

ADDRESS
OF HIS ALL HOLINESS
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
B A R T H O L O M E W

At the Audience with the Most Reverend Members Orthodox Bishops in the
Americas

The Headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
Direct Archdiocesan District
New York, New York

(October 27, 2009)

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Your Eminence Archbishop Demetrios and
Beloved Brothers in the Lord,

We bring to you the greeting, the blessing, and the love of the Apostolic, Patriarchal and Ecumenical Throne of the First-Called Andrew, and we express as well our appreciation to the Most Reverend Chairman of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, for bringing you together today with our Modesty, so that we may have this opportunity for fellowship in the Holy Spirit and for a dialogue of love.

For nearly fifty years, the Standing Conference has served as a place for the Primates of the various jurisdictions that are present in North America to gather and discuss common concerns and issues. Also, through the many agencies that have been formed under your aegis, you have been able to activate pan-Orthodox ministries that extend beyond the confines of your particular Churches, so that your united effort might be brought to bear in common interests.

The success of SCOBA has always been based in the true sense of cooperation, of synergy, between the Orthodox ecclesiastical entities here in North America. You have been successful at providing a common witness to all the Orthodox Faithful, even as you have maintained your ties to the

Mother Churches and sought to establish to establish yourselves in the countries and culture within which you live.

Nevertheless, SCOBA has always been an organization that lacks authorization from the Mother Churches, being a self-started and volunteer body. This reality reflects both strengths and weaknesses – strengths in that SCOBA was free to find creative solutions to issues and problems, without seeking approval from a higher authority – and weaknesses, because without authorization from the Mother Churches, there has been no methodology to effectuate decisions and policies that prepare for the future.

Given these considerations, it was logical for the status quo to evolve, as it did at the Synaxis of the Heads of the universally recognized Autocephalous Churches last October at the Ecumenical Patriarchate. At that time, the common will of the universally recognized Autocephalous was expressed as follows:

As Primates and the Representatives of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches, fully aware of the gravity of the aforementioned problems, and laboring to confront them directly as “servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries” (1 Cor. 4:1), we proclaim from this See of the First-throne among the Churches and we re-affirm:

i) our unswerving position and obligation to safeguard the unity of the Orthodox Church in “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), the faith of our Fathers, in the common Divine Eucharist and in the faithful observance of the canonical system of Church governance by settling any problems that arise from time to time in relations among us with a spirit of love and peace.

ii) our desire for the swift healing of every canonical anomaly that has arisen from historical circumstances and pastoral requirements, such as in the so-called Orthodox Diaspora, with a view to overcoming every possible influence that is foreign to Orthodox ecclesiology. In this respect we welcome the proposal by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to convene Panorthodox Consultations within the coming year 2009 on this subject, as well as for the continuation of preparations for the Holy and Great Council.

As you all know and are well aware, the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference did take place in June of this year, at the Center of the

Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, Switzerland. The Decision, and the Regulations promulgated by the Pre-Conciliar Conference establish a *modus operandi* by which the Bishops, in the regions of the world defined by the Conference, may progress institutionally toward the solutions that we all seek in the forthcoming Great and Holy Council.

This is not to say that there will not be difficulties along the way. The region defined for this portion of the Western Hemisphere is quite extensive, including Spanish-speaking Mexico and Central America, together with the rest of Anglophone and Francophone North America. There are many bishops who have never been represented in SCOBA, and who will now participate through their Mother Churches in the Assembly of Bishops. There are also the issues of so-called “autonomies” and “autocephalies” that are not recognized by the Church Universal, and for which solutions must be found in order allow for full participation on every level in the processes of the Assembly of Bishops.

All of the issues and problems that require resolution first require willing hearts and minds, study and careful consideration, and the unfailing loving application of the canonical tradition of our Holy Orthodox Church.

As the convener of the pan-Orthodox world, the Ecumenical Patriarchate stands ready to be of assistance through guidance and an ongoing dialogue based in the truth of Gospel. We welcome positive suggestions and, as it said in our modern world, “thinking outside the box,” so that we may construct models of ecclesiastical polity and governance with foundations sunk deep in the venerable tradition of our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church – and at the same time are relevant to the spiritual needs and societal conventions of the world within which our faithful live.

Here, we do not reference compromise nor conformity to the world, but, following the exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul – that we be ‘transformed by the renewing of our minds,’ we speak of transformative and transformational models that are faithful to the history of the Church, for this history is that of the Holy Spirit Who infuses and guides the Church in every generation – in times of weakness and in times of strength, in times of persecution and in times of triumph, in times war and in times of peace. And in whatever time the Church finds her incarnate presence through the grace, operation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we know that the Church lives

in accordance with the Apostle's injunction: "that everything be done decently and in good order."

Therefore, beloved brothers in the Lord, let the order of the Church be observed perfectly among you, beginning and ending always with the commandment – new and divine – that we have received from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

ΑΓΑΠΑΤΕ ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΣ – Love one another.

Everything else that we attempt – even with all our skill and might – will come to naught if love does not reign supreme among us all.

With these words we leave each of you with our Patriarchal and paternal blessing, invoking upon you the grace of God and His infinite mercy.