

In France, by late 1987, the traditional Orthodox faithful also had given up all hope that the Russian Church Abroad would ever correct the uncanonical activities that had been increasing at an alarming rate in that jurisdiction. Their own bishop, Archbishop Anthony of Geneva, was one of the Russian bishops who had been lax in his relations with ecumenistic Orthodox jurisdictions, even during Metropolitan Philaret's lifetime. In 1986, with the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, Archbishop Anthony issued an official ukase which stated that his priests were free to concelebrate with clergy of the new calendar, ecumenistic jurisdictions. Finally, with Metropolitan Vitaly's Nativity Epistle of 1986, the French Orthodox Mission's worst fears were confirmed. The following letter to Metropolitan Vitaly directly addressed these fears:

Paris

March 19/April 1, 1987

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vitaly
President of the Holy Synod
of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad
War is better than a peace that separates from God.
Saint Symeon the New Theologian

Master, Bless.

At the time of our meeting in the month of June 1986 at the Lesna convent, where you received us so paternally and where you listened to the statement of our problems, you asked us to have patience during the time you needed "to put on the shoes of a Metropolitan," according to your own phrase. We therefore were patient, keeping silent, and instead of seeing our questions resolved, it is with profound astonishment that we discovered in your Nativity Epistle that the ecclesiological theses of Vladyka Anthony of Geneva are now officially accepted by the Russian Church Abroad. We no longer found the rigor of your confession of faith, and that grieves us very much.

Concerning the anathema, you say, "We have proclaimed the anathema against Ecumenism for the children of our Church alone, but by this act we invite, so to speak, very modestly, but firmly, gently but decisively, the local Churches to consider."

We are dismayed by this definition of the anathema, which we find neither in the tradition of the Holy Fathers, nor in that of our canonists. An anathema is not an invitation to reflection, but a malediction on a false doctrine and on those who profess it—since there is no heresy without heretics. All the anathemas cast by the Fathers and the Councils took aim at the heretics and their heresies. Now, according to the theory of Vladyka Anthony of Geneva, which you have manifestly adopted, we may pray with those who belong to these heresies. But the "official" Churches, which you now recognize as constituting Orthodoxy, are all organic members of the World Council of Churches, which in its statutes acknowledges the principle that no particular Church can claim to possess by herself alone all the truth. By entering the World Council of Churches as an organic member, every Orthodox Church renounces being the unique Orthodox Church.

An anathema without a heretic, therefore, is abolished of itself, is annulled of itself,

and puts to shame in turn those who cast it.

In his Rudder, Saint Nicodemos the Athonite distinguishes two meanings for the word “anathema.” “An anathema is that which is ‘set apart’ by men and consecrated to God; and also we call anathema that which is separated from God by the Church of Christ and thus consigned to the devil.¹⁹ Out of honor and respect for the Lord, no one may touch with his hands that which has been ‘anathematized’ or consecrated to God; and likewise he that has been separated by God or by the Church becomes ‘consecrated,’ consigned to the devil. No one should dare to keep company or to commune with him; rather, all the faithful separate themselves from him. In conclusion, the one anathema and the other—that which is set apart—differ between them in the sense that one is consecrated to God and the other consigned to the devil, and are therefore opposites.”

You yourself, last summer, told us that the bishops knew very well what they were doing when they cast the anathema, and that every limitation of the sense of this anathema had been discarded. This is also what you affirmed in your explanation of the anathema published in 1984 where you said that “the spiritual destiny of all the local Churches within the universal Orthodox Church depends on their acceptance of this anathema.”

Your new interpretation of this fearful anathema, in which we see a heresy and no heretics, reminds us of a humorous cartoon published some years ago in a Greek journal, in which a bishop cast forth anathemas and curses that issued from his mouth in the form of little black birds; but since they had no place to perch, they returned and perched on his own head.

In saying that the anathema is not directed at anyone—and therefore that there are no heretics—you justify on the one hand the concelebrations that Vladyka Anthony authorizes with his blessing—with the other local Churches—and which are in fact performed by himself and by the priests of Western Europe; but, on the other hand, do you not fear that the consequences of this anathema will come back down on us?

You also say, “If any of our clergy, by economy, has lent himself to such a concelebration . . .” But, as Saint Mark of Ephesus says, in matters of dogma, there is no economy, and here, economy cannot be applied, because the clergy who are allowed by Vladyka Anthony to concelebrate “by economy” [with ecumenistic clergy] do not in any way change the opinions and conduct [of the ecumenistic clergy]. As a consequence, certain of the faithful are deeply troubled, in particular those who know the writings of Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory and of Archbishop Vitaly of Canada.

In short, by celebrating with the clergy of the Churches that you call “official,” Vladyka Anthony is soliciting recognition from Churches, all of which consider us as a schism and which consider the Patriarchate of Moscow as the canonical Russian Church, and its Patriarch Pimen as legitimate. Thus we enfeeble our witness and we justify those who accuse us of being a “political schism.”

“We remember days of old”—as the Psalmist says—when we would read with enthusiasm the writings of the Archbishop of Canada.

In your letter on the calendar you wrote that the Synod condemned, along with ecumenism, the cause thereof—the change of the calendar—“as having nothing in common with the dogmas of the universal Church.”

In your Report of 1969, you invited the members of our Church “to free

themselves from a certain scholastic ecumenism that has deeply penetrated our minds” and you foresaw that “the Antichrist will preside over the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, but in spirit he will draw nearer to the World Council of Churches.”

In an article written two or three years ago, you write, “The Church says, ‘I will not give Thee a kiss as did Judas.’ Thus she warns us that in following an unorthodox mentality, a perverted Christian teaching, a man immediately betrays Christ as did Judas, and joins himself to the camp of the enemies of God.”

Finally in your beautiful article “The Apocalypse of our Times,” read before the Synod of Bishops, you said that the times for spiritual diplomacy had ended. “We are already living at the beginning of that era of the great choice . . . When the fateful question will be asked, every human soul will tremble, will be unsettled and shaken to its foundations and will be forced to make the inevitable choice. There will no longer be any place for spiritual neutrality, it will no longer be possible to stay on the sidelines, so to speak, it will no longer be possible to be spiritually evasive, to escape, to hide oneself: all will be hunted out, all will be driven out from the shadows, from the darkest corners, and that will be the end of spiritual diplomacy, of provisional neutrality. The choice is simple and clear: light or darkness, Christ or Belial.”

You also added, “We are going to witness astonishing transformations in people.” Today we no longer recognize, in Metropolitan Vitaly, the Archbishop Vitaly [we knew], as if you had “changed your spiritual face” according to your own words.

Wishing to remain faithful to the patristic interpretations of the concepts of anathema and of economy, as well as to your own [original] interpretation and to that of the Blessed Metropolitan Philaret, we ourselves and our faithful pose a question to you:

Do you condemn the circular of Vladyka Anthony which authorizes, with his blessing, concelebrations with new calendarists and ecumenists?

We hope, on behalf of the peace of our soul and conscience, for a clarification on your part. We continue to pray fervently for you and to love you as we have up to the present. We kiss your hand and ask your episcopal blessing.

Archimandrite Ambrose

Hieromonk Joseph

Patric, priest

A second letter, written five months later, this time to Archbishop Anthony of Geneva, demonstrates that the French Orthodox Mission had lost hope of seeing any correction in the course the Russian Church Abroad had taken:

Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Deanery of the French Parishes Paris

August 21/September 3, 1987

His Eminence Vladyka Anthony

Archbishop of Geneva and of Western Europe

3, rue Toepffer 1206 Geneva

Switzerland

Vladyka,

We read, with all the attention that they deserved, your recent circulars in which you expound your ecclesiology.

What astonished us is that you make no mention whatsoever of the fearful anathema of 1983—which you nevertheless signed. This act, so fearful, yet just, you have done everything to annul, whether by your restatement, the publication of which you imposed on us in our periodical *La Lumière du Thabor*, or again by the Nativity Epistle of Metropolitan Vitaly, which seems to have been inspired by you.

Troubled by these so unexpected interpretations, we consulted the Rudder of Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, where we found the true meaning of “anathema,” in conformity with the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and the Synodicon of Orthodoxy, in which Metropolitan Philaret—whom we greatly miss—stated that the anathema in question be included.

Saint Nicodemos, whose Rudder wields authority in the Church, says clearly that we call anathema that which is totally separated from the Church and consigned to the devil—and this has filled us with terror.

In your circulars, you assert also that, on the one hand, ecumenism is a great heresy and, on the other, that there are no heretics condemned by your anathema. By this subterfuge you annul de facto this anathema which, by necessity, falls back on you. This evokes the image of black birds representing the anathemas pronounced by a bishop and returning to perch on his head.

Not wishing to receive the repercussions of the anathema of '83 which would then come back down on our heads, we cannot in [good] conscience continue to commemorate your name in the diptychs as faithfully dispensing the word of truth.

Vladyka, you have always had the courage of your opinions and you have the sincerity not to hide your personal ecclesiology, going so far as publicly to oppose Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory: you are saying, in fact, that for you, all the “official” Churches constitute Orthodoxy. Extending your reasoning to its conclusion, we conclude by necessity that the [Russian] Synodal Church, not being an “official” Church, is not Orthodox. And this is confirmed by the practice of all the “official” Churches which recognize as the “official” Russian Church the Moscow Patriarchate with which they all are in communion. Since all the Churches recognize the Patriarchate of Moscow and its Patriarch Pimen as canonical and legitimate, they all accuse you, openly or not, of schism.

We discover therefore with sadness, according to your own argumentation, that it is not for reasons of faith that you have separated yourself from the Patriarchate of Moscow, but for other reasons in which we have always refused to be implicated.

Therefore, after consultation with the lay presidents [of our communities], we have made the decision to leave your diocese. As a result we are no longer able to take into consideration any canonical measures that you might take against us.

With all the respect due to your rank,

Archimandrite Ambrose

Hieromonk Joseph

Patric, priest

After this, the French Orthodox Mission began to make contacts with the various Synods of the Traditional Orthodox Christians in Greece. In December of 1987, one full year after the parishes and clergy in North America had left the Russian Church Abroad for the same reasons of faith, the French Mission was also accepted into communion by the Holy Synod of Archbishop Auxentius.