

The Ever-Memorable Confessor Metropolitan
Philaret, First Hierarch of the Russian
Orthodox Church Abroad
(†1985)



Text I

An Appeal to His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople

Your All-Holiness!

We have inherited a testament from the Holy Fathers that everything in the Church of God should be done according to lawful order, unanimously, and in concordance with ancient Traditions. If any of the Bishops or even Primate of one of the autocephalous Churches does something which is not in agreement with the teaching of the whole Church, then each of her members may protest against it. The Fifteenth Canon of the First-Second Synod of Constantinople of 861 recognizes as worthy “of the honor befitting Orthodox Christians” those Bishops or clergymen who withdraw from communion even with their Patriarch, if he publicly preaches heresy or openly teaches it in Church. In this way, we are all guardians of ecclesiastical truth, which has always been carefully protected so that nothing of general importance to the Church be done without the consent of all.

For this reason, our attitude toward various divisions beyond the limits of particular local Churches was determined by nothing other than the consent of all the Churches involved.

If our separation from Rome was originally decided in Constantinople, it was, nonetheless, subsequently accepted by the entire Orthodox Church and became a matter of concern to the whole Orthodox world. None of the local Churches separately—and especially not the Church of Constantinople, esteemed from of old by all of us, from which our Russian Church received the treasure of Orthodoxy—, may change anything in this matter without the prior consent of all. Moreover, we, the Bishops ruling at present, may not make decisions which would disagree with the teaching of the Holy Fathers who lived before us, and in particular—since this matter concerns the West—Saints Photios of Constantinople and Mark of Ephesus.

In the light of these principles, although we are the youngest of the Primates of the Churches, as the leader of the free autonomous part of the Russian Church, we consider it our duty to state our categorical protest against the action of Your All-Holiness in connection with your simultaneous solemn declaration with the Pope of Rome concerning the removal of the excommunication proclaimed by Patriarch Michael Keroularios in 1054.

We heard many expressions of confusion when Your All-Holiness, in the sight of the whole world, perpetrated something new, unknown to your predecessors and also contrary to the Tenth Apostolic Canon, at your meeting with Pope Paul VI of Rome in Jerusalem. Let us speak forthrightly and without mincing words: the scandal was great. We have heard that in the wake of this, many monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos have refused to commemorate the name of Your All-Holiness at Divine services. But now you are going even further when, solely by your own decision and that of the Bishops of your Synod, you rescind the decision of Patriarch Michael Keroularios that was ratified and accepted by the entire Orthodox East. In so doing, Your All-Holiness, you are acting inconsonantly with the attitude adopted by the whole of our Church with regard to Roman Catholicism. It is not a question of this or that evaluation of the behavior of Cardinal Humbert; it is not a matter of any personal conflict between the Pope and the Patriarch which easily could be remedied by their mutual Christian forgiveness; no, the essence of the problem lies in the deviations from Orthodoxy which took root in the Roman Church during the course of the centuries, beginning with the doctrine of the infallibility of the

Pope, which was definitively formulated at the First Vatican Council. The declaration of Your All-Holiness and the Pope correctly recognizes your act of “mutual forgiveness” as insufficient for the cessation of both older and more recent differences. But more than that, your act places a *sign of equality between* error and truth. In the course of the centuries, the entire Orthodox Church has correctly believed that she has not deviated in any respect from the teaching of the Holy Œcumenical Synods, whereas the Church of Rome has introduced a series of innovations, incompatible with Orthodoxy, into her dogmatic teaching. The more innovations were introduced, the deeper became the split between East and West. The dogmatic deviations of Rome at the end of the eleventh century did not yet contain those errors that were added later. Therefore, the lifting of the mutual censures of 1054 could have had meaning at that time; but now it serves only as evidence of disregard for the most important and essential new doctrines, unknown to the ancient Church, which were proclaimed thereafter, of which some, having been refuted by Saint Mark of Ephesus, were the reason why the Holy Church rejected the Union of Florence.

We declare decisively and categorically: No union of the Roman Church with us is possible as long as she does not renounce her new doctrines, and no communion in prayer can be restored with her without a decision of all the Churches. This, however, does not seem to us to be possible before the liberation of the Church of Russia, which at present is forced to live in the catacombs. The Hierarchy that is now headed by Patriarch Alexey cannot express the genuine voice of the Russian Church because it is in complete subjugation to the atheist authority, fulfilling its will. Primates of several other Churches in Communist countries are also not free.

Since the Vatican is not only a religious center but also a state, and since relations with it have also a political significance, as is evident from the recent visit of the Pope to the United Nations, one must reckon with the possibility that the Hierarchies of the captive Churches are influenced by the godless authorities in one direction or another in the matter of the Roman Church.

History attests to us that negotiations with the heterodox under pressure of political factors never brought anything to the Church except confusion and schisms. For this reason, we consider it indispens-

able to state that our Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, as well as, unquestionably, the Russian Church which is at present in the catacombs, will not consent to any “dialogues” on dogma with other confessions and rejects *a priori* any agreement with them in that regard, acknowledging the possibility of restoring union with them only if they fully accept Orthodox teaching in the form in which it has been preserved up until now in the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. As long as this has not happened, the anathemas proclaimed by Patriarch Michael Kerouliarios retain all of their validity, and the lifting thereof by Your All-Holiness is an act both illegal and void.

To be sure, we are not opposed to amicable relations with representatives of other confessions, as long as the truth of Orthodoxy is not betrayed. For this reason, our Church in due time accepted the kind invitation to send observers to the Second Vatican Council, just as she used to send observers to the Protestant conferences of the World Council of Churches, in order to have firsthand information concerning the work of these assemblies without any participation in their decisions. We appreciate the kindly attitude towards our observers, and we are studying with interest their detailed reports, which bear witness to the advent of significant changes in the Roman Church. We will thank God if these changes serve the cause of its rapprochement with Orthodoxy. However, if Rome has much to change in order to return to the “expression of the Faith of the Apostles,” the Orthodox Church, which has maintained that Faith intact to this day, has nothing to change.

The Tradition of the Church and the example of the Holy Fathers teach us that no dialogue is to be held with those who have fallen away from the Orthodox Church. Rather, a monologue of preaching is always addressed to them, through which the Church calls them to return to her fold through rejection of any doctrine inconsonant with her. Genuine dialogue implies an exchange of views, allowing the possibility of persuading the participants to reach an agreement. As is evident from the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI understands the dialogue as a plan for our incorporation into the Roman Church or the restoration of communion with her through the aid of some formula which would, however, leave her doctrines unaltered and, in particular, her dogmatic teaching about the position of the Pope in the Church.

However, any concord with error is foreign to the entire history of the Orthodox Church and to her essence. It would lead, not to a confession of the truth in unanimity, but only to an illusory, outward union, similar to the agreement of dissident Protestant communions in the ecumenical movement.

May such a betrayal of Orthodoxy not enter into our midst.

We earnestly beseech Your Holiness to put an end to the confusion, because the way you have chosen to follow, if it did bring you into a union with the Roman Catholics, would provoke a division in the Orthodox world, for surely even many of your spiritual children would prefer loyalty to Orthodoxy to the ecumenical idea of a compromising union with the heterodox without their full concord in the truth.

Asking for your holy prayers, I remain your All-Holiness' humble servant,

President of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church
Outside of Russia,

† Metropolitan Philaret

New York

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