

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

18 February/2 March 2000

A Statement of the ROCOR Bishops Concerning the Moscow Patriarchate.

The leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate has now officially declared that it looks upon the property of the Russian Church Abroad as its own, for only it, and no other, is the "sole legal heir to the property of the pre-Revolutionary Church," which, consequently, "is being held by the schismatics abroad illegally," and that such a decision "is accepted by the Orthodox believing people of Russia with joy and profound gratitude."

This statement compels us, the hierarchs abroad, to address the Russian Orthodox people directly. It is essential that we clarify the essential question which has emerged over the last decade-the question of succession with regard to the Russian Orthodox Church and historical Russia.

I. On the eve of the fall of the Communist regime it seemed possible that the previous cause of the ecclesiastical division-the atheistic government-was already falling away, and that the rest of our problems would be resolved in a fraternal dialogue. The Council of Bishops repeatedly referred to this idea in its epistles, and in actual fact strove to open paths to this fellowship. In this, however, great difficulties were encountered, and later-as far as we are able to judge, due to the active interference of the authorities in Russia early in 1997-our attempts at clarification were broken off (the seizure of the monastery in Hebron). Difficulties manifested themselves, firstly, in a totally different attitude toward questions essential to the Church, and our differences in this regard have not been resolved to the present day. A) The question of the sainthood of the new martyrs and the Tsar-Martyr, the anointed of God, who were slain by the atheistic authorities. From our point of view, they fulfilled the principal mission of the Church of Russia in the 20th century.

B) The policy of collaboration with the atheistic authorities begun by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) against that part of the Church "disloyal" to the Communist overlords, which brought about the destruction of the former. From our point of view, to defend this policy is to demean the struggle of the New Martyrs.

C) The ecumenical activity of the Orthodox in the World Council of Churches. From our point of view, this crosses the boundaries set by the holy canons and the Tradition of the holy fathers, infringing upon the very truth of Orthodoxy.

D) Relations toward the post-Communist leadership of the Russian Federation. From our point of view, they are introducing a non-Christian policy designed to break down the Russian people and destroy Russia. And this false spirit is in nowise offset by the gilding of domes and the restoration of church buildings in which these very leaders are praised. Attempts at "dialogue" on these differences on various levels did not lead to the hoped-for results. We acknowledge that in this certain of our representatives are partly to blame, for in their haste to make the Truth clear they insufficiently understood the complex conditions of the turmoil in Russia. In the tumultuous sea of the last decade in Russia it was incredibly difficult to make our Russian brethren hear the Truth of the Russian Church by which we live-in unbroken succession and without the intrusion of malicious powers into our ecclesiastical life. We were mistaken in our response to the situation in Russia and in our search for reliable allies, being somewhat lacking in patience and love for those opposed to us-which soon even became viewed as arrogance in the eyes of the Russian people. Yet what we wished for was something quite different.

II. Over all the preceding decades, we had preserved spiritual fellowship with those who did not submit to militant atheism, preserving Orthodoxy; and our hearts were open to them, in whatever part of the Church of Russia they were to be found. This fellowship was in part also in accordance with the canons of the Church, so that when times of greater liberty came, these ties, this presence in Russia, were also revealed. This happened because there was preserved, and continued secretly to live, that part of the Church of Russia which did not accept the "Declaration of Loyalty" (1927) imposed by the militant atheists, wherewith Metropolitan Sergius tried to bind both the conscience of all Orthodox people in Russia as well as our conscience (demanding that each clergyman abroad personally sign an oath of "loyalty to the Soviet authorities").

As the years passed, the word "schism" began to be applied to us and others who were viewed as "disloyal"; this term continues to distort the ecclesial crux of the question to this day. We have never accepted this term, and we do not wish to apply it to others. This question is extremely painful, and must, from our point of view, be resolved in some other way.

As early as 1923, the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad resolved: "Having as our immediate objective the nurturing of the Russian Orthodox flock abroad, the Council of Bishops, the Synod, the hierarchs and priests, within the limitations of their powers, must show all possible cooperation in meeting various spiritual needs when asked to do so by the ecclesiastical organizations which remain in Russia or by individual Christians." In particular, it was stipulated: "Representatives of the dioceses located outside the boundaries of Russia, acting together, express the voice of the free Russian Church abroad; but no individual person, nor even the Council of the bishops of these dioceses, represents itself as an

authority which has the rights which the whole Church of Russia possesses in all its fullness, in the person of its lawful hierarchy."

The concept of the whole Church of Russia and a lawful hierarchy, according to canon law, does not exclude the diaspora, but naturally embraces the totality of the Church of Russia in the light of the Pan-Russia Council of 1917-1918. It is impossible to restore this integrity by a process of rejection and exclusion which have their origin with the militant atheists, who tried to set the Orthodox people against one another, and for this purpose concocted the "Living Church" and other obstacles. We consider that the interpretation of historical and ecclesiastical judgment must be a joint task over which the Russian people—all of us—must labor with great patience, first of all with love for the Truth. Otherwise, there is the danger that we will fall to disentangle ourselves from the snares, or may fall into them again.

We reject the word "schism," not only as one which distorts the crux of the problem, but also as a lie against the whole Church of Russia concocted by the enemies of Christ during the most terrible period of persecutions. We have never accepted this lie concerning the Church just as we have not accepted the lie concerning the Church contained in the "Declaration," in which, to please the regime of that time, patristic doctrine and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures were trampled underfoot. For this reason, our fathers declared in 1927: "The portion of the Church of Russia abroad considers itself an inseparable, spiritually united branch of the great Church of Russia. It does not separate itself from its Mother Church, and does not consider itself autocephalous. As before, it considers its head to be the patriarchal locum tenens Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, and commemorates him [as such] during the divine services." At that time, we discovered that the lawful first hierarch of the Church of Russia had rebuked his deputy, Metropolitan Sergius, from exile, for "exceeding his authority", and commanded him to "return" to the correct ecclesiastical path; but he was not obeyed. In fact, even while Metropolitan Peter was alive, Metropolitan Sergius usurped, first his diocese (which, according to the canons, is strictly forbidden), and later his very position as locum tenens. These actions constituted not only a personal catastrophe, but also a universal catastrophe for our Church.

We never left the Church, even though there have been those who began to separate and drive us out with the word "schism" from those most terrible of days even to the present—failing to grasp the main point, and still not being aware of it. It is impossible to resolve contemporary ecclesiastical questions by simply usurping the title "sole lawful ecclesiastical leadership," trampling the tragic truth of the Church in Russia underfoot. Our readiness, even over the last decades, to help the believing people in Russia (as far as our weak powers permitted) in various ways (literature, bearing witness concerning the persecution of the Church, protests) has not changed. It has led to our receiving believers under our omophorion, and, for

various reasons, a small number of clergymen in addition to those who already had had a secret existence for some time. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, others were added which entailed at the time intolerable violations of the canons of the Church, and these were still uncorrected in 1989-1991. Then a tempest arose over the "opening" of parishes of the Church Abroad in Russia. We did not try actively to open parishes and foist ourselves on them from abroad, but merely "accepted" those Russian people who had learned more about the history of the Church and its life and yearned for ecclesial communion with us, despite the barriers of a propaganda inherited from past times. This little portion, for which our shortcomings did not overshadow the Truth and which, for this reason, decided to unite themselves in Russia to our prayers, has been subjected to persecutions, while our Church is slandered in all the official church publications.

Yet the same leadership: of the Moscow Patriarchate, which on the new stage of gradual liberation has exacerbated the situation by its own interpretation of events and has so bitterly fought against the "parallel structure," has itself, since the end of World War II, continuing to carry out the demands of the authorities then in power, created its own structures where it was only possible in the diaspora, and in Israel, in 1948, totally drove away our monastics when establishing itself. At that time this was, for us, although grievous, at least understandable—we saw the Church's lack of freedom and the enslavement of officially sanctioned ecclesiastical structures in Russia, which were fettered by the authorities and chained to the authorities.

These latter years have witnessed a new wave of forcible seizures by the Moscow Patriarchate of churches and monasteries from the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in various countries, or attempts to seize them—with the help of the secular authorities (foreign and Russian), wherever such is possible—in Italy, Israel, Germany, Denmark, Canada. Now it is finally confirmed, even by the mouth of the primate of the Moscow Patriarchate, Alexis II, and representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Affairs, that they have no desire for unification with us on the proposed position of Truth. They prefer to resolve the indicated points of disagreement and the question of the history of the Church of Russia simply by eliminating the Church Abroad, by crushing it. In other words, the present leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate prefers to continue the policies of Metropolitan Sergius—only in a new form, at a new level.

III. Thus, when we pose the question of succession, we have in mind not only property title to the churches abroad. Regarding this question, it is well known that the Soviet regime refused them, as it did "ecclesial obscurantism" in general, when in the 1930's it announced its "five-year plan for atheism." It is precisely the Russian emigration which was able to save these churches from confiscation by foreign states and from destruction, carefully restoring them with its own means as Russia Abroad, which is open with all its heart both

to the Russian past (tsarist Russia) and a Russia of the future. Therefore, this is in actuality our joint heritage-the heritage of the whole Russian people, and without fail it will be such as a result of the restoration of the one Church of Russia, which stands in the Truth. However, to our distress, the past decade has shown that the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate are avoiding true union, are not ready for it, for this would mean that they would have to give an honest account to the people and listen to its voice. This is also the reason why they are violently seizing churches which have not been preserved by their efforts, taking no account of the outlay of expenses, even though in Russia itself thousands of desolate churches need to be saved.

It is obvious that the principal objective of this is the smothering of our Church, and not their nurturing of the flock abroad, for here they do not in the least fear the terrible scandalizing of that flock. Who among the emigrants will enter those churches which have been wrested away by violence and wickedness? One cannot fail to see that they are attempting to eliminate us as a vexing and incorruptible witness to the 19th century history of Russia. The main succession which we preserve and which our "opponents" in the Moscow Patriarchate are trying to uproot in our person, is historical and spiritual. After the militantly atheist Revolution, it was our Russian Church Abroad which became the linchpin of that small portion of the Russian nation which did not recognize the Revolution and chose as its path the preservation of loyalty to our Orthodox state. This stubborn stand for the Truth, despite its apparent "unreality," pressure from the Bolsheviks, from pro-Soviet hierarchs, and the surrounding democratic world, was realized among us as a "struggle for Russianism in the midst of universal apostasy"-in the hope that for this God would have mercy on Russia and give our people a last chance to restore its historic aspect. This was the primary purpose of the Russian diaspora. It is for this that we have been praying in our churches for eighty years: "For the suffering land of Russia" and "That He may deliver its people from the bitter tyranny of the atheist authorities." This refers also to the post-Communist regime of the Russian Federation, which considers itself the successor not so much of historical Russia (this is declared only rarely, and in words only) as the successor of the Bolshevik regime. The entire legal system of the Russian Federation is founded on the Soviet legal system, and not on the pre-Revolutionary laws.* The present democratically elected officials in Russia have preserved the majority of Bolshevism's atheistic symbols (the five-pointed star, etc.), monuments, street and city names, ignoring the people's original intent: that the Communist heritage be overturned, that the national tragedy of Russia in the 19th century be reassessed, that there be repentance. At the same time, a new, anti-Christian ideology has taken root in the Russian land. And so as to weaken the people's opposition to this, there is being waged an intentional, conscious, calculated demoralization of the people themselves by cutting them off from their true, historic and spiritual roots. And all of this is going on with the permission, consent and even blessing of the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate which, in

order to preserve its own power structures, is prepared to collaborate with any regime whatever, and to participate actively in ecumenism, not only with non-Orthodox Christians, but even with non-Christian political powers. "By our joint efforts we will build a new, democratic society," declared the head of the Moscow Patriarchate, Alexis II, in 1991, in an address made to rabbis in New York, where he preached peace for all "in an atmosphere of friendship, creative cooperation and the brotherhood of the children of the One God, the Father of all, the God of your fathers and ours." How a similar irenic activity answers to our fate is evident in the fact that not long ago, while in Israel for the feast of the Nativity of Christ, the primate of the Moscow Patriarchate performed three morally incompatible activities: he prayed to the God we have in common, Christ the incarnate Son of God, then reached an agreement with the Moslems concerning the seizure of one of our monasteries, and finally praised the destroyer Yeltsin for "laboring for the good of Russia" and for his "efforts in restoring the morality of our people."

IV. We are convinced that the intensifying persecution against the Russian Church Abroad throughout the world is one of the steps being taken toward the establishment of a new world order. Furthermore, peoples deprived of their own spiritual and cultural originality, and Christian principles are being perverted and undermined. Anti-Christian powers are achieving their objectives by employing various methods, among which is the inciting of certain nations and confessions against others, and often of a certain part of a nation against another, always encouraging within the local Orthodox Churches those groups which are deemed useful at a given moment, and denigrating those who oppose them. Is this not what is taking place right now in the midst of Russian Orthodoxy? Is it not obvious that there are powers which are striving to reduce the Church of Russia to an ideological instrument-both the authorities of the Russian Confederation and the "mighty of this world" who stand behind them-for the control of the Russian people? How can we fail to remember the image of the harlot church seated upon the beast, which is described in the Book of Revelation? And if the Book of Revelation tells us: "Power was given him over all kindred, and tongues, and nations. And all who dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13: 7-9), then it would seem that over the past decade it has been entirely possible to discuss and clarify in a "dialogue" in what way one ought to understand, following a true, patristic interpretation of the Sacred Scripture (which every consecrated bishop is obligated by oath to keep holy), that "there is no power but of God" (Rom. 13:1-5). By this it may be possible to set aright the perversion of the Orthodox Faith, terrible in its consequences, which is to be found in documents being published in the name of the Moscow Patriarchate as in the name of the Church of Russia itself. Encroachment upon the sense of Holy Tradition hinders spiritual healing. Our appeal

continues to be ignored... the Truth of the Church is not being proclaimed; false teaching is not being condemned.

We know that a significant part of the people and clergy of Russia are aware of the danger of the situation, which is being manifested in many different forms. Still, the neo-Renovationists, the ecumenists, and their opponents within the "right-leaning" circles of the Moscow Patriarchate, who call themselves "true catacomb Christians" despite all their irreconcilable differences, not to mention the very leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, are united in spreading the selfsame slander against our Church. We know that our being situated outside Russia can seem "unpatriotic" to some-as is proclaimed in the publications of the Moscow Patriarchate. Yet those who attack us for this should read St. Athanasius the Great's "Apology for My Flight," and the canons of St. Peter of Alexandria, to avoid unchurchly, secular reasoning and to understand how the Holy Church has actually treated similar questions. We see in this fate of part of the Russian people, sent into the West by the Providence of God, a call to understand the universal scale of the impending apocalyptic period. We do not place our hope in foreign authorities when we appeal to them, pointing out the principles of Justice (as the holy Apostle Paul once appealed to his Roman citizenship so as to avoid violence united with iniquity) when we demand the cessation of the iniquity inflicted upon the "little flock" of Christ, our little Church. Justice is appealed to-as we avail ourselves of a traffic light on a road-so as to insure elementary order for all, among whom one may also consider the émigrés who once saved themselves from annihilation. We place our trust in the One Holy Trinity, Whom we confess, and on the wisdom of our people, who for a thousand years have confessed the unity of the Trinity amid all the vicissitudes of history. We hope that, taught by its new bitter experience, it will have learned a lesson from the 20th century through which it has just lived. The fate of Russia is in the hands of God and the hands of the Russian people, if they desire to remain the people of God.

We, descendants of the various generations of émigrés, who find ourselves exiles in a foreign land by dint of the bitter dregs which our people drained in the beginning, as well as many of the other peoples of the world (whose children have since come to us for the salvation of Christ), hope to hold out until that day when, through the supplications of our holy new-martyrs, Russia will be moved by prayer to carry out its final mission-to bear witness before the world concerning the Truth of 'Orthodoxy and the Orthodox form of government. As far as our scant powers permit, we will always bear witness to this for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. Our goal, however modest, is not to allow anyone to drown this Truth in the ocean of impending apostasy.

Forgive us, compatriots who are dear to us in Christ, for our mistakes. And do not discard the Truth itself with our shortcomings and weaknesses. We call upon you to be aware of the universal scale of the

present Church problems, to reunite with us in common prayer, and to deepen in our native land the struggle of being Russian amid the conditions of apostasy-despite the policies of those worldly and ecclesiastical authorities who do not value Russia's universal spiritual vocation. Why is our existence disturbing to those who call us "a tiny handful of schismatics?" Saint Mark of Ephesus demonstrated that the Truth is not measured by the number of ruling hierarchs. All of Orthodoxy can be defended by a single, solitary "schismatic." The holy apostles, the holy fathers and teachers of the Church, the holy martyrs, call upon us, for the sake of Truth, to withdraw from falsehood, from the imminent kingdom of the Antichrist, and to struggle in love for Christ, that we may be written "in the Book of Life of the Lamb, Who was slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear."

+Metropolitan Vitaly +Archbishop Lavr +Archbishop Mark +Archbishop
Hilarion +Bishop Kirill +Bishop Mitrofan +Bishop Ambrosy +Bishop
Gavrill +Bishop Mikhail

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