

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Abbot *Haralampos Dionysiatis: The Teacher of Noetic Prayer*

Author: Elder Joseph Dionysiatis

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Reviewer: unknown

Did Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Florina Sign "That Which He Did Not Believe?"

With all due respect to the author of Abbot Haralampos Dionysiatis, some of the anecdotal history he presents concerning of the reasons Elder Haralampos left the True Orthodox Church of Greece to commemorate the Patriarch of Constantinople is open to question.

First, on the issue of grace, it was the New Calendar State Church that first declared the True Orthodox Christians to be without grace. On April 24, 1926, the State Church of Greece issued a very harsh encyclical (Protocol Number 2398/2203) directed against the traditional Orthodox Christians. The encyclical states: "They separate themselves from the Church and cut themselves off from the Body of Christ, drawing upon themselves condemnation and excommunication, not knowing, or perhaps forgetting, that he who does not hear the Church is 'as the heathen man and the publican' (Matt. 18:17)...The decisions of the Church are absolutely obligatory; he who does not obey them no longer belongs to her; he is deprived of the means of divine grace; and is liable to eternal torment" (emphasis added). A persecution followed which included the forced closure and demolition of the places of worship used by the traditional Orthodox, sacrilege, and the disruption of their worship in which the clergy were beaten and arrested. The faithful were also beaten and imprisoned, and one, Catherine Routis, even died as a result of the wounds inflicted on her by the police.

In May of 1935, three Bishops who returned to the Church Calendar and left the State Church of Greece, one of whom was Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina, Synodically and officially issued an encyclical two days after they consecrated four new bishops. In this encyclical the following was stated "the governing hierarchy of Greece has, in spirit, torn and walled itself off from the sacred canons and the entire Body of Orthodoxy, and potentially and in essence, declared itself schismatic,

according to the determination of the committee of experts in canon law, of theologians, and professors of the University [of Athens] who were assigned to study the calendar question (one of the committee members at that time being His Beatitude, the Archbishop of Athens, who was a Professor of History in our national University)."

These statements provoked the intense wrath of the State Church and the seven bishops were immediately arrested and brought to trial in June of 1935. The bishops were condemned for causing division and disturbance by organizing "unlawful assemblies," and showing contempt for the "legal" and "canonical" Church. Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina was one of the bishops sentenced to exile and imprisonment. Before the Bishops left, they addressed their flock with one last synodical Encyclical. In June of 1935 they wrote, "...we counsel all who follow the Orthodox festal calendar to have no spiritual communion with the schismatic Church and its schismatic ministers, from whom the grace of the All-holy Spirit has departed, since they have set at naught the resolutions of the Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and all the Pan-Orthodox Councils that condemned the Gregorian festal calendar..."

Elder Haralampos was a prominent layman among the traditional Orthodox at the time these events took place. It is very surprising that he was not aware of these official Encyclicals issued by his bishops and instead, according to the author, says on pg. 53 "Some believed that grace was lost in the official Church along with the change of the calendar, while others said that grace remained, and ours was a stance of protest. I agreed with latter."

Perhaps Fr. Haralampos is referring to the private opinion that Metropolitan Chrysostom expressed in a personal letter to Bishop Germanus in November of 1937. Metropolitan Chrysostom modified and softened his original position because he saw that although there were many in the State Church who violently persecuted the traditional Orthodox, there were many who sympathized with the traditional Orthodox. He had high hopes that a Pan-Orthodox Council would set all things right in the near future. This softening caused a division among the traditionalist bishops because they saw Metropolitan Chrysostom's opinion as a betrayal. Metropolitan Chrysostom himself, in his private letter, said, "it is our personal and completely private opinion that His Beatitude and the Hierarchy with him...have potentially, but not actually, fallen from divine grace...His Beatitude and those Bishops who are of one mind with him will fall away from divine grace and become aliens...in actuality...when they are

proclaimed as such and as actual schismatics by a Pan-Orthodox Council..."

In 1950, after seeing that the State Church showed no signs of changing direction and that no Pan-Orthodox Council had set things aright, Metropolitan Chrysostom reinstated his original views in the synodical Encyclical he signed in May of that year. He "revoked and repudiated whatever was written by us from 1937 until today...incompatible or contrary to the principles of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ...as it was proclaimed in the encyclical published by the sacred Synod in the year 1935, without any addition or omission, including even the technical phrase 'potentially and in actuality.'" It is of this Encyclical of 1950 that the author of Abbot Haralampos Dionysiatis claims that the venerable Metropolitan "is believed to have said, 'I sign that which I don't believe.'" (pg. 54).

To say that Metropolitan Chrysostom did not believe in his last Encyclical cannot be supported by the historical facts. First, he suffered a two-year exile on account of this Encyclical, because it had especially infuriated the new calendar State Church. Secondly, he returned from exile in 1952 and lived three more years in freedom, but he did nothing to retract the Encyclical. Besides, in ecclesiastical matters, it is the official and public confession and statement which bears weight. Certainly, he was a man of integrity who had proved by his exiles and imprisonments that he did not fear to take a position because of its consequences. Nothing less could be expected from a man of such stature. Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina had spoken his convictions in clear conscience and maintained them with integrity. One may disagree with Metropolitan Chrysostom's stand, nevertheless, the facts are so clear that it is impermissible to ignore his position of 1950 or discount it as mere hypocrisy. For a full treatment of these issues, we refer the reader to *The Struggle Against Ecumenism* (Holy Orthodox Church in North America, 1998, ISBN 0-943405-09-2), especially the second and third chapters.

The moot point is what is exactly meant by the technical phrase "potentially and in actuality." We think that it is best understood as to whether or not the other bishops, clergy and flock are aware of the schism or heresy of their chief hierarch and his accomplices and are of one mind with it, or are ignorant of it. These things take time to become known and for the clergy and flock to react with clarity. Some condemn the heresy or schism immediately and break communion, others wait and will stop celebrating with those they do not agree with, yet will continue to commemorate them in the diptychs. Others will break communion with the bishops and clergy, but not the monastics and laity, waiting for a conciliar

decision of some sort concerning the heresy or schism. At such times in Church History, many become confused and have sometimes erred due to excessive caution. Sometimes even Saints have been confused, "hesitating," for a while. St. Gerasimus of the Jordan is a famous example. Alas, some have even reposed in this ambiguity and it is the Church who will later ascertain their status, sometimes numbering them among the saints because it is very clear from the rest of their writings and witness that if they had lived a little bit longer they would have made a clear statement and not continued in communion with the innovators. New-Hieromartyr Archbishop Hilarion Troitsky (1927+), the holy Elder Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-Dweller (1959+), and the venerable Fr. Justin Popovich (1979+) are notable examples of this.

In 1964, when Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras met in Jerusalem and publicly prayed together, many of the Fathers of Mount Athos published a proclamation of protest. The entire Synodia of Elder Joseph the Hesychast was then living at Nea Skete. They all, including Abbot Haralampos, signed this protest.¹ The "answer" of Constantinople to this protest was "the lifting of the Anathemas of 1054." At this time almost the entire Holy Mountain ceased the commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch.² The entire Synodia of the Elder Joseph also stopped commemorating the Patriarch. Elder Joseph the Younger (the Cypriot) wrote to a young member of the original Synodia residing in the United States with a fledgling community, strongly advising them to seek refuge with Metropolitan Philaret of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Abbot Haralampos remained a non-commemorator until he agreed to become the abbot of Dionysiou Monastery in 1979.

Regardless, can one really say the State Church of Greece, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, or for that matter, any of local Orthodox Churches, is free of "fanaticism, egoism, ambitions, and division of the leaders" (pg. 54 of *Abbot Haralampos Dionysiatis*) without appearing to be incredibly ignorant, naïve, or hypocritical? Is not the current persecution of the confessing fathers of the Holy Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mount Athos by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the full cooperation of the Greek Government and the commemorating monasteries on Mount Athos, "fanaticism?" Are not the scandals of the State Church of Greece and the Jerusalem Patriarchate that are currently being broadcast to the whole world a sorry exposé of "egoism, ambitions, and divisions of leaders?" Regardless, these are human sins, not matters of faith. One cannot justify the apostasy of "World Orthodoxy" because of the divisions and scandals of the traditional

Orthodox. Sinful and divided the traditional Orthodox may be, but heretics they are not. We can only pray that our beloved Fr. Haralampos, with all his spiritual gifts, will find mercy as a good intentioned hesitator who was scandalized by the extremism of some of the zealots on Mount Athos and the divisions of the traditionalist Orthodox hierarchy in Greece, and that somehow he was not aware of the gravity of the essential issues because of his well-known simplicity. This simplicity no doubt worked to his advantage when it came to making progress in prayer and asceticism; it did not, however, work to his advantage in the present crisis facing the Church. His explanation of only commemorating the apostate Patriarch of Constantinople in the litanies in the main church of the monastery was disingenuous to say the least. He was led astray by those around him whom he trusted to his disadvantage. No one should use his mistake, hopefully made in ignorance and with the best pastoral intentions, as an excuse to remain in communion with apostate "World Orthodoxy."