

Dear Fathers,

We pray that this letter finds you, your families, and flock well, and in the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, His holy Mother, and of all the saints. Amen.

Here, glory be to God, we all are well for the time being.

Fathers, you ask many questions, and for a great many of them we simply do not have the answers because:

- 1) The facts are buried in obscurity;
- 2) The facts are contradictory to one another;
- 3) So many of the protagonists have died;
- 4) The relationships between bishops, or groups of bishops, have been and still are constantly changing (like a kaleidoscope). And we would have to write an entire new book to chronicle it all.

Have you heard of the Gordian Knot? No one could find a way to loosen it, except for Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

The Old Calendarists of Greece are our modern Gordian Knot (much like our present-day Russian True Orthodox Christians). There is only one way to loosen this knot, and that is by cutting through it with a sharp sword. And in our case that sharp sword is the sword of the Spirit, i.e., the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith of the Holy Orthodox Church.

*All* of the Old Calendarists of Greece are Orthodox, just as, I suppose, all of the True Orthodox Christians of Russia are Orthodox. The differences between them all seem to be *primarily personal*. They suspect one another; they do not trust one another. There are issues of pride and personal ambition. They quibble over the various degrees of strictness and *economia* that each employs in a variety of matters. They choose their scandals (to see which one of the many will be a source of offence).

To give you an example: When one Old Calendar priest-monk in Greece first heard about the formation of yet another Old Calendar group in Greece, he asked a colleague, “What do we know *against* them?”

Of course, there are also doctrinal issues, but how many of those are true issues, or only theological opinions (*θεολογούμενα*, in Greek), which are matters of dispute and subject to a variety of viewpoints and interpretations? There is always the temptation to take a *theologoumenon* and turn it into an absolute dogma of the Church.

Likewise, it is always possible to find some human flaws in one’s hierarchy. It is taken for granted that our bishops must be Orthodox in their confession of the Faith (see, for example, the three vows that a candidate for the episcopacy must proclaim publicly at the time of his consecration as a bishop); he must be a moral man. In addition there are serious pastoral questions in which he must be heedful, as Church history teaches us. But beyond that, matters become a bit more ambiguous.

For example, in the thirteenth century there was an Ecumenical Patriarch (his name escapes me at the moment), who was genuinely Orthodox in his faith; his only weakness, it seems, was that he enjoyed going to the public baths two times a day. When questioned

about his un-monastic lapse into a life of soft living and luxury, as it were, he replied that the reason that he took two baths a day was because he did not have time to take three! Today, would this be a valid reason for forming a separate group with another hierarchy — the “Once-a- day Bathers”?

To be more specific, we hear many good things about Archbishop Tikhon of Omsk. What is your opinion of him?

The fact of the matter, beloved fathers, is that we are really not in favor of “international synods” of bishops — i.e., a synod of bishops that governs the whole planet Earth. This is a very papal idea that has insinuated itself fairly recently into Orthodox ecclesiology. We would truly prefer to return to the Church’s ancient practice in this matter — that is, each province or nation should have its own ruling synod of hierarchs, and when a major issue arises, all the local Orthodox synods of bishops would then come together in a general council to resolve the matter.

The only reason that we have some clergy abroad today is because: 1) they themselves have appealed to us, and 2) we find that some bishops are keen on turning some *theologoumena* into Church dogma, and 3) because we have not yet found a synod of bishops abroad who have renounced this novel idea of an “international synod of bishops”. We would be willing to work with others in this matter, if they too were willing to work with us, and to return to the Church's ancient usages and ecclesiology. May God grant this for the sake of the Church's unity!

To all of your many questions, our answer is one and the same: Examine our faith, as it is embodied and expressed in our official statements, on our web-sites, in our publications, our conference tapes, our videos, etc. If it suits you; fine. If it does not, then may God bless you and may He help you to find whatever it is that you seek, if it is unto salvation.

We pray for you, and ask that you also pray for us as well.

In Christ,

+ Ephraim, Metropolitan of Boston

PS: Enclosed please find a copy of the Synodicon of Orthodoxy Sunday, which we translated into English and printed.

Also, while this letter was being prepared, we received your appeal to join our Synod. Please read our letter above again very carefully. All I can say at present is that, in approximately a week’s time, we will have a meeting of our Holy Synod, and we will discuss your letter and appeal. In the meantime, we await your response to this letter.