

November 8/21, 1986  
+Holy Bodiless Commanders,  
Michael and Gabriel

His Eminence, Most Rev. Metropolitan Vitaly  
Synod of Bishops  
75 East 93rd Street  
New York City, N.Y. 10028-1390

Your Eminence:

Bless!

On several occasions since the enthronement of Your Eminence as President of the Synod of Bishops, we have addressed you with our concerns regarding the life of our Church and Her struggle against the heresy of Ecumenism. We told you that we were encouraged by your reputation for being strongly opposed to Ecumenism, Sergianism<sup>1</sup>, and dealings with the other jurisdictions that cooperate with the evil forces which are determined to undermine our Holy Orthodox Faith.

We cited many instances wherein even Synod clergy sullied the witness of our Church before the eyes of the whole world. We asked Your Eminence to publicly address the whole Church regarding these incidents. We stressed that a correction of the scandals and a clear public reaffirmation of our Church's long-standing posture would comfort and strengthen the faithful and preserve our Church as the defender of Orthodoxy. We assured you that, in your firm stand on behalf of our Church and Faith, you would have our unswerving support.

The response of Your Eminence was to reassure us of your continuing witness to our Faith in the same forthright spirit and manner of your holy predecessors of blessed memory, Metropolitan Antony, Anastassy, and Philaret. You even noted that on your recent trip to Europe you heard the same concerns voiced by our brother clergy.

Sadly, Vladika, there have been no public declarations specifically censuring these violations of our Church's Faith. The result is a continuing erosion of the integrity of our Church, a constant gnawing at the conscience of our faithful, and the fear that our Hierarchy is weakening in its defense of the Faith.

We are now imploring Your Eminence, therefore, to address these matters at the forthcoming Sobor. We are expecting that you, in the name of the Synod of Bishops, will address each item publicly.

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<sup>1</sup> Sergius was the Metropolitan in the 1920's who initially compromised the Church's position with the Soviet Authorities.

We call you attention to some courageous documents of Faith, which constitute the very foundation of our Church's existence, and on the basis of which we now so unhesitatingly address this letter to you.

First, the Certificate of Incorporation of our Church, filed with the State of New York in 1952, states in Article III:

The corporation in its corporate function and operation, and all of its trustees and officers, shall maintain no relations whatever with the Russian ecclesiastical authorities and organizations within the boundaries of the Soviet Union and the satellites of the Soviet Union, so long as the said countries, or any of them, shall be subject to Communist rule.

Second, the spiritual last will and testament (1957) of Metropolitan Anastassy repeated this legally-codified position of our Church. He warned us never to have any "canonical, liturgical, or even simply external communion" with the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Third, in his letter (dated May 21/June 3, 1968) addressed to Athenagoras I of Constantinople, Metropolitan Philaret stated that "the Patriarch of Moscow and his collaborators have. . . long ago fully surrendered themselves to the orders of the communists, fulfilling their every wish and instruction.

Fourth, continuing in the spirit of this policy, the decision of the Synod issued on March 18/31, 1970, repeats our Church's understanding "that the present Moscow Patriarchate is not the authentic representative of the Church of Russia, since it has an atheistic government as the source of its authority." The Holy Synod states further:

Entering thus into communion with the heterodox, the Moscow Patriarchate estranges itself from the unity of the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church. By its action it does not sanctify the heretics to whom it offers the sacraments, but it itself becomes part of their heresy.

(Hence, by the Synod's own instruction to us, we are to have no dealings with the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate not only because that church is uncanonical but also because it is heretical.)

Fifth, the two "Sorrowful Epistles" (1969 and 1972) of Metropolitan Philaret and several official pronouncements of the synod over the years have consistently preached against the heresy of Ecumenism. We cite two additional documents in this area. One is authored by Your Eminence. In your 1969 Report to the Sobor of Bishops on the dangers of Ecumenism, you make this crucial point:

Ecumenism is now at the very doors of our Church. All local Orthodox Churches have become its members, the last being the Serbian Church which was accepted in 1968.

From the Western European diocese of Yladika Anthony of Geneva emanates the other document, a declaration of the priests and laity in the May, 1969, Ninth Diocesan Congress. In this paper, one of the essential pillars of the heresy of Ecumenism, the so-called “branch theory”, is called a “perverse theory.” Moreover, those who advocate this teaching are called “the false teachers of our own day,” and a concelebration with the heterodox is termed “illusory.”

Sixth, because the other so-called “Orthodox” jurisdictions have demonstrated an obstinate refusal to hearken to these warnings, and because the poisonous menace of Ecumenism has grown frighteningly worse, the Bishops of our Church pronounced the anathema of 1983, in which they very clearly condemn Ecumenism and “those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism.” We note that both the teaching and its adherents are anathematized.

This confession of Faith has brought down the blessings of God on us all. Many of our clergy and laity have come to our Church and remain with her precisely because She has not shied away from preaching and living this Truth.

Yet, witness now some of the gross violations that have occurred within the bosom of our Church which totally undermine the legal and doctrinal basis for our Church’s existence and the integrity of Her Orthodox witness:

1. In 1984, Father Victor Potapov of Washington, D.C., visited the Soviet Union, and came into contact with Soviet churchmen, although, as demonstrated above, such activity is expressly prohibited by our Church.
2. In 1985, the same Father Victor Potapov visited the Soviet Gorny Convent in Israel, and in his own letter to Bishop Gregory, Father Victor said he visited the same Soviet convent two years earlier. Again, the same ecclesiastical prohibition applies here.
3. Toward the end of 1985, Archimandrite Seraphim Bobich of the Prophet Elias Skete on Mount Athos complained that Father Theodore (the priestmonk who is now at our Church in Hebron in the Holy Land) was commemorating the ecumenist patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios I, who, as shown above, falls under the excommunication of the 1983 anathema.
4. The same Father Seraphim also complained that Bishop Mark of Berlin served at the Serbian Hiliandar Monastery on Mount Athos, even though our Synod, as evidenced by the documentation cited above, recognizes that the Serbian Patriarchate is ecumenist (Patriarch German served as a president of the World Council of

Churches for ten years), and, therefore, also falls under the excommunication of the 1983 anathema.

5. At the beginning of this year, Archbishop Paul of Sydney concelebrated a Vigil Service with the Serbian Proto-priest, Fr. Chedomir Videkanich, and then concelebrated a Liturgy with the Serbian Bishop Vasily on January 11, though both Serbian clerics are excommunicated by the anathema of 1983 because they participate in Ecumenism.<sup>2</sup>

6. In March of this year, Bishop Hilarion, on behalf of the Synod, officially reprimanded Father Nektas Palassis of Seattle for criticizing the blatantly uncanonical and ecumenistic actions of the Serbian Patriarchate, which, in keeping with the Ecumenism it espouses, received the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury as a Bishop of the church, chanting to him “Many Years” and joining together with him in prayer. Ineffect, then, the Synod censures the correct confession of the faith by Father Nektas and covers the heresy of the Serbian Church.<sup>3</sup>

7. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy this year, Bishop Alypy of Cleveland was present at a “Pan-Orthodox” vespers celebrated by clergy from the other ecumenist jurisdictions which are excommunicated by the 1983 anathema.

8. Again this year, Archbishop Antony of Geneva recirculated an earlier encyclical of his, the effective message of which is that clergy of our Church in his jurisdiction may, with his blessing, concelebrate with clergy of the other ecumenist jurisdictions, which, as noted, are excommunicated by the anathema of 1983.

9. On his pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Archbishop Laurus receives communion consecrated by clergy of the Jerusalem Patriarchate at the Holy Sepulcher and then administers this communion to members of our Church who are present there with him, even though the Jerusalem Patriarchate is both in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate and excommunicated by the 1983 anathema because it actively participates in the World Council of Churches and advocates Ecumenism.

At no time has the Synod publicly denounced these scandals. Indeed, it seems that, by its silence, the Synod is condoning these violations of our Church’s Faith and order. Every

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<sup>2</sup> It was reported in the beginning of the year 1986, Archbishop Paul of Australia concelebrated with Bishop Basil of the Serbian Patriarchal Church at a consecration of a Russian church in Australia. This incident was in defiance of a previous decision of the Russian Church Abroad which prohibited concelebrations with the Serbian Church on an episcopal level. Of course, we had no means of knowing of this event until it was later reported in *Pravoslavnaia Russ* (Jan. 1/14, 1986), which is published by Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville.

<sup>3</sup> For the text of the article in the *Orthodox Christian Witness* that was a translation from *Church News* see [The Church of Serbia at the Crossroads](#). For Bishop Hilarion’s letter of reprimand see [Bishop Hilarion’s Letter to Fr. Nektas Palassis, March 1986](#). For Fr. Nektas’ reply to Bishop Hilarion see [Fr. Nektas Palassis’ Letter to Bishop Hilarion, October 1986](#).

sorrowful indication is that our Church, weakened by nostalgia for the Russian motherland and the urgent desire to see the godless authority overthrown, has been seduced into the heresies of Sergianism and Ecumenism by ever more frequent reports from the Soviet Union of a new religious freedom and a spiritual renaissance. While every Christian soul must continue to pray for the restoration of True Christianity and Holy Russia, nevertheless, these reports can be accepted only when they are accompanied by a categorical rejection of Sergianism and Ecumenism, both of which heresies the Soviet church continues to espouse.

Vladika, as we have explained above, we belong to the Synod because of its Orthodox confession of Faith and its renunciation of Sergianism and Ecumenism. Further, we believe that our concerns are justified by your own teachings and by the teachings of our Holy Hierarchs of blessed memory.

Finally, Viadika, these blatant contradictions have caused a deep spiritual crisis of conscience within our souls. Therefore, we approach you with love and humility, and implore you, our Chief Hierarchy, for counsel and guidance so that we and those who share our concerns may be delivered by your love and wisdom from the dangerous crisis of conscience that afflicts our souls.

Awaiting your archpastoral counsel, care, and love, we remain Your servants in the Lord

Archpriest George Kochergin  
Dean  
Holy Nativity Convent  
Brookline, Massachusetts

Archpriest John Fleser  
St. Anna  
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Father Christos Constantinou  
St. Mark of Ephesus  
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Father Theodore Stavru  
Dormition of the Theotokos  
Concord, New Hampshire

Father Deacon John Mihopoulos  
St. Mark of Ephesus  
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Father Victor Melechov  
Holy Resurrection  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Father Deacon John Routsos  
Holy Dormition  
Concord, New Hampshire

Father Deacon Peter Farnsworth  
Holy Resurrection  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Father Spiridon Schneider  
St. John the Russian  
Ipswich, Massachusetts

Father Deacon John Bockman  
St. John the Russian  
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