

The Holy Synod in Resistance and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Statement on the Recent Rapprochement Between the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate

A. The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) is that part of the Russian Church that fled Russia after the 1917 Revolution and which was dispersed throughout Europe, America, Asia, and Australia. It was established on canonical grounds with approval from St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (1919, 1920, 1922), from the Patriarchate of Constantinople (1920), and from the Serbian Orthodox Church, which hosted it (1921-). It has maintained no communion with the Moscow Patriarchate on the grounds of its special relations with the atheistic and anti-ecclesiastical Soviet régime, relations which became fully established after the repose of the Holy Patriarch Tikhon (1925), when Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhegorod, whom the government had designated *Locum Tenens* of the vacant Patriarchal throne, made his notorious “Declaration” of loyalty to the Soviets in 1927 (“Sergianism”).

The ROCA formed a synodal jurisdiction on the basis of the foregoing, having as its Chief Hierarchs Metropolitans Anthony (†1936), Anastassy (†1965), Philaret (†1985), Vitaly (retired, 2001), and at present Metropolitan Laurus (October 2001-), constituting thereby the free part of the historical Russian Church and maintaining its rich ecclesiastical heritage. For this reason, it was from the very outset opposed to the spirit of innovation, reform, and ecumenism. It has always followed the traditional Church Calendar, and in 1983 it issued a synodal condemnation of ecumenism.

This stand led the ROCA to the gradual cessation, particularly after the Second World War, and especially since 1965, of all communion with the other local Orthodox Churches, with which, up to that point, it had maintained unofficial or informal relations.

B. Relations with the Greek Old Calendarists

In 1960, in the U.S.A, and in 1962, in Greece, the ROCA Consecrated Bishops for the Greek Old Calendarists, who, after the calendar change of 1924, were organized as a separate ecclesiastical community.

In 1969, the Holy Synod of the ROCA, under Metropolitan Philaret, recognized these Consecrations and entered into full ecclesiastical communion with them. The Greek Old Calendarists were at the time under the jurisdiction of the ever-memorable Archbishop Auxentios, with whom the ROCA broke communion, however, in 1978, on the grounds of canonical infractions on the part of the Greeks.

The ROCA, under Metropolitan Vitaly, opened full ecclesiastical communion with the Romanian Old Calendarists under Metropolitan Vlasie in 1992; then, in the year 1994, with the Greek Old Calendarists under Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, as well as the Bulgarian Old Calendarists under Bishop Photii of Triaditza.

C. Rapprochement Between the ROCA and Moscow

The ten-year-old union of the ROCA and the Greek, Romanian, and Bulgarian Old Calendarists had as its basis, aside from the obvious need for mutual reinforcement and support, a common anti-ecumenical self-consciousness, manifested primarily in the cessation of communion with all of the “official” local Orthodox Churches, which participate in the ecumenical movement and are active members of the World Council of Churches (1948-), and also a concerted, and therefore more effective, confrontation of the proliferation of ecumenism within the local Orthodox Churches.

However, over time it became obvious that the ROCA was going through a progressive crisis with regard to its ecclesiological identity; and its overtures, albeit unofficial at the outset, towards the Moscow Patriarchate (beginning in 2000), and towards the ecumenist jurisdictions in general provoked initial disquietude in the Holy Synod in Resistance, a fruit of which was, first and foremost, an official letter (Protocol No. 340/1 January 2001) addressed to the Holy Synod of the ROCA by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, President of the

Synod in Resistance.

In this letter, with the consent of the Holy Synod, His Eminence wrote the following, among other things:

“Our Holy Synod is resolved, by the Grace of God, to continue, in response to the confidence placed in it by its pious and anguished flock, refraining—as it has hitherto—from direct or indirect communion with the Orthodox ecumenists.”

His Eminence also pointed out to our Russian brethren that “you are, in essence, on a steady course towards the gradual relinquishment of the glorious anti-ecumenist tradition of your Church that has been fostered during the past thirty-five years and which has been expounded with singular theological clarity.”

With the elevation of a new Chief Hierarchy for the ROCA in October of 2001, which provoked a schism within its ranks by reason of this new direction, the Synod in Resistance maintained communion with Metropolitan Laurus and the Bishops with him because, in spite of its reservations, it was satisfied that the policy statements of the new Primate were genuinely Orthodox and because it viewed as hyperbolic the complaints of those outside and within Russia who, albeit after the fact, did not recognize his election.

Notwithstanding this, already last year (in 2003), the situation began to give rise to justifiable concern, in particular because of the vigorous promotion of a clearly new direction in the ROCA, in spite of its statements and confirmations to the contrary.

Precisely because of this unpleasant development, Metropolitan Cyprian, in a number of memoranda to the ROCA, expressed the opposition of our Synod in Resistance to the steps being taken by the ROCA, that is, its rapprochement with Moscow, reminding its Bishops at all times that, even if the other reasons for separation from the Moscow Patriarchate were regarded as essentially no longer valid, there was still one absolutely insurmountable impediment to union; namely, the heresy of ecumenism.

D. The Acceleration of Contacts Towards Rapprochement

Unfortunately, contacts and overtures between the ROCA and Moscow have increased and accelerated, and this with intense pressure from the Russian authorities, using the Moscow Patriarchate as the primary tool for exerting such pressure, and, to be sure, with the guiding influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church over certain elements in the ROCA. The most important steps in this journey towards union were the following:

- 1) The meeting in New York City, in September 2003, of Hierarchical representatives of the ROCA with the President of Russia [an ex-KGB General—*trans.*], Vladimir Putin;
- 2) The meeting in Moscow, in November 2003, of Hierarchical representatives of the ROCA with Patriarch Alexis and members of the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate;
- 3) The official visit to Moscow, in May 2004, of Metropolitan Laurus, during which, in an atmosphere of prayerful communion, a dialogue concerning union was conducted and it was decided to establish Committees for Dialogue and to set the agenda for union discussions;
- 4) The inauguration, in June 2004, of the work of the Committees for Dialogue in Moscow, and the elaboration of common statements of agreement to be submitted to the respective Hierarchs of each Church for evaluation.

Anticipating the meeting of the full Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate in October and the usual meeting of the full Synod of the ROCA at the beginning of 2005, we may conclude that these developments will be very swift and dramatic.

Official voices in both the ROCA and the Moscow Patriarchate assure us that, in fact, this union has been decided upon and that its accomplishment is now a matter of time, since the things that unite them, as they tellingly put it, are very cogent, whereas the things that divide them, are matters of secondary importance, including the issue of ecumenism.

E. The Resisters in the Face of These Developments

The Holy Synod in Resistance, in common thought with our Romanian and Bulgarian Old Calendarist brethren, are following these developments, with which, of course, they are *prima facie* in disagreement at a root level, with attention and prayer.

With regard to the issue of immediate and official cessation of communion with the ROCA so quickly after the initiation of these proceedings towards rapprochement, we have not deemed such final action to be the most efficacious solution, but have decided to continue gradually distancing ourselves from this situation, keeping in mind that, for several years now, we have, in effect, had almost no communion with the ROCA. It is our intention to exercise benevolent influence in a healthy direction over the various factions within the ROCA.

In the face of these truly dramatic developments, even if we are nearing the boundaries of economy, we consider it preferable to maintain our stand of forbearance in delaying official and definitive cessation of communion with the ROCA, in the hope that this planned union will be averted by some miraculous intervention, calling upon the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and all the Saints, and especially the New Martyrs of Russia and St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, by whose special protection and guidance our communion with the ROCA was, from the beginning, accomplished.

If and when the union of a portion of the ROCA with Moscow becomes certain, definite, and irrevocable (God forbid!), we will immediately cease communion with that group, continuing our communion with the remaining portion of the Church, if they should, indeed, wish such communion—providing, of course, that they also maintain a clear anti-ecumenical stance, refusing communion with the ecumenists at all costs, whether directly or indirectly.

*From the Secretariat
of the Holy Synod in Resistance,
Fili, Attika, 20 July 2004 (Old Style)
Holy and Glorious Prophet Elias the Thesbite*