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TRUE ORTHODOXY OR ARROGATION*?

Address of a Member of the IV All-Diaspora Council, Bernard Le Caro
Geneva, May 2/15, 2007

"The Church is established not to sow division among those who gather within her, but to gather those who are divided."

St John Chrysostom

*To claim unwarrantably or presumptuously; assume or appropriate to oneself without right.

There is a passage in the Old Testament about how Saul sought to justify his rebelliousness and disobedience by increasing the number of burnt sacrifices, but he was told through a prophet: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice... For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." For his disobedience, Saul was spurned by the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Blessedness, departed from him. So it is no surprise that those who depart from the Body of Christ "forming their separate gatherings" divide themselves, for they are not united by the Spirit of the Lord, Which "gathers together the whole of the Church" (Pentecost service). In this lies the difference between the ROCOR and the groups of "True-Orthodox Christians": Metropolitan Anthony acted in accordance with the blessing of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority headed by Holy Patriarch Tikhon and with the permission of the Locum Tenens of the Ecumenical Throne, while today's groups are simply arrogating. From what canonical authority, that is, from which genuine Sobor [Council] of Bishops, did Archbishop Lazar, the founder of the RTOC, receive a blessing or release to act independently? In his appeal of 1990 to the Council of Bishops of ROCOR headed by Metropolitan Vitaly, Archbishop Lazar, deeming that "in ROCOR there are latent Sergianists and Masons" (!), he writes "I fulfilled the decision of the Synod of ROCOR and the decrees of the First Hierarch by my own free will... I declare that on the basis of Ukase No. 362 of Holy Patriarch Tikhon... the decisions of the Council and Synod of the ROCOR, and also the decrees of the First Hierarch are not obligatory " for his diocese, and this was 12 years before dialog began between the ROCOR and the

MP! How can one say then that the RTOC is some kind of "extension of ROCOR"? The same applies to all the other groups that have broken away from the Church Abroad.

It was for good reason that Holy Apostle Paul calls the Church a "body," for, in the words of Holy Hieromartyr Ilarion (Troitsky), "two bodies cannot organically be bound together... If the foot says: I am not a part of the body, because I am not the arm, does it then mean that it indeed does not belong to the body?.. The eye cannot say to the hand: I do not need you; or the head to the feet: You are of no use to me." St Ilarion continues: "In the organism, separate members cannot grow and develop apart from each other, but always only bound together with the whole organism. The same applies to the Church." That is why he who crafts a hierarchy apart from this body is not within the Church.

In our day, there are some 15 groups worldwide of "true-Orthodox Christians" who have no communion with each other. As with the Protestants, the Church is "unseen." In the words of St Theophan the Recluse, "Where is the united Church of Christ? What sort of Body of the Church is it when all the parts have fallen away and have gone in different directions? How can one say that the one true Divine Pastor is their Pastor?" These groups are not simply "jurisdictions:" all Russian jurisdictions (ROCOR, the Paris Exarchate, the OCA) are in communion with the Ecumenical Church: ROCOR through the Patriarch of Serbia or Jerusalem, the Exarchate through the Patriarch of Constantinople, the OCA through the Moscow Patriarchate. The Catacomb Hierarchs Kirill of Kazan, Agafangel of Yaroslav and Iosif of Petrograd did not create a new, independent Church : they commemorated the lawful locum tenens , St Peter of Krutitsa, who connected them with the entire Ecumenical Church. Before his blessed repose, the most zealous Metropolitan Philaret commemorated the Patriarch of Jerusalem in our monasteries in the Holy Land, despite the fact that the latter commemorated all the Orthodox Patriarchs, including the Patriarch of Moscow. Was not then Metropolitan Philaret in communion with "worldwide Orthodoxy?"

In the words of the great canonist, Bishop Nikodim (Milash): "If in every society, strict order must be observed and each must know his place in society... this is especially so with regard to the Church of Christ on earth." That is why, according to the holy canons, a priest, if he departs from his bishop, is called "a thief of authority." Laypersons who commune with him are expelled "from communion in the Church." It is often thought that "apostolic succession" is enough for a bishop to be a true Orthodox bishop, and consequently, that the Mysteries he performs possess grace. In the 4th century, Maximus the Cynic desired to seize the Constantinople cathedra, and the two bishops from the Patriarchate of Alexandria summoned by him performed his consecration. Yet

the Fourth Canon of the Second Ecumenical Council declared: "Maximus never was and is not now a bishop." Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), notes: "For the validity of a Mystery of the priestly ordination, it must be made not only by full-fledged bishops, but in the observance of the rules of election and installation of a bishop." This means that the leader of the RTOC, in the Orthodox teaching on the Church, is not a bishop.

There is only one circumstance – if a clergyman begins to openly preach heresy already condemned by the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils – that gives the right to break communion with him. In addition, the laws only allow non-commemoration of him "until the Council examines him," "to guard the Church against schisms." That is why the canons do not allow the commemoration of another Bishop, or the creation of a new hierarchy.

"Keep always in your mind's eye... Metropolitan Anthony, who was like the ancient hierarchs, and in difficult times ask yourself how he would have acted in each case" said St John of Shanghai. It was precisely at the time that the Primate of ROCOR was Metropolitan Anthony that the Ecumenical Patriarch and the other Churches adopted the new calendar. The Patriarch Basil III mentioned below was not only a modernist but an ecumenist:

In the beginning of his letter to the Athos Hieroschemamonk Theodosius, Metropolitan Anthony posed the main question: "We must always think of this: what will my proposed step do for the Holy Church and for our souls?" Further he writes: "In the resolution of a question on continuing or breaking communion, one must, in accordance with Divine will, revealed through Tradition, the Canons and the lives of the Saints, employ condescension," and in fact, "in certain circumstances, the breaking of communion with the guilty is mandatory only for bishops." From the point of view of Holy Canons, the Hierarch, in his letter to Hieromonk Ilarion, clarifies: "Continue to commemorate Patriarch Basil as before... To separate from ones Patriarch is permitted by the 15 Canon of the Double Council only when he is condemned by the Council for clear heresy, and until then one can only refrain from fulfilling his unlawful demands. St Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, teaches us by example how we are to treasure ecclesiastical peace. Let Fr Theophan calmly continue to serve as a priest and pray for the good order of the holy Divine Churches." In another letter to Hieroschemamonk Theodosius, Vladyka Anthony explains: "I grieve that you were persuading the brethren not to pray for Patriarch Basil... For the monks of Athos will be divided, not like the seamless garment of Christ. Pray that the Lord enlighten the old madman [the Patriarch]..." It is interesting to note that the Metropolitan thought first of the unity of the Athos monastics, which was more important than some sort of "true Orthodoxy," for the great Hierarch knew in his inherent foresight what can happen: " By this [that is, by breaking communion

with the Patriarch] you approach the bezpopovtsi [priestless Old Believers] and at the very least, the schismatics." In another letter he repeats: " In hastening towards division, [the zealots] can find themselves in the same abyss that the bezpopovtsi threw themselves." One must note that the Metropolitan did not say that they must simply commemorate the Patriarch, but must pray for him, that the Lord "enlighten" him. In this way, healing untruth in the Church, the Metropolitan thought, was achieved not by schism, but by prayer. In conclusion, the Metropolitan writes to the zealots beyond reason: "Your zeal is worthy of praise, but hardly worthy of praise is rebellion and your judgment upon bishops!"

Fr Justin Popovich, student of Metropolitan Anthony, did likewise. He commemorated his ruling bishop despite the fact that at the time, Patriarch German was the President of the WCC. Few know that, while openly denouncing the teaching of Patriarch Athenogoras as heretical, he felt that since the latter was not condemned by the Church, he, consequently, remained a part of her. That is why, when he learned of the death of the Patriarch, he served a pannikhida for his soul.

In the words of Holy Martyr Ilarion (Troitsky); " To separate, to go into isolation, is... for a Local Church the same as for a ray of sunlight to separate from the Sun, for a stream to separate from its wellspring, for a branch to separate from its trunk. The spiritual life can only exist in organic connection with the Ecumenical Church; if this connection is broken, Christian life will then unavoidably dry up." This is attested to by the behavior of the so-called "true-Orthodox Christians" who divide monasteries, parishes, families... One must destroy ones passions with the help of the Church, not destroy the Church by ones passions. The Athonite Elder Paisius said, characteristically: " If one hopes to help the Church, one would be better to correct oneself, and not others. If you correct yourself, then a small part of the Church will be corrected. And it is obvious that if everyone did that, then the Church would be brought into perfect order. But people today are occupied with everything possible except themselves, because it is easy to fix others, but it requires effort to fix oneself."

"More than once has Orthodoxy appeared to be on the brink of doom, but then the time would come for its internal, and also external, strength," wrote St John of Shanghai, for the Lord Himself saves His Church. In 2000, some clergymen wished to "save ROCOR." Instead, they have broken into three factions. Without a doubt, the RTOC will soon fragment. Now is the time, during the struggle for the purity of Orthodoxy, that the good pastor must "lay down his life for his flock," since "a hireling leaves his flock and flees." Our hierarchs, who after the war found themselves in communist countries, continued to serve under the omophorion of the Moscow Patriarchate, and yet continued to fearlessly witness

the Truth. For example, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) spoke out most decisively against ecumenism at the Conference of 1948 in Moscow. Instructive also is the example of the good pastor Metropolitan Philaret: while in Harbin, although utterly disappointed in the behavior of the MP, for the sake of the flock he continued to serve, commemorating Patriarch Alexy I, and "did not obey unlawful demands," that is, did not commemorate the godless state.

St Tikhon of Moscow showed us the way: "Only upon this rock – the healing of evil with good – is the indestructible glory and greatness of our Holy Orthodox Church in the Russian land." To the adherents of a different path, the path of the sectarians of the RTOC, Archbishop Anthony of Geneva spoke prophetically during the All-Diaspora Council of 1974: "To set out upon such a path [of breaking with the Ecumenical Church] we must first reject the past of our own Church and condemn it... What is more important for us, the Church herself and her living forces, or her temporary, maybe even unworthy, representatives? Shall we, because of the latter, tear away from the Universal Church, in which most think as we do, in which, despite our unworthiness, the Holy Spirit breathes? Whom are we punishing then? Only ourselves!"

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