

A Pilgrimage to Romania for the Consecration of the Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God

by

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The beloved, gentle, and holy President of our Synod, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, was one of the first Greek Old Calendarists to visit the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Romania in contemporary times. He initially visited them some thirty years ago, when they had already passed through fierce discrimination under hostile political régimes—often spilling their martyric blood for the Faith—that culminated in their severe persecution and the imprisonment of many of the clergy and lay people under Ceaușescu’s Communist régime. Sadly and shamefully enough, much of this abuse was undertaken, in Communist times, with the tacit coopération and approval of the New Calendarist Patriarchate in Bucharest.

Through Metropolitan Cyprian’s effort, in 1979 the Greek Old Calendarists established liturgical communion with their Romanian brothers, a unity that has been preserved unbroken from that time, owing partly to the inviolable esteem and profound and unassailable love that St. Glicherie, the Father of the Romanian Old Calendar movement, had for the person of Metropolitan Cyprian, and *vice versa*. In the face of the vagaries and factionalism of the various Old Calendarist groups, and despite the nefarious efforts of unscrupulous and envious persons and demonic agencies to compromise it, that personal bond has manifested itself in the unbroken liturgical and spiritual unity, from 1979 to the present, of our Synod in Resistance and the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Romania—the largest national Church of Old Calendarist resisters in the world (in the past, numbering as many as a million or more adherents, and still many hundreds of thousands today).

In describing our two Churches as “Sister Churches,” one can understand the ultimate meaning of the goodness of brothers dwelling in unity and grasp the true meaning of Christian fellowship. These qualities were manifested in Metropolitan Cyprian’s immediate collection of tons of food and aid from our faithful, which were transported in caravan after caravan to our brethren in Romania, when food and basic ne-

cessities were unavailable, just after the fall of the former régime. They are qualities likewise expressed by the loyalty, fidelity, trust, and inimitable kindness and hospitality that have constantly been shown to us by the Romanian faithful and clergy over the years, and especially during the time that our Metropolitan and our Church were unfairly and aggressively attacked by voices from the extreme right and left.



I first visited Romania in the Summer of 1991, accompanying His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian and numerous faithful from Greece and leading a small group of American pilgrims. We had gone there to attend the annual Feast Day of the Transfiguration Monastery in Slătioara, headquarters of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Romania. On our return to prepare to fly back to America, we stopped at the Dormition Monastery (*at left and below*), under the direction of the then Archimandrite Flavian. The Fathers were in the process of reconstruction, their first monastery having been destroyed by the Communist régime in 1983. Their Abbot, Father Flavian (then a student in nuclear physics at the University of Bucharest), and the monastery Deacon were imprisoned, with

the refusal of the New Calendar Patriarchate to intercede in any manner for them, and the monks dispersed to work camps.

That visit was the beginning of a long and close brotherly relationship between our monastery in Etna and the Dormition Monastery in Bucharest. Every time that our Bishops and I, or our faithful, have returned to Romania—most notably for the glorification of St. Glicherie, in 1999, and throughout the first decade of 2000, I was awestruck by the progress made on the monastery Church in Bucharest. When the Fathers spoke of the anticipated Consecration of the Church, I promised, at their insistence that our Bishops and I do so, that we would do all that we could to attend. With the Blessing of Archbishop Chrysostomos, who was unable to be there—despite his immense regrets—because of health problems, and Bishop Auxentios, who had to return from Greece to America before the Consecration, I was able to fulfill that promise this year.



On the weekend of Oct. 10 and 11, 2010 (Old Style), I thus had the distinct privilege of attending the Consecration of the Cathedral Church

of the Dormition Monastery, where its Abbot—now His Grace, Bishop Flavian of Ilfov—had arranged for the festivities. Because of the great multitude of clergy and faithful who were expected to attend, the Sat-



urday evening Vigil (*above*) was served in a small pavilion (a temporary wooden Church housing an Altar), next to the Cathedral. Following the Consecration service early Sunday morning, an Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was also served there.

Participating in the Consecration Liturgy were His Eminence,



Metropolitan Vlasie, the First Hierarchy of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Romania, and all of his Bishops—Teodosie, Glicherie, Iosif, Flavian, Dionisie, Antonie, and Evloghie—in Romania. Only Bishops Demosten, Sofronie, and Ghenadie were absent because of illness. Also participating were His Eminence, Bishop Photii, First Hierarchy of our Sister Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, to whom our Bishops and monastery in California are also very closely attached, as well as His Grace, Bishop Ambrose (*see at left*), representing the Holy Synod in Resistance of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece. I represented the American

Exarchate of the Synod in Resistance and our Bishops in America. Serving with the Bishops were fifty Presbyters and twelve Deacons.



The Consecration Service (*at left*) began at 6 a.m., followed by the Consecration Liturgy, which did not end until six and one half hours later, at half past noon. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, the participating Bishops signed the Consecration documents, with me signing as the representative of Archbishop Chrysostomos and of Bishop Auxentios. After removing our vestments in the main Church, the Bishops and the clergy passed through the crowds of pious faithful, all of whom pressed forward asking for blessings, as we made our way to the large guest *Trapeza* (Refectory) of the monastery for a festive meal.

The Romanians have a beautiful tradition: Following the Consecration of a Church, all the faithful—men, women, and children—are allowed to enter the Altar, this one time, to venerate the four corners of the Holy Table. For twelve hours the faithful streamed into the Cathedral Altar and each piously kissed the Blessing Crosses placed at each corner of the Holy Table (*at right*). The area directly in front of the Holy Table was cordoned off and Hieromonks were placed on guard to insure proper decorum.



An episcopal staff that belonged to St. John of San Fran-



cisco, a gift from Archbishop Chrysostomos, was presented by me to Bishop Flavian for the Skete of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, in Cernica. Bishops Photii and Ambrose carried this staff during the Vigil services and Liturgy, and when word of its provenance reached the crowds, the faithful asked that they be permit-

ted to venerate it. Fulfilling their request, Bishop Flavian placed it at the back of the Holy Table, allowing the faithful to kiss it as they came to venerate the newly consecrated Cathedral and Holy Table.



Worshippers at the Consecration service were estimated by the Fathers at the monastery to be at 10,000 persons (*see one portion of the throng above*), while the number of people venerating and attending the services for the two days was estimated at twice that number, or more, by the police who were on hand to assist with crowd control.

On the Monday immediately after the Consecration, some of the foreign visitors—including myself and Mr. Evangel Nicol, from Canada—were taken to downtown Bucharest to venerate the True Cross and Relics of Sts. Constantine and Helen and St. Dimitrie the New at the Patriarchal Cathedral, and the Relics of St. Cyprian and St. Menas at the Churches dedicated to them.

On the next day, Tuesday, the eve of the Feast of St. Paraskeve the New of Epivat, we also traveled to the municipality of Valea Roșie, near Bucharest, to attend Vigil services at the Annunciation Convent, a monastic community of eighty nuns under the spiritual direction of His Grace, Bishop Flavian and its revered Abbess, the Reverend Mother Teodosia. The vigil was served by Bishop Antonie, twelve Priests, and four Deacons, with Bishops Flavian and Evloghie in prayerful attendance. Owing to our scheduled departures on Wednesday, we were not

able to remain for the Feast Day Liturgy. Taking the blessings of the Bishops and making our farewells to the clergy and monastics, we returned to the monastery in Bucharest late that night to prepare for our return to America. (*Below, the Annunciation Convent Church and the Convent living quarters, all built by the hands of Bishop Flavian, his monks, and the sisterhood of the Convent*). □

