

"For your information"

AN OPEN LETTER ON THE SERBIAN QUESTION

Dear Bishop Photius,

I am writing to you, the Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod of the True Orthodox Church of Greece, since, as I am told, you have been calling the Russian and Serbian True Orthodox Churches "schismatic" since the ordination of Hieroschemamonk Akakije as Bishop of Resava and Shumadiya (Eastern and Central Serbia) by bishops of the True Orthodox Church of Russia. I have been asked to refute this accusation, and I will do so willingly, for I believe that such an accusation, coming from you, could cause a lot of confusion in those who don't know what has really happened.

As the saying goes, the course of true love never runs smooth. The devil, the father of lies and hater of mankind, is always trying to frustrate it, and thereby prevent the birth of a new generation that will praise and glorify God. What is true in secular life is true also in the Church. Nothing is so fruitful, nothing is so necessary for the growth and spiritual prosperity of the Church, as the lawful marriage of a true bishop with the flock that believes in him and loves him. But the devil will do everything in his power – a power, however, that is always limited by Almighty God – either to prevent the marriage, or, when the marriage has been accomplished, to break it up and separate those whom God has brought together...

For years the flock of the Serbian True Orthodox Church has been petitioning for the ordination to the episcopate of their founder and builder, Hieroschemamonk Akakije (Stankevich). They were talking about it already in May, 2006, when I visited the Serbian Church for the first time, and I heard many complaints about Metropolitan Kallinikos' neglect and indifference towards his Serbian flock. When they asked me my opinion, I could only sympathize with them, because, although I did not know Fr. Akakije well and had no first-hand experience of conditions in Serbia at that time, I knew from our bitter experience in England that Metropolitan Kallinikos cared not at all for his non-Greek flock in Western Europe. Of course, you, as a member of the Greek Synod, will always attempt to hide Kallinikos' appalling record as a bishop in Europe, and for your sake I will not now go into detail about what I know myself and have heard from reliable witnesses. But the fact itself cannot and must not be ignored, for otherwise it is impossible to understand the present situation and evaluate it correctly.

Strictly speaking, I believe that Kallinikos should have been put on trial and defrocked for his record in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.* One Greek told me that the main failure of Archbishop Chrysostomos' otherwise distinguished tenure as Archbishop of Athens was his failure to control Kallinikos, with whom he and other members of the Synod often quarreled. I know from a priest

* See Apostolic Canon 36 (Nicene series).

who was "trained" and ordained by him that he had two vast piles of unopened letters on his desk in Corinth – one from people inside Greece, and one from people outside Greece. So when, after his election as archbishop on Chrysostomos' death in 2010, you phoned me and said: "He's better now – he answers the telephone!", I smiled grimly and thought: "But has he answered that mountain of letters?" Certainly, he never answered a single one of our letters or phone-calls, and his only communication with us in the whole of the last twenty years that I have seen was one postcard saying "Macedonia is Greek!"

And that's the problem, isn't it, Despota? Archbishop Kallinikos cares much more that the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia should be called "Skopje" and not "Macedonia", and that Serbia should remain within the Greek ecclesiastical sphere of influence, than for the objective spiritual welfare of the people entrusted temporarily to his care in that area. His motivation is essentially political, not spiritual or pastoral; his passion is to recover the "lost territories" of the former Byzantine Empire in the Balkans rather than the salvation of the non-Greek peoples of the Balkans.

And your Synod has turned a blind eye to his notorious nationalism... When, in 1994, he wrote an article declaring that the Greeks, unlike the Slavs, put love for Christ above love for their country, and that the Slavs "have never been good Orthodox". other Greek Old Calendarists, appalled at this breathtaking hypocrisy, protested, but from our Synod there came only – silence. Recently, I believe, Kallinikos has tried to "make excuses for excuses in sin" by "reinterpreting" his article. But the text is quite clear and cannot be interpreted in any other way than as an outrageous assault on the whole of Slavic Orthodoxy. For the truth is that, long before Bishop Akakije's supposedly "schismatic" ordination, ***ARCHBISHOP KALLINIKOS HAS BEEN IN SPIRITUAL SCHISM FROM THE WHOLE OF SLAVIC ORTHODOXY...***

This conclusion is strongly confirmed by the events of the last three-and-a-half years, during which time the Russian True Orthodox Church has been knocking on your door seeking communion with the True Orthodox Church of Greece. Already in February, 2008 it was established that there were no major dogmatic or canonical obstacles to union, and the Russians eagerly expected union soon. And yet in September, 2009, you Greeks first voted for union, and then, only a few days later, ***under pressure from Metropolitan Kallinikos***, and to the astonishment of many, reversed the decision.

Why?

I believe that the real reason was quite simply that Metropolitan Kallinikos ***did not want*** communion with the Russians, and succeeded in imposing his will on his colleagues. (Only you, Despota, stood out against the decision, and I believe history will commend you for your courage then...) Of course, Kallinikos had to have excuses for his opposition to union with the Russians, some fig-leaf to cover the nakedness of his schismatic mentality. The only excuse offered that had any apparent basis in the holy canons was the supposed weakness of the Russian Church in

their reception of people from the Moscow Patriarchate, with the result that some priests of the Russian True Orthodox Church serve without having received a canonical baptism.

Now the obsession of your Greek Synod with the application of extreme strictness in the reception of converts from World Orthodoxy has already, as you know, had disastrous consequences. In 1978, when the Russian and Greek True Orthodox Churches were still in full communion, Archbishop Auxentios took a Portuguese priest serving under the omophorion of Archbishop Anthony of Geneva on the excuse that he had not been properly baptized, baptized him, reordained him and even made him "Bishop of Lisbon" of the "Autonomous Church of Portugal"* – after which the new bishop promptly fell into the heresy of Ecumenism... Again, in 1989 the well-known missionary protopriest, Fr. Alexey Young, applied to join the Greek Church and become the priest of our parish in England. But he was told that he had to be baptized first! He reluctantly refused, on the very reasonable grounds that his baptism would cause scandal and confusion among the very many members of the Russian Church Abroad whom he had baptized and married over the previous twenty years. The result was that our parish lost a much-needed priest... Again, in 1995 it was discovered that a Bulgarian priest of your Synod had baptized the whole of his parish, but he himself had not had canonical baptism. So were his parishioners baptized or not?... I do not know what solution your Synod found to this problem, but I do know that one Greek bishop has called the Russian True Orthodox "unbaptized" because of the existence of a few such anomalies among them!...

And yet the practice of the Russian True Orthodox Church today is stricter than that of the Russian Church Abroad, from which your Greek Synod received its apostolic succession in 1969. Are we to conclude that there is a "problem" with *your* ordinations?! Of course not, you will say. But in that case there cannot be any real problem with the practice of the Russian True Orthodox Church. For they accept that the only canonical form of baptism is threefold immersion, but, like every Local Church in history, they reserve the right to practice oikonomia occasionally for the salvation of the many...

I have seen you affirm that the differences between the Greeks and the Russians on this issue have been resolved since the meeting of the two delegations in Odessa in February, 2011. But *how* has the problem been resolved? I know that the proceedings and documents produced by the Odessa meeting were kept secret, but surely the *conclusions* of the discussions should not be kept secret. Surely the people have the right to know what the official position of their Church on this important question is? If the results of the talks with the Cyprianites were made public, why not those of the talks with the Russians?

* Our added note: Yet, even the Athonite priestmonks who commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch would have done the same. Such was the case of Ephraim Lash, a British convert, who became a priestmonk under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but was not allowed to serve on the Holy Mountain because he was not properly baptized.

As far as I know, the Russians did not change their position. So did the Greek Synod soften theirs, and agree on the Russians' right to decide by themselves questions of akriveia and oikonomia on their own territory? If so, we need to have this confirmed from an official source with Archbishop Kallinikos' signature. But all I have seen on your website is a vague statement issued in March that the Synod was pleased with the outcome of the Odessa talks, but that both sides needed two years to prepare for official concelebration. But when I asked Archbishop Tikhon, he immediately denied that his Church required anything like another two years – after all, the talks had been going on for three years already!...

So what was going on? Simply a mistranslation or misunderstanding of Archbishop Tikhon's words to you in Odessa? Perhaps... But I think there is another explanation that is more probable and explains more of the facts. Metropolitan Kallinikos never had any intention of softening his extremely rigorous views on akriveia and oikonomia (which in any case cannot be taken seriously, since for many years now the priests of the Greek cathedral in Astoria, New York, have been giving communion to new calendarists). At the same time, Kallinikos did not want to declare this publicly, and therefore be blamed for the breakdown of the talks with the Russians again in 2011 as he had been blamed in 2009. The best policy, therefore was to procrastinate, make some vague but comforting comments, and drag the talks on indefinitely - which would exhaust the Russians and lead *them* to break off the talks.

And there was another reason for procrastination. In February, a Serbian delegation had gone to Athens and presented the Greeks with a very reasonable request that they answer certain questions with regard to their plans for the future of the Serbian Church, and in particular whether the Greeks were planning to ordain a bishop for them or not. They asked you to answer in writing before Pentecost. Pentecost came and went, but you did not answer their questions. You had no plans to ordain a bishop for the Serbs, but you did not tell them so openly, in writing. For then you knew that they would go to the Russians...

Your procrastination in relation to the Russians and the Serbs had a single purpose: to stop the Serbs turning to the Russians for the ordination of Fr. Akakije. You hoped that by your stonewalling tactics you would either discourage the Serbs and make them give up their plans to go to the Russians, or make the Russians hesitate to help the Serbs for fear that it would lead to the breakdown of the union talks... But then, at their meeting in Odessa in June, 2011, the Russians and the Serbs signaled their determination to continue with the ordination of Fr. Akakije. This alarmed you, and you tried very hard to stop the ordination, putting pressure on both the Serbs and the Russians. But they stood firm, and - Glory to God! - the bridegroom and the bride were united with the help of the friend of the bridegroom, the Russian True Orthodox Church...

The union of the Russian and Serbian True Orthodox Churches, which had been artificially delayed by the Serbs' dependence on you, must be good news to anyone who looks at the present state of the True Orthodox Church worldwide. If the Russians and the Serbs cannot be united

when, besides dogmatic Orthodoxy, they have so much else in common, - a common ecclesiastical language, mutual help in the recent past, common veneration of the Royal Martyrs and monarchism, - what hope is there for union between other national Churches that have less in common? But, as so often in the past, you Greeks have shown yourselves indifferent to the interests of sister Churches, putting the narrow supposed interests of Greek Orthodoxy above those of the Universal Church.

Look at what you have lost, and what you could have gained. You had three years in which to unite with the Russians – and it would have been easy at any time in that period with just a little will for unity on your part. But instead, surrendering to Archbishop Kallinikos' bullying tactics and then his procrastinations, you wasted the opportunity. You had much more than three years in which to satisfy the legitimate aspirations and needs of the Serbs, and if you had done that – with very little cost to anyone or anything except Kallinikos' pride - you would have won their undying gratitude and a strong ally of Greek Orthodoxy. But instead, surrendering to Metropolitan Kallinikos' lust for power (Belgrade must be mine!), you have sown a well-justified distrust among the Serbs (and not only the Serbs!) and a schism that will not be easy to heal, at least in the short-term.

"But they are the schismatics!" you will say. But the Russians and the Serbs have broken communion with nobody. It is *you* who have broken communion with them for completely unjustified reasons. In my view, that makes *you, not them, guilty of schism.*

The essential question we have to ask ourselves is: is Archbishop Kallinikos the lawfully elected head of the Serbian Church? The answer is: *no*. He was asked by the Serbian True Orthodox Christians to *help* them *temporarily* - temporary help is not the same thing as permanent canonical rule - until they could acquire their own Serbian bishop and stand on their own feet, as befitted an *Autocephalous* Church. In any case, one bishop cannot be simultaneously a hierarch in two Autocephalous Churches. So *Kallinikos cannot be bishop of both Athens and Belgrade.* (Metropolitan Kyrikos of Mesogaia claimed, a few years ago, that he was the head of both the Russian and the Greek True Orthodox Churches. But you have told me that he is "mad"...))

Some people say that the Serbian Church has lost its autocephalous status, and is now missionary territory. This might be true if Serbia had lost all connection with Orthodoxy even externally, as has, for example, the former Autocephalous Church of Old Rome. But in essence the Serbian Church has exactly the same status as the Greek Church, as we can see if we compare their recent history.

In the 1920s the official Greek Church fell away from the faith, but a faithful remnant preserved Orthodoxy and was able to re-establish the episcopate in 1935. In 1955 the Greek Church lost its episcopate again, but this was restored by the Russian Church in 1969. The official Serbian Church remained in Orthodoxy longer than the Greek Church, falling away only

in the 1960s. It is arguable whether the Free Serbian Church, which separated from the Serbian patriarchate after the war, constituted a canonical faithful remnant. Evidently your Church considered that it was canonical, because you entered into union with it in 1981. In any case, True Orthodoxy was not restored *inside* Serbia until 1995 when the three Serbs from Esphigmenou monastery returned to Serbia. Now, in 2011, the episcopate of the Serbian Church has been restored – again, by the Russian Church. So Archbishop Tikhon has done for the Serbs exactly what Metropolitan Philaret did for the Greeks, and with the same canonical right.

Can we conclude from this brief survey that the Greeks have had any kind of imperialist suzerainty or protectorate over the Serbian Church in the last century? Clearly not. The Greeks could not give *themselves* a protectorate over any non-Greek territory: they could receive such a thing only through the decree of an Ecumenical or Pan-Orthodox Council. And there has been no such Council...

In any case, history shows that the only protectors of the weak and struggling Churches of the Balkans in the last hundred and fifty years have been *the Russians*, who liberated Bulgaria from the Turks, tried to liberate Serbia from the Austrians, resurrected both the Serbian and the Greek Churches, and provided apostolic succession to one of the Romanian Old Calendarist jurisdiction. The Serbs acknowledge this debt with gratitude. The Greeks, however, have repaid their debt by calling their benefactors "schismatics"!

Even if Serbia were missionary territory, would Archbishop Kallinikos have the kind of absolute power over it that he now claims? Hardly... A missionary territory belongs to no single Church unless an Ecumenical or Pan-Orthodox Church has agreed to assign it to that Church. That is why Greeks and Russians (and Serbs and Romanians and Georgians) can set up dioceses next to each other on one and the same missionary territory. Of course, strictly speaking there cannot be two bishops on one and the same territory, according to the holy canons. But until the Churches have agreed to assign one particular territory to one particular Church, there is some excuse for the continuance of this uncanonical situation...

Even if Serbia were missionary territory, and even if no bishop of any other Church laid claim to it, Kallinikos' power over the Serbs could not be absolute, because the Orthodox Church knows no absolute, unconditional power of one man over another. For the Orthodox Church is neither an absolute monarchy on the papist model, nor a democratic confederation on the Protestant model. If a bishop fails to act as a bishop, and therefore exposes the people to the danger of eternal damnation, then the people have the right and the duty to act in order to have the bishop replaced. Of course, this should be done, if possible, through Councils of bishops acting in accordance with the holy canons. But if the other bishops connive at their fellow bishop's evil, as happens so often in our terrible times, is there nothing to be done? No, there is always the final resort, which should not be adopted except in extreme circumstances, but can never be ruled out entirely: rebellion for the sake of the faith. When Bishop Eudoxius of Antioch displayed criminal negligence in the carrying out of his duties, his flock rebelled and elected St.

Meletius in his stead – and the holy Fathers Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian accepted the people’s verdict (*Lives of the Saints*, February 12)...

However, these canonical and historical considerations do not go to the heart of the matter, which is that Archbishop Kallinikos did not love his flock, and tried to exert authority over them through the force of cold law rather than the power of love – precisely the attitude of the Pharisees, who said of the people that followed Christ the Good Shepherd: "This crowd that does not know the law is accursed" (John 7.49). New Hieromartyr Andrew, Archbishop of Ufa (+1937), once said: "I am the bishop of those who want me as their bishop". And a contemporary True Orthodox bishop, commenting on the present Serbian question, has said that if a flock, rightly or wrongly, did not want him as their bishop, he would not want to impose himself on them. This is the attitude of a true bishop, who understands that all relationships in the Church are based on love, not power, and that if something cannot be accomplished through love then it should not be done at all.

If this were not the case, then the Orthodox Church would be transformed into a kind of Eastern Papism like that practised by the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow, whose only difference from the Western Pope is that they allow him to occupy the first place, while they quarrel over who will be second...

The sad thing is that the True Orthodox Church of Greece under Archbishop Kallinkos appears to be being transformed into just such an Eastern Papacy – except that in essence he recognizes no authority equal to himself. For no other Church is granted communion with it unless it conforms to Archbishop Kallinikos’ will in all things... May God preserve our Church from falling into such a schismatical mentality, into such Pharisaical and hypocritical self-righteousness!

With love in Christ,

Vladimir Moss.

August 8/21, 2011.