

STATEMENT

We are in full agreement with all the conciliar decrees and holy canons that state that there can be no sanctifying grace in the “sacraments” of those found in either heresy or schism; for, according to strictness, this is the proper understanding of the aforesaid holy decrees and canons that deal with schism and heresy (see, for example, the 46th, 47th and 68th Apostolic Canons, Canon 1 of Carthage, and Canon 1 of Saint Basil).*

At the same time, as we observe in the letter that accompanies this Statement, there have been many instances in Church History when, either because of the great confusion that existed in Church matters or because of human misunderstandings and error, God — “Who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4) — manifested a certain *economia* in the matter of *when* He restrained His divine grace from the mysteries of those that were being led astray. That is to say, since His divine grace is not a created entity, we do not know the precise moment when God withheld His grace in particular instances, in both ancient and contemporary Church History. These particular instances constitute an authentic aspect of the experience of the Church that we cannot ignore or deny, and this too is the reason why we choose to limit ourselves to identifying, condemning and placing under anathema that which is manifestly and unarguably the major heresy of our times, Ecumenism. Thus, joint prayers and imparting the Holy Mysteries to people enmeshed in this heresy are forbidden, and those who come to us from Ecumenistic “Orthodox” jurisdictions are received by Holy Chrismation; those that come to us from the heterodox are received by Holy Baptism.

Harkening to the words of the holy Apostle Paul, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 1:13), we too keep the “form of sound words” set forth by the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, and limit ourselves to identifying and upholding truth and anathematizing heresy.

As for the precise instant when God withdraws His grace from the “sacraments” of those that are being led astray in innovation and Ecumenism, this, we feel, is not our problem to solve. It is a problem primarily for those found in schism and heresy, as Saint Philaret of New York, the New Confessor, affirmed, and as the holy canons confirm.

We hope and pray for the conversion and return to Orthodoxy of those that have fallen into this pernicious error of Ecumenism, and for the re-establishment of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic faith in the ancient Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches of “World Orthodoxy.” May God illumine their hearts, and return them to the fullness of “the faith once delivered unto the Saints” (Jude 1:3). Amen.

* It should be noted that in the Holy Canons, schism and heresy are two separate categories, each with its own definition. Their adherents are viewed differently, penalized and received differently.

*This is a modified version of a
letter originally written on March 29, 2001*

Dear _____

I pray that this letter finds you well and in the grace and peace of our Saviour.

Amen.

Your letter contains many statements, which, if taken in the sense you understand them, would mean, strictly speaking, that the Church of Christ no longer exists on the face of the earth, and Christ, therefore, has proved to be a false prophet when He told the disciples that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church.

Basically, what your letter fails to appreciate is that the Church has gone through some extraordinarily difficult times in the last century ? perhaps the most difficult times in its history. Militant atheism on the one hand and Masonic syncretism on the other, both battling against the Church simultaneously ? to such a degree, that *all* the hierarchs of the official local Churches, for the first time ever, succumbed in one way or another. You know this, of course, but there are some aspects of this recent history, and also some aspects of the Church's ancient history, that I would like to bring to your attention and of which you may be unaware.

Allow me to cite for you some examples from Church History:

In every instance when the Church has been assailed by one or another heresy, we find that many people are fooled by the heresy without actually understanding what is happening. Heresy is always presented as the truth and in this way many are misled. This was the case at the time of that truly pernicious heresy, Arianism, concerning which St. Hilary of Poitiers († 368) said, "Multitudes of churches, in almost every province of the Roman Empire, have already caught the plague of this deadly doctrine; error, persistently inculcated and falsely claiming to be the truth, has become ingrained in the minds [of people] which vainly imagine that they are loyal to the Faith" (*De Trinit.*, VI, 1).

Confusion was widespread, not only among the simple people, but even among the Holy Fathers. To bring just one case as an example, let us look at the condition of the Church of Antioch, where there were two Orthodox bishops for one throne: St. Meletius and Paulinus (the latter a Roman priest consecrated while St. Meletius was in exile). Thus there existed *two parallel Orthodox Churches not in communion with one another*. St. Meletius was recognized by St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Eastern bishops, whereas St. Athanasius the Great, the bishops of Egypt and the Pope of Rome supported Paulinus, because they suspected that St. Meletius was not Orthodox, since he was an adherent of the 'Homoiousian' party.¹ Now then, according to strictness,² which of these two churches was

¹ *I.e.*, those who preferred the term: *homoiousios*, (of like essence), to the word *homo-ousios* (of one essence).

² Throughout this letter, the word "strictness" should be taken in the ecclesiastical sense of *akrivia*, *i.e.*, the opposite of *economia*.

in schism (since some Holy Fathers recognized one and some the other)? St. Meletius reposed in 381, while serving as president of the Second Ecumenical Council, and yet the schism continued until the year 413. Was Paulinus in schism? Then we must conclude that St. Athanasius the Great supported a schismatic. Was St. Meletius the schismatic? Can a schismatic be a saint? And are we saying that the Cappadocian Fathers supported a schismatic? But, if we adhere only to a rationalistic strictness, either they or St. Athanasius are guilty of supporting a schismatic.

Accordingly, if all schismatics and heretics are automatically and immediately rendered graceless, then which of the two groups of Holy Fathers was left graceless in this dispute?

Look at what St. Hilary of Poitiers says about the sorry condition of the Church in the fourth century:

Since the Nicene Council, we have done nothing but rewrite creeds. While we fight about words, inquire about novelties, take advantage of ambiguities, criticize authors, fight on party questions, have difficulties in agreeing, and prepare to anathematize each other, there is scarce a man who belongs to Christ. Take, for instance, last year's creed, what alteration is there not in it already? First, we have a creed which bids us not to use the Nicene "consubstantial"; then comes another, which decrees and preaches it; next, the third excuses the word "substance," as adopted by the Fathers in their simplicity; lastly, the fourth, which instead of excusing, condemns. We determine creeds by the year or by the month, we change our own determinations, we prohibit our changes, we anathematize our prohibitions. Thus, we either condemn others in our own persons, or ourselves in the instance of others, while we bite and devour one another, and are like to be consumed one of another.

(Ad. Const. ii 4, 5)

The great Ecumenical teacher, St. Cyril of Alexandria, who was the first to realize that Theodore of Mopsuestia was the actual originator of the Nestorian heresy, in order to facilitate the return of the Eastern bishops to the Church, *permitted them to commemorate Theodore of Mopsuestia in the diptychs* provided that they themselves confessed the Orthodox Faith. At this time, Theodore had already reposed (*cf. Epistle 72, To Proclus of Constantinople*, PG 77, 344–345).

It should be noted also that St. Theodore the Studite, who was well known for his great strictness, praises this *economia* of St. Cyril (see PG 99–1085C–1088BC).

This particular *economia* is especially astounding if one places it in our modern context. Suppose a group of new calendar bishops, and fifty or so of their clergy, with an equal number of parishes were to approach me and say: "Your Eminence, we want to join your Church. We will follow the canonical Church calendar, denounce the heresy of Ecumenism and follow all the Holy Canons faithfully. The only *economia* that we ask of you is that you allow us to continue commemorating the now departed Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in the diptychs. You see, our older clergy and people knew him personally and loved him and respected him as a person. We know that he was wrong as regards Ecumenism, but he is still remembered and respected by

many of us as being a good man and a caring shepherd.” Now, what should I do? If I were to use strictness and said, “Absolutely not!” these people might well say: “This bishop is a fanatic. Forget about him and his super-Orthodoxy. Let us remain where we are.” Of course, they would then all be lost as far as the Church is concerned. But if I used the same strategy and *economia* that St. Cyril of Alexandria used in a similar case (with the approval of St. Theodore the Studite some centuries later), I would think to myself and say, “In less than one generation, perhaps in a few years, all these elderly clergy and laity who knew Athenagoras personally and loved him will have reposed. Their children, on the other hand, did not know Athenagoras and have no personal attachments to him, and so the need for this particular *economia* will cease, but ? thanks be to God ? all the children and their children will, at least, now be in the Church.” That is exactly how St. Cyril of Alexandria thought and acted.

Of course, our modern Ecumenists have gone much further than Theodore Mopsuestia — or even Patriarch Athenagoras — ever went, so it is debatable if such an *economia* could be used or applied today to contemporary modernists.

Some other examples from Church History and the Holy Scriptures:

The Sixth Canon of Laodicea forbids heretics from entering our churches. Yet, people from the Georgian Patriarchate in your nation and new calendarists here in America and in Greece are always attending our services. Does this mean that we are praying with heretics when they are present? No, because we are not concelebrating with them, although, strictly speaking, the Holy Canons forbid even their presence. But no old calendarist jurisdiction has ever forbidden new calendarists from attending its services! Quite the contrary. Indeed, because of their attendance at our services, many hundreds of ecumenists have been moved to join us. The envoys of Prince Vladimir of Kiev were awed by the “heavenly beauty” of the Byzantine services which they beheld in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. While yet *pagans*, they were *invited* to attend the holy services, and this moved them and, through them, the Prince and his people to convert to Orthodox Christianity. The Holy Martyr Eustathius, the Cobbler, of Mtskheta, while still a Zoroastrian (and moreover, *the son of a pagan priest*, who was *himself* preparing to become a priest) attended the church of the Christians during services, which became one of the causes of his conversion. Strictly speaking, as I mentioned, the examples I’ve cited above violate the Holy Canons, and yet the Holy Fathers, who composed these Canons, also used their discretion and wisdom and a certain *economia* in order to look to the ultimate good and to draw these souls to the Faith.

You are aware, of course, that at the Council of Florence, St. Mark of Ephesus and the other Orthodox delegates kissed the Pope’s hand,³ and addressed the Pope as “His Holiness” and all the other Roman Catholic prelates with their ecclesiastical titles, even though Rome had been unrepentant in heresy and under the Anathema of 1054 for some 380 years. There were even joint prayers.⁴ Would you condemn St. Mark for all the above? I would, if he had failed to confess the Orthodox Faith in the midst of that “Council”; if he had followed the other Eastern bishops who had fallen under the influence of Rome. But this did not happen with him! The fact that St. Mark, by extreme *economia*, addressed the heretical “hierarchs” with their “proper” titles

³ *History of the Council of Florence*, Ivan N. Ostroumoff (Moscow, 1897), p. 40, *English Edition*.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 44.

might make some Orthodox faithful think that he fully recognized their heretical priesthood. But St. Mark acted thus out of the slight hope that it might still be possible to convert these heretics to the truth. Once it became obvious that even this hope was lost, St. Mark boldly confessed the Orthodox Faith and quit the Council. Through this God-inspired wisdom, St. Mark ultimately gained the crown of sainthood for his good confession, just as our saintly Metropolitan Philaret did under circumstances that were equally difficult.

We are taught by the Holy Fathers the combined use of exactness and *economia*, which St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain calls “the two hands of the Church.”

This same combination of exactness and *economia* is to be found from Apostolic times until our very own days. St. John Chrysostom, remarking on this combination of exactness and *economia* as shown by St. Paul towards those Galatians who had fallen into error concerning the keeping of the Mosaic law, says: “Wise physicians do not cure those who have fallen into a long sickness all at once, but little by little, lest they should faint and die” (*On Galatians*, Homily IV, ch. 19).

We know from experience that there are *economias* that can eventually lead people *away* from the Church. But, we also see from the examples that I have cited for you that another, fully Orthodox hierarch may likewise make *economias* in order to lead many *back into* the Church. The question that we must ask is: what is the purpose of these *economias* and where do they lead the faithful ultimately? Away from the Church, or into the Church? From experience, we have seen that the *economias* shown by Metropolitan Philaret led many thousands back into the bosom of the True Orthodox Church. In addition, *all* the traditional Orthodox Christians and their bishops turned to him for guidance and help. In the midst of the great confusion and deception that existed in every local “official” Church, where would these many of thousands of faithful [including all the Old Calendarists of Greece] have turned, if his Sorrowful Epistles, addressed to “World Orthodoxy’s” bishops, had not been proclaimed throughout the entire earth? In this age of delusion, Metropolitan Philaret was *the sole Orthodox bishop* whose voice sounded forth in defense of the truth. Do you know of anything comparable to his “Sorrowful Epistles” written at that time?

In 1985, one Father Theodoretos, a Greek old calendarist priestmonk, printed a booklet containing many of Metropolitan Philaret’s open letters of protest to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, Archbishop Iakovos of America, and also the “Sorrowful Epistles” addressed to all the bishops of “World Orthodoxy.” In his Introduction to the booklet, Father Theodoretos said: “People have asked me why I have not published also the encyclicals of our own Greek [old calendar] bishops on the heresy of Ecumenism. The answer is: I would gladly publish them, *but there are none!*”

Was this because the Greek old calendar bishops were incapable of writing something serious about this heresy? Was it because they were too busy attacking one another, what with their constant bickerings, unions and divisions, uncanonical and secret ordinations, etc? Who knows? The fact remains: *only* Metropolitan Philaret wrote and published such monumental statements against the pan-heresy of Ecumenism.

And there are some other important factors that must be kept in mind, of which you are apparently unaware.

There have been some very good statements issued by the new calendarists, long after the calendar change. Two or three of these statements immediately come to mind. One is the statement made against joint prayers with non-Orthodox by the SCOBA bishops in North America in 1951. I am enclosing a copy of this document, which was published in the periodical of St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York. Another good statement on the role of the Orthodox Church *vis-à-vis* other so-called "Christian" bodies is the one entitled "On the Nature of the Unity We Seek," composed in 1954. What I am saying is that as late as the 1950's, many new calendarist bishops were still making sound statements about the Orthodox Faith. True, the Ecumenist bishops of today no longer agree with these statements, and they are (perhaps) embarrassed by them. But, nonetheless, the fact remains that these Orthodox documents were written in the 1950's and they rebuke today's modernists and ecumenists.

In contrast to this, see the two Matthewite encyclicals dated January 23, 1992 (protocol number 2566) and February 26, 1993 (protocol number 2660), which officially espouse teachings that openly and stubbornly defy Church Tradition, the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and the writings of the Church Fathers regarding the depiction of God the Father, and which even *anathematize* anyone who dares to follow the Church's teaching faithfully in this matter! These lamentable and un-Orthodox encyclicals were issued only some ten years ago by a "True Orthodox" synod which officially tries to justify its violation of the Apostolic Canons concerning the consecration of bishops by one bishop alone. [Another Matthewite bishop in Southern Greece, Gregory of Messinia, just recently consecrated another bishop all by himself—thereby perpetuating their new "tradition" and creating a fourth Matthewite jurisdiction.]

So much for "Following in the steps of our holy Fathers"! So much for the "True Orthodoxy" of some Greek old calendarists!

This contemporary situation (equivocation, or deceit, or sometimes even good statements from the modernists on the one hand, and the numerous old calendarist jurisdictions, canonical violations and occasional theological stupidity on the part of the Greek old calendarists on the other) has muddied the waters for many people and brought about much confusion. This is why many traditional Orthodox Christians and spiritual men were reluctant to identify themselves without reservation with the old calendarists. This is why the heroic efforts of Metropolitan Philaret to try to extract "World Orthodoxy's" members out of the Ecumenical swamp and to bring some order out of the ecclesiastical chaos of our times are so esteemed and appreciated by so many of us today. Thanks to the bridge he built, we have a canonical and theologically sound Holy Synod of bishops, and, thanks to him, the direction the Church must take through today's treacherous waters is much clearer. Remember: thanks to him, the Russian Church Abroad espoused the anathema against Ecumenism, despite virtually insurmountable obstacles. [To our knowledge, no Greek old calendarist Synod, except our own, has officially and synodically composed or declared an anathema against Ecumenism.]

We know that on one occasion, the Patriarch of Alexandria, Dioscuros, who was condemned by the Fourth Ecumenical Council, concelebrated with Eutyches (a man condemned for heresy

by the same Council) and, during that concelebration, consecrated Anatolius as Patriarch of Constantinople because, as the historian Theodore the Reader writes in his work *Select Readings from Church History*, Vol. I, p. 351, Dioscuros “assumed that Anatolius would uphold his (Dioscuros’) doctrines. Yet, even in this, God arranged matters to the contrary,” that is God, in His *economia*, arranged that something Orthodox and good (*i.e.* St. Anatolius and his Confession of the Orthodox Faith) would come out of this episcopal ordination performed by a hierarch condemned by an Ecumenical Council, and that is why, because of these unusual circumstances, St. Tarasius, the Patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, declared that Anatolius’ consecration by Dioscuros was an “ordination from God.” [Was there grace in this ordination performed by Dioscuros?]

St. Basil the Great writes in his first canon, “I am under some apprehension lest [the strictness] of our counsel concerning Baptism make [the heretics] reluctant to join the Church, and we, through the severity of our decision, become a hindrance to those who are being saved.” We too must have some apprehension about excessive strictness, lest souls be lost by our severity.

Here it would be appropriate to mention the case of the Roman Church. The holy Patriarch Photius the Great had determined the *filioque* to be a heresy, and had even anathematized it as such, during the first half of the ninth century. However, one hundred years were needed for a gradual “tightening of the screws” and a total severing of communion. Read also the source materials on the history of the relations between the Georgian and Armenian Churches. See for how long a period of time the Orthodox Georgian hierarchs did not sever communion with the Armenian Church, which was wavering and drifting into heresy.⁵ Or consider the case of Nestorius. Some of the Orthodox in Constantinople severed communion with him as soon as they detected heretical teaching in him, while others waited for a Synodal decision.

With great concern, Saint Cyril of Alexandria first wrote him two letters, but when he saw that Nestorius persisted in his error, the Saint pronounced his Twelve Anathemas against him in his third letter. The circumstances in all of these, and other cases, were, of course, varied, but the general purpose of *economia* (and all of these examples are precisely nothing more than *economia*) remained the same — to save as many as possible of the souls drowning in fatal heresy. The complexity of our present circumstances — one must always remember — are incomparably greater than ever before in the history of the Church, although, as time passes, things are becoming far clearer. According to the righteous judgment of God, the race of man deserved death (Adam was told: “thou shalt surely die”)⁶, but by long-suffering and merciful *economia*, the Son of God was given up to death, in order to deliver us from bondage and destruction. In describing Christ’s mission, the Holy Fathers use precisely that word: *economia*, *i.e.*, the dispensation of our salvation. The devil has been condemned and given over to eternal anathema together with his lies and all the heresies introduced by him. But we must try to extricate all those whom it is still possible to extricate. The examples given above serve as our guides in accomplishing this goal.

⁵ See the so-called *Book of Epistles*, the book of the Patriarch Kyrion *On the Armenian Schism*, and other sources on the history of the Church in Transcaucasia.

⁶ Genesis 2:17

St. Basil the Great likens the time in which he lived as a time of utter confusion in the Church, and he likens it to a sea-battle waged by the fleets of four different nations, each one fighting against the other three, simultaneously, in the same place, during a raging sea-storm, at night. Under such chaotic conditions, mistakes are virtually unavoidable. In our times, there are not only four fleets at war among themselves? there are nine, ten, or more. And if one were to continue this analogy, then this present sea would be seen not just as a raging sea, but as a world-wide ocean convulsed by hurricanes and earthquakes. That is why I have cited the aforementioned passages from the holy writings of the Church Fathers in order to help you understand how the Church has used great *economia* and has to use “two hands”⁷ in order to do her work, an *economia* resembling that of our Lord.

In his work *Questions and Answers*, Number 603, St. Barsanuphius writes that it is possible that some Saints made mistakes even in doctrinal matters. He explains that they may have learned some particular points of doctrine from their teachers who were in error, and the Saints in question accepted them in innocence without further examination. The point is that we may accept the sanctity of such an individual, knowing that in some points, because of human misunderstanding, he made a mistake. And, I must emphasize, it is not I who say this, but a Saint of the Church.

If, therefore, you insist only on exactness and strictness from a bishop, then, if you are to be consistent, you must demand exactness and strictness from all, including the Saints, without exception. And, if you do this consistently, as I wrote to you at the beginning, then, according to the understanding with which you write, the gates of Hades have prevailed against the Church, and there is no One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church left on the face of the earth (if you are to apply exactness and strictness *only*).

Do not mistake me; I accept and espouse all the citations that you presented. What I want to show you is that there is also another side, another facet to the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers and contemporary issues of which you may have been unaware. We must keep this other facet in mind. Like St. Basil the Great, we must be “apprehensive lest the strictness” of our policies “make the heretics reluctant to join the Church, and we, through the severity of our decisions, become a hindrance to those” who wish to be saved and to join us. This is what St. John Maximovich, the saintly Metropolitan Philaret, the Elder Ieronymos of Aegina and others were trying to do in the midst of a sea-battle with many other enemy fleets during the unceasing sea-storms in the night of the twentieth century.

In the beginning of this letter, I wrote that, if we were to take strictness in the sense you understand it, then the Church of Christ no longer exists on the face of the earth. I quoted many examples from Church History to substantiate this. Allow me to quote one more: in the nineteenth century, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate (to which the Church of Georgia was subject at the time), and the Church of Greece *officially and synodically* began to allow mixed marriages to take place under certain conditions. This was at least sixty years before the calendar change. This decision taken by these local Churches violates scores of holy canons *by permitting an unrepentant heretic not only to be present in a church service, but also to*

⁷ To use the image of St. Nicodemus the Athonite (*see above*).

*participate fully and actively in one of the Holy Mysteries of the Church.*⁸ According to the mentality you advocate, everyone in these local Churches, and everyone in communion with these local Churches, *violated the Orthodox Faith in a most fundamental way*. Such being the case, and since this was the official policy of these Churches, and since no other Church cut off communion with them, according to strictness as you understand it, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church lapsed into schism and heresy, and God automatically and instantly withdrew His grace. All, therefore, have fallen, and, according to this understanding, Christ is a false prophet.

Today, the problems and divisions among the old calendarists also complicate matters from a canonical point of view, since all the Synods (there are four Matthewite groups alone) have mutually defrocked each other many times over. Therefore, according to your thinking, all are either in schism or heresy and are rendered graceless (if we think of God's grace as a created energy or commodity that gets switched on and off like electrical current).

For those who believe that God's divine grace is created (the Roman Catholics and Protestants), this is, perhaps, a fitting conclusion. But for Orthodox Christians who believe that divine grace is an everlasting and uncreated emanation of the Holy Trinity — *i.e.*, God Himself in His power and glory —, this conclusion is completely untenable and blasphemous, for it denies God's sovereign authority and His saving *economia* for mankind.

In conclusion: by the letter of the Law, as St. Paul says, we are condemned, but by Christ's *economia* we are saved. If you deny *economia*, you must also reject the grace of our Saviour and the love and salvation He gave us in order to rescue us from the letter of the Law. “[God] hath made us able ministers of the new testament: not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” (II Cor. 3:6). Are we Jews, or Christians under grace? As the Holy Fathers teach us by their words and by their writings, if we exclude the gift of Christ's *economia* in the Church, we exclude our salvation.

May this never come to pass among us.

With love in Christ,
✠ Ephraim,
Metropolitan of Boston

Conclusion:

We believe and affirm that, as the Holy Fathers and Holy Canons teach us, according to strictness there is no grace in the mysteries of those in heresy or schism. However, as we discern from the incidents cited in the letter above, we see that we cannot speak of the precise moment when God, in His wisdom and *economia*, withdraws His uncreated power and grace from the mysteries of those who are being led astray.

✠ Metropolitan Makarios of Toronto, Locum Tenens
✠ Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston
✠ Metropolitan Moses of Seattle

⁸ I should point out here that several years ago our Holy Synod corrected this uncanonical practice.