of Saint Andrew (30th November 2006) and thereafter the visit by His Beatitude the Archbishop of Athens Mr. Christodoulos to the Vatican on (14th December 2006) provoked a variety of impressions, evaluations and reactions. We shall skip those things that the secular Press had evaluated as positive or negative, to focus on those things that pertain to our salvation, for whose sake we came out from the world to live in the wilderness of the Holy Mountain.

As Monks of the Holy Mountain, we respect the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under whose canonical jurisdiction we belong. We honor and venerate His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Mr. Bartholomew and we rejoice in all that he has achieved and so labored for, in a Godly manner, for the Church. We especially commemorate his solid and untiring defense of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, amid the many unfavorable conditions that exist, as well as his support for impoverished local Orthodox Churches and the care that is taken to spread the message of the Orthodox Church throughout the world. Furthermore, we the Monks of the Holy Mountain honor the Most Holy Church of Greece, from which most of us grew up in, and we respect His Beatitude the Primate.

However, the events that took place during the recent visits of the Pope to Patriarchate and of His Beatitude the Archbishop to the Vatican evoked deep sorrow in our hearts.

We desire and we struggle through our way of life to safeguard the trust willed to us by the Holy Fathers, which was bequeathed to us by the holy Founders of our Sacred Monasteries and the blessed reposed fathers who have gone before us. We strive to the best of our ability to live the mystery of the Church and the unblemished Orthodox Faith, according to what we are daily taught by the divine Services, the sacred readings, and the teachings in general of the Holy Fathers which are set out in their writings and in the decisions of the Ecumenical Synods. We

safeguard our dogmatic conscience “like the apple of our eye”, and we build on it, by applying ourselves to God-pleasing labors and the meticulous study of the achievements of the holy Confessor Fathers when they struggled against the miscellaneous heresies, and especially of our father among the saints, Gregory of Palamas, the Holy Martyrs of the Holy Mountain and the Holy Martyr Kosmas the First, whose sacred relics we kiss with every honor and whose sacred memory we celebrate. We are afraid to remain silent, whenever issues arise that pertain to the trust that our Fathers left us. Our responsibility, towards the most venerable fathers and brothers of the overall brotherhood of the Holy Mountain and towards the pious faithful of the Church who regard Athonite Monasticism as their non-negotiable guardian of sacred Tradition, weighs heavily upon our conscience,

The visits of the Pope at the Patriarchate and the Archbishop’s visit at the Vatican may have secured certain benefits of a secular nature, however, during those visits, various other events took place which were not according to the lawful custom of Orthodox Ecclesiology, or agreed commitments were made that would neither benefit the Orthodox Church, nor any heterodox Christians.

First of all, the Pope was received as though he were a canonical (proper) bishop of Rome. During the service, the Pope wore an omophoron; he was addressed by the Ecumenical Patriarch with the greeting “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” as though it were Christ the Lord; he blessed the congregation and he was commemorated as “most holy” and “His Beatitude the Bishop of Rome”. Furthermore, the Pope’s presiding on the Bishop’s Throne while wearing an omophoron during the Orthodox Divine Liturgy; also, the reciting of the “Lord’s Prayer”, the liturgical kiss with the Patriarch, are displays which go beyond simple common prayer. And all of this, when the papist institution has not retreated at all on any of its heretical teachings and its policy; on the contrary, the Pope is in fact visibly promoting and trying to reinforce Uniates along with the Papist dogmas on primacy and infallibility, and is going even further, with inter-faith common prayers and the pan-religious hegemony of the Pope of Rome that is discerned therein.

As regards with the reception of the Pope at the Patriarchate, we are especially grieved by the fact that all of the Media kept repeating the same, incorrect information, that the hymns that were (unduly) sung at the time had been composed by Monks of the Holy Mountain. We take this opportunity to responsibly inform all pious Christians that their composer was not, and could never be, a monk of the Holy Mountain.

Then there is the matter of the attempt by His Beatitude the Archbishop of Athens to commence relations with the Vatican on social, cultural and bio-ethical issues, as well as the objective to mutually defend the Christian roots of Europe (positions which are also found in the Common Declaration of the Pope and the Patriarch of Istanbul), both of which may seem innocuous or even positive, given that their aim is to cultivate peaceful human relations. Nevertheless, it is important that all these do not give the impression that the West and Orthodoxy continue to have the same bases, or lead one into forgetting the distance that separates the Orthodox Tradition from that which is usually presented as the “European spirit”. (Western) Europe is burdened with a series of anti-Christian institutions and acts, such as the Crusades, the “Holy” Inquisition, slave trading and colonization. It is burdened with the tragic division which took on the form of

the schism of Protestantism; the devastating world wars, also the man-centered humanism and its atheist view. All of these are the consequence of Rome's theological deviations from Orthodoxy. One after the other, the Papist and the Protestant heresies gradually removed the humble Christ of Orthodoxy and in His place, they enthroned haughty Man. The holy bishop Nicholas of Ochrid and Zitsa wrote the following from Dahau: «**What, then, is Europe? The Pope and Luther.... This is what Europe is, at its core, ontologically and historically**». The blessed Elder Justin Popovitch supplements the above: «**The 2nd Vatican Synod comprises the rebirth of every kind of European humanism.... because the Synod persistently adhered to the dogma on the Pope's infallibility**» and he surmises: «**Undoubtedly, the authorities and the powers of (western) European culture and civilization are Christ-expellers**». This is why it is so important to project the humble morality of Orthodoxy and to support the truly Christian roots of the united Europe; the roots that Europe had during the first Christian centuries, during the time of the catacombs and of the seven holy Ecumenical Synods. It is advisable for Orthodoxy to not saddle itself with foreign sins, and furthermore, the impression should not be given to those who became de-Christianized in reaction to the sidetracking of Western-style Christianity, that Orthodoxy is related to it, thus failing to testify that it is the only authentic Faith in Christ, and the only hope of the peoples of Europe.

The Roman Catholics are obviously attempting to disengage themselves from the decisions of their pursuant (and according to them, Ecumenical) Synods, which had legitimized the Filioque, the Primacy, the Infallibility, the secular authority of the Roman Pontiff, 'created Grace', the immaculate conception of the Holy Mother, and of the Uniates. Despite all these, we Orthodox continue the so-called traditional exchanges of visits, bestowing honors befitting an Orthodox Bishop on the Pope and totally disregarding a series of Sacred Canons which forbid common prayers, while the theological dialogue repeatedly flounders, and, after being dredged from the depths, it again sinks down.

All indications lead to the conclusion that the Vatican is not orienting itself to discard its heretical teachings, but only to "re-interpret" them – in other words, to veil them.

Roman Catholic ecclesiology varies, from one Encyclical to the next; from the so-called "open" ecclesiology of the Encyclical «Ut Unum Sint», to the ecclesiological exclusivity of the Encyclical «Dominus Jesus». It should be noted that both of the aforementioned views are contrary to Orthodox Ecclesiology. Our conscience duty bound declares the holy Orthodox Church as the only One, Holy, Catholic (=overall) and Apostolic Church, does not allow for the recognition of other, heterodox churches and confessions as "sister churches". "Sister Churches" are only the local Orthodox Churches of the same faith. No other homonymous reference to "sister churches" other than the Orthodox one is theologically permissible.

The "Filioque" is promoted by the roman catholic side as yet another legal expression of the teaching regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit, and theologically equivalent to the Orthodox teaching that procession is "only from the Father" – a view that is unfortunately supported by some of our own theologians.

Besides, the Pontiff is maintaining the Primacy as an inalienable privilege, as one can tell from the recent deletion of the title "Patriarch of the West" by the current Pope Benedict XVI; also

from his reference to the worldwide mission of the Apostle Peter and his successors during his homily in the Patriarchal Temple, as well as from his also recent speech, which included the following: «...within the society, with the Successors of the Apostles, whose visible unity is guaranteed by the Successor of the Apostle Peter, the Ukrainian Catholic Community managed to preserve the Sacred Tradition alive, in its integrity» (Catholic Newspaper, No.3046/18-4-2006).

The Uniates are being reinforced and reassured in many and various ways, despite the proclamations by the Pope to the contrary. This dishonest stance is witnessed, apart from other instances, by the provocative intervention of the previous Pope, John-Paul II, which led the Orthodox-roman catholic dialogue in Baltimore into a disaster, as well as by the letter sent by the current Pope to the Cardinal Ljubomir Husar, the Uniate Archbishop of Ukraine. In this letter dated 22/2/2006, the following is emphatically stressed: «It is imperative to secure the presence of the two great carriers of the only Tradition (the Latin and the Eastern).... The mission that the Greek Catholic Church has undertaken, being in full communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter, is two-fold: on one side, it must visibly preserve the eastern Tradition inside the Catholic Church; on the other, it must favor the merging of the two traditions, testifying that they not only can coordinate between themselves, but that they also constitute a profound union amid their variety».

Seen in this light, polite exchanges such as the visits of the Pope to Patriarchate (in Istanbul) and the Archbishop of Athens to the Vatican, without the prerequisite of a unity in the Faith, may on the one hand create the false impressions of unity and thus turn away the heterodox who could have looked towards Orthodoxy as being the true Church, and on the other hand, blunt the dogmatic sensor of many Orthodox. Even more, they may push some of the faithful and pious Orthodox, who are deeply concerned over what is taking place inopportunately and against the Sacred Canons, to detach themselves from the corpus of the Church and create new schisms.

Thus, out of love for our Orthodoxy, but with pain as regards the unity of the Church, and with a view to preserve the Orthodox Faith free of all innovations, we proclaim in every direction that which was proclaimed by the Extraordinary, Double, Holy Assembly of our Sacred Community of the Holy Mountain on the 9th / 22nd of April 1980:

*«We believe that our Holy Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, having the fullness of Grace and the Truth, and for this reason, an uninterrupted Apostolic Succession. On the contrary, the “churches” and the “confessions” of the West, having distorted the faith of the Gospel, the Apostles and the Fathers on many points, are deprived of the sanctifying Grace, the true Mysteries (Sacraments) and Apostolic Succession...*

*Dialogues with the heterodox - if they are intended to inform them about the Orthodox Faith so that when they become receptive of divine enlightenment and their eyes are opened they might return to the Orthodox Faith – are not condemned.*

*In no way should a theological dialogue be accompanied by common prayers, participation in liturgical and worship assemblies, by either side and any other activities that might give the impression that our Orthodox Church acknowledges the Roman Catholics (or any Protestant*

*confessions) as a complete Church and the Pope as a canonical (proper) Bishop of Rome. Such acts mislead the Orthodox as well as the Roman Catholic (or Protestant) faithful, who are given a false impression of what Orthodoxy thinks of them....*

*With the Grace of God, the Holy Mountain remains faithful - as do the Orthodox people of the Lord - to the Faith of the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers, and also out of love for the heterodox, who are essentially helped, when the Orthodox with their steadfast Orthodox stance point out the extent of their spiritual ailment and the way they can be cured.*

*The failed attempts for union during the past teach us that for a permanent union, according to the will of God, within the Truth of the Church, the prerequisite is a different kind of preparation and course, than those which were followed in the past and appear to be followed to this day.»*

**By All the Representatives and Abbots of the common Assembly of the Twenty sacred monasteries of the Holy Mountain Athos**

**Monk Prodromos Gregoriates - Secretariat of the Sacred Community**