

# TOO HEAVY TO LIFT

— Part Two —

*A Protest to Patriarch Athenagoras  
On the Lifting of the Anathemas of 1054*

December 2/15, 1965

Your Holiness:

From the Holy Fathers we have inherited the testament that in the Church of God all is done according to canonical order, in unity of mind and in agreement with ancient traditions. If, however, any from among the bishops, or even from among the representatives of autocephalous Churches, should do anything not in agreement with what the whole Church teaches, each member of the Church may declare his protest. The 15th rule of the First and Second Council of Constantinople in 861 acknowledges as worthy of "the honor befitting an Orthodox Christian" those bishops or clergy who withdraw from communion even with their Patriarch, if he should publicly preach heresy or teach such openly in the Church. Thus we are guardians of the Church's truth, which has always been defended by concern that nothing possessing significance for the whole Church be done without the agreement of all.

For this reason our relation to various divisions which go beyond the bounds of separate Local Churches has also been determined not otherwise than by the agreement of all these Churches.

If our separation from Rome was originally determined in Constantinople, subsequently it was accepted by the whole Orthodox Church and became an act of the whole Orthodox world. No one Local Church separately -- and in particular the Church of Constantinople, long respected by all of us, from whom our Russian Church received the treasure of Orthodoxy -- can change anything in the matter without the prior agreement of all. Moreover we, the presently ruling bishops, cannot execute decisions which would be in disagreement with the teaching of the Holy Fathers, specifically Sts. Photius of Constantinople and Mark of Ephesus, insofar as the matter concerns the West.

In the light of these principles we, though we are the youngest of the representatives of the Church, yet as the head of the autonomous, free portion of the Russian Church, consider it our duty to declare a decisive protest against the act of Your Holiness concerning the solemn declaration,

simultaneously with the Pope of Rome, of the removal of the excommunication proclaimed by Patriarch Michael Cerularius in 1054.

We heard many expressions of dismay when Your Holiness, before the whole world, did something novel, unknown to Your predecessors and contrary to the tenth Apostolic Canon, by meeting the Pope of Rome, Paul VI, in Jerusalem, We shall say frankly, without hesitation: the offense was great. We have heard that as a result of this many monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos ceased to mention the name of Your Holiness during Divine services. Now, however, You go yet further when, by a decree of Yourself and the bishops only of Your Synod, You abrogate the decree of Patriarch Michael Cerularius, confirmed and accepted by the entire Orthodox East. By doing this, Your Holiness acts in disagreement with the relation toward Roman Catholicism that has been adopted by our whole Church. It is not a question of one or another evaluation of the conduct of Cardinal Humbert; it is not a question of any personal falling-out between Pope and Patriarch that could be easily healed by mutual Christian forgiveness; no — the essence of the question lies in those deviations from Orthodoxy which have become rooted in the Roman Church during the course of centuries, first of all the teaching of Papal infallibility, definitely formulated at the First Vatican Council. The declaration of Your Holiness and the Pope justly acknowledges the act of mutual pardon as insufficient for the cessation of former as well as of more recent divergences. But more than that: this act places a sign of equality between error and truth. During the course of centuries, the whole Orthodox Church has justly believed that she has departed in nothing from the teaching of the Holy Ecumenical Councils, while at the same time the Roman Church has accepted a series of novelties, discordant with Orthodoxy, in her dogmatic teaching. The more these novelties have been introduced, the deeper has the division become between East and West. The dogmatic deviations of eleventh-century Rome did not yet contain such errors as were added later. Therefore the cancellation of the mutual communications of 1054 might have had significance in that epoch, but now it serves only as evidence of indifference for the most important and essential: namely, the new teachings, unknown to the ancient Church, that were proclaimed after that, of which several, being exposed by Saint Mark of Ephesus, served as a reason why the Union of Florence was rejected by the Holy Church.

We declare decisively and categorically:

No union of any sort of the Roman Church with us is possible until she renounces her new dogmas, and it is not possible to reestablish communion

in prayer with her without the decree of all Churches — which, however, is not regarded by us as possible until the Russian Church, now compelled to live in the catacombs, becomes free. The hierarchy now headed by Patriarch Alexis cannot express the authentic voice of the Russian Church, for it is completely subservient to the atheist authority, executing its will. The representatives of several other Churches in Communist countries are also not free.

Inasmuch as the Vatican is not only a religious center, but also a state, and one's relation to it — as the recent visit of the Pope to the United Nations clearly showed — has also a political significance, one cannot fail to reckon with the possible influence of the atheist powers upon the hierarchy of the captive Churches, on one side or the other, in the question of the Roman Church.

History testifies that negotiations with those of different belief under the condition of pressure from political circumstances have never brought the Church anything but disturbance and divisions. Therefore we consider it necessary to declare that our Russian Church Abroad, as undoubtedly also the Russian Church now in the catacombs, will not consent to any "dialogues" whatever with other confessions concerning dogmas, and she rejects beforehand every agreement with them in this connection, acknowledging the possibility of a restoration of unity with them only if they accept in full Orthodox doctrine in that form in which it has been preserved until now by the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. As long as this condition is unfulfilled, the excommunications of Patriarch Michael Cerularius maintain all their force, and their removal by Your Holiness is an act uncanonical and invalid.

To be sure, we are not opposed to cordial mutual relations with the representatives of other confessions, as long as Orthodox truth is not betrayed thereby. For this reason our Church at one time accepted the kind invitation to send observers to the Second Vatican Council, just as she had sent observers to the Protestant Conferences of the World Council of Churches, in order to have information from first hand concerning the work of these meetings, without any participation in their decisions. We value the kind reception of our observers and study with interest their detailed reports, which testify to the beginning of significant changes in the Roman Church. We shall thank God if these changes will serve the cause of her drawing near to Orthodoxy. However, if Rome must change much in order to return to the confession of the Apostolic faith, the Orthodox Church, which has preserved this faith until now uncorrupted, has nothing to change.

Church tradition and the example of the Holy Fathers teach us that no dialogue is conducted with Churches that have fallen away from Orthodoxy. To them is always directed the monologue of the Church's preaching, in which the Church calls them to return to her bosom through rejection of every teaching not in accord with her. A genuine dialogue supposes an exchange of opinions, admitting the possibility of the persuasion of the participants in it for the attainment of agreement. As is apparent from the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI understands dialogue as a plan for our annexation to Rome, or for the restoration of communion with her with the aid of some kind of formula, which however leaves her doctrine totally unchanged, and in particular her dogmatic teaching on the position of the Pope in the Church. But any agreement with error is foreign to the whole history of the Orthodox Church and to her very existence. It could lead, not to unanimous confession of the truth, but to an illusory external union similar to the agreement of the discordant Protestant societies within the Ecumenical Movement.

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

We fervently beg Your Holiness to place an end to the offense, for the path which You have chosen, if it should further bring You into union with the Roman Catholics, would call forth a division in the Orthodox world; for undoubtedly many of Your own spiritual children also will prefer faithfulness to Orthodoxy to the ecumenistic idea of a compromising union with non-Orthodox without their full agreement in the truth.

+Metropolitan PHILARET  
President of the Synod of Bishops of the  
Orthodox Church Outside of Russia