

Pope Kisses Feet of Orthodox Prelate

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, in an unusual and dramatic gesture during an ecumenical service in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel (Dec. 14), prostrated himself to kiss the feet of Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon.

The papal action, described by Vatican authorities as spontaneous and unplanned, followed an announcement by the Orthodox prelate that Eastern Orthodox Churches had decided to establish a joint commission to prepare for unification talks with the Church of Rome.

Metropolitan Meliton, who is Dean of the Orthodox Synod, made the announcement during the special service that marked the 10th-anniversary of the lifting of mutual excommunications proclaimed by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches when the two bodies

split in 1054, an event known as the Great Schism.

After the metropolitan made his announcement, the Pope turned to him and the other members of an Orthodox delegation and said:

"You, beloved brethren, have brought the good news that the Orthodox Churches, at the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, have decided to establish a pan-Orthodox commission to prepare a theological dialogue with the Catholic Church. We highly appreciate this initiative and declare that we are fully ready to do the same thing in order to achieve full communion between our Churches."

The pontiff then walked toward the Orthodox delegation, knelt down, bent over, and kissed the feet of Metropolitan Meliton in a gesture of humility.

Onlookers said that Metropolitan Meliton at first seemed taken aback and unsure how to respond.

They said that after a brief instant, he tried to throw himself at the Pope's feet in turn, but the pontiff stopped him. The Metropolitan then kissed the Pope's hand.

In a sermon during the Sistine Chapel service, Pope Paul said that the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches "are already united in such a deep communion that it lacks very little to reach a fullness allowing the common celebration of the Lord's Eucharist."

"The two Churches," he went on, "have in common the same Sacraments, the same priesthood, the same system of bishops and apostolic succession, and for centuries they celebrated ecumenical councils together."

In a message read at the Sistine service by Metropolitan Meliton, Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I of Istanbul (Constantinople), spiritual leader of the world's Eastern Orthodox Christians, called Pope Paul the "first bishop of Christendom," a term also used before by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras.

In 1965, Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul formally abrogated the mutual excommunications proclaimed by Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople nine centuries ago.

The Great Schism developed over centuries and involved issues quite complex and confused. However, the excommunications in question came in 1054 when Patriarch Cerularius refused to see an envoy of Pope Leo IX, who wished to protest the closing of Latin churches in the Patriarch's See.

As a result, the Vatican excommunicated the Patriarch. A week later, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate responded by excommunicating the Pope. Brief reconciliations came in 1274-1282 and 1439-1472. Almost 500 years passed before Patriarch Athenagoras met with Pope Paul in Jerusalem. At that historic meeting in 1964, the two spiritual leaders agreed to the lifting of the excommunications in an effort to

repair the psychological damage of ancient quarrels and develop better relations between Rome and Orthodoxy.

Father Pierre Duprey, a member of the White Fathers, said he overheard a journalist from Athens, Greece, who was present at the ecumenical service, remark to Metropolitan

Meliton in reference to the Pope's action: "Only a very great man can humiliate himself like that!"

To which, said Father Duprey, the Orthodox prelate, "still shaken by the act which he had earlier called 'tremendous', corrected the journalist; saying, 'Only a saint could act like that.'"



Pat Costa

Twisting the channel selector

If case you thought it was too early for repeats, look again. This, the Christmas week, is studded with such gems as reruns of "Six Million Dollar Man," "Tony Orlando and Dawn" and "McCloud," among others. On the other hand "Christmas At the Pops" was rescheduled for the week also and that takes some of the sting out of the line-up.

—If there were ever any question as to what degree the writers make a TV situation comedy work "Phyllis" is a prime example. A few weeks ago the comment here was that the new series was peopled with unlikable characters none of whom could attract a following. Yet a couple of weeks later after writing that I caught a show in which Phyllis' daughter introduces to her mother the parents of the boy she wants to marry. They are midgets and when the unsuspecting Phyllis first gets a glimpse of

them it is pure consternation. How the writers handle that meeting and subsequent ones was a joy to watch and hear. Taste, humor and insight all blended to turn Phyllis from caricature to character. Hopefully they can hold on to the magic formula.

Remember Burns and Allen? Well, if you do remember them — and kindly — you'd best leave it that way and not tune in to the old shows seen Sunday nights on Channel 21. Gracie is as charmingly dim-witted as I remember but the plots and dialogue are horrible. Wonder how their old radio shows would sound?

Every week seems to bring announcement of the end of another series. This week "When Things Were Rotten" plays its last scene. In spite of many virtues discovered by various critics it almost got my vote as the worst new entry of this past season. But I couldn't deviate from my first choice — "The Montefuscoes".

With a new TV season nearly here (we now have two a year) we can look forward to "The Bionic Woman" which I think requires little explanation as to format, "One Day at a Time" about a divorced mother bringing up two teenage daughters, and "The Blue Knight" a second go-around for Joseph Wambaugh's dedicated cop Bumper Morgan.

Somebody needs a new cookie cutter in TV land.

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