

- The practical cultivation of a synodal spirit

THE HOLY SYNOD IN RESISTANCE

Its Thirty-Fifth Regular Annual Meeting (October 4, 2008 [Old Style])

I. ON FRIDAY, October 4, 2008 (Old Style), following an official invitation to its Members (Protocol No. 1637/August 13, 2008 [Old Style]), the Orthodox Church of Greece, Holy Synod in Resistance, convened for its regular annual meeting (the thirty-fifth).

The lengthy and arduous meeting of the Synod (in two consecutive sessions) was presided over by Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, since the First Hierarchy of the Holy Synod, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, by reason of his incapacitation, could not, of course, be present.

The following Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs of the Holy Synod took part in these sessions: from Greece, Their Graces, Bishop Chrysostomos of Christianoupolis, Bishop Ambrose of Methone, and Bishop Klemes (Clement) of Gardikion; from America, His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna and His Grace, Bishop Auxentios of Photike; from Australia, His Eminence, Bishop Chrysostomos of Sydney and New South Wales; from Italy, Their Eminences, Bishop Michael of Nora



and Bishop Silvano of Luni; and from Sweden, His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis. (His Eminence, Bishop George of Albania, from South Ossetia, was not in attendance, owing to the ongoing conflict in his country.)

His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion, Secretary of the Holy Synod, duly performed his service, while Archimandrite Glykerios and Hieromonk John, of the Holy Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, assiduously discharged their duties as translators.

The lengthy and laborious discussions of the very extensive agenda of the thirty-fifth meeting provided, by the Grace of God, an excellent opportunity for the cultivation of a synodal spirit: dialogue conducted in humil-

ity, love, and purity of disposition, in a spirit of peace and prayer, with an attitude of hearing “what the Spirit saith unto the Church.”

II. FOLLOWING its agenda, the Holy Synod dealt with eight topics, a ninth topic being tabled for the Standing Holy Synod.

1. Issues Dealt with by the Standing Holy Synod

During its First Period (October 2007–September 2008), the Standing Holy Synod, comprised of four canonically elected members, carried out very extensive and onerous work (Sessions I–XXIV running to a hundred pages of Minutes) and handled innumerable topics pertaining to the teaching, missionary, and inter-Church activities of our Orthodox Ecclesiastical Community.

Certain topics on which the Standing Holy Synod rendered decisions, being of major importance, required final ratification by the entire Synod, which indeed took place (e.g., liturgical and pastoral issues, relations with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad under Bishop [now Metropolitan—*Trans.*] Agafangel, and efforts to open communion with the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece under Archbishop Chrysostomos [Kiouses]).

The regular program of the Standing Holy Synod has admittedly, at times, been in abeyance, owing, firstly, to the precipitous workload and an increase in pastoral activities on many levels—and especially for the Acting President—and, secondly, to the ongoing union dialogue, the results of which have given rise to a variety of corresponding issues.

2. Efforts at Union with the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece

In the previous meeting of our Synod (the thirty-fourth/October 4, 2007 [Old Style]), it was unanimously decided that rapprochement and dialogue be undertaken towards union or coöperation and the consolidation of Orthodox anti-ecumenism in the context of the Old Calendar movement.

In February of 2008, an informal dialogue was inaugurated, by way of a joint commission, with the Holy Synod of the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece (three Bishops from each side), and up to September 2008, five meetings have been held (in Megara, Piræus, Acharnai, Aphidnai, and Piræus).

Very many historical, canonical, and theological issues have been examined and resolved at these meetings. However, we have now reached a critical historical turning-point, which demands—on our part—patience and spiritual wisdom, so that, in the process of putting forth a vision of unity, our ecclesiological identity will not be lost.

At the meeting of our Synod, the Hierarchs initially endorsed the laborious unitive endeavor undertaken by the Standing Holy Synod. They subsequently went on to declare themselves firmly in favor of promoting a dialogue for unity, though with the proviso that our Synod can make concessions only to the extent that our basic ecclesiological principles remain unsullied. Finally, then, they scrutinized in depth, and article by article, the ten “nonnegotiable points” proposed for agreement by the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece, with a view to union, contained in a document composed by its Secretary (Protocol No. 3-1141/September 9/22, 2008), and which we regard, for the time being, as inappropriate for publication, since our dialogue is in progress and is, moreover, informal; that is, not binding.

Our Synod of Bishops came, directly or indirectly, to the following conclusions regarding the aforementioned “nonnegotiable points,” after a very protracted discussion.

- In principle, it would be possible for us to agree with several of these points, once various improvements and modifications have been made to the wording thereof.

- However, any final “convergence” of both sides on these points would be rather artificial and superficial, as long as there remain crucial “points” on which there is no possibility of concession on our part—that is, on points nonnegotiable in terms of a theology of Orthodox resistance.

- These crucial “points” (the repetition of Chrismation and Baptism—even when simply improperly performed—and the nominal anathematization of New Calendarists), if adopted and explicitly proclaimed by us, would lead to a different interpretation of the other “points,” as well, and to an outright denial of our ecclesiological principles.

- In this regard, there arises the question of the extent to which, for the sake of the supreme good of unity, we can without absolute ecclesiological uniformity on both sides—as was the case at least up until 1984—achieve oneness with the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece on the basis of fundamental points of agreement, leaving to a General, Pan-Orthodox, or Œcumenical Synod for decisive adjudication and resolution those points still in dispute.

We decided by a majority to issue a commendatory response, and our commission for dialogue will continue working in this direction.

3. Designation of a New First Hierarchy (Metropolitan)

It was proposed in correspondence from several of the Bishops outside Greece that the election and designation of a new First Hierarchy (Metropolitan) of the Holy Synod be held, so as to forestall any sense of temporariness regarding its decisions and actions. This issue was discussed at some length.



In the end, it was resolved by a majority vote not to proceed with the designation of a new First Hierarchy (Metropolitan), postponing this to the indefinite future, in due consideration for the fact that, though very seriously incapacitated, our much-revered First Hierarchy, Metropolitan Cyprian, is still alive.

4. Petition for Retirement by the Archbishop of Etna

His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna had submitted a request to be retired from the Holy Synod, primarily for reasons of health, since serious ailments are hampering him in exercising his pastoral duties.

By unanimous decision, His Eminence's request was not accepted for various reasons, though essentially because we are passing through a very critical period of transition, involving the illness of His Eminence, the First Hierarchy of our Synod, on the one hand, and because, on the other hand, we find ourselves in the midst of ongoing union dialogues.

5. The Holy Diocese of Sydney (Australia): Present and Future

Since His Eminence, Bishop Chrysostomos of Sydney and New South Wales is already residing permanently in Greece, because of issues with his health, it was proposed by the Standing Holy Synod that this matter be brought under discussion. However, it was ultimately decided that it would be advisable to postpone any examination thereof for the future, in a more opportune climate.

6. The Holy Diocese of Alania: A Period of Crisis

In the unstable situation in the region of the Caucasus and the occupation of South Ossetia by *protective* Russian forces, our Holy Diocese of Alania is undergoing a profound crisis in its existence, and an essential solution is unattainable without personal deliberations with our resident Hierarchy, His Eminence, Bishop George, who will be visiting Greece shortly. The Standing Holy Synod will convey to him the discussions and proposals of the Hierarchs.

7. Regarding Improperly-Performed Baptisms

The question of improperly-performed Baptisms, which are becoming widespread and which are, of course, worthy of censure, was discussed at length (see above, section 2), with reference to Canonical Tradition, according to which it is not permissible to repeat a Holy Mystery, as long as the one performing it is not an actual (condemned) heretic.

On the basis of Holy Canon LI of St. Nikephoros the Confessor, Patriarch of Constantinople, “Church canons appoint” that in the performance by a Priest of the entire Service of Baptism for a child baptized “in an emergency...by a layman,” he [the Priest] avoid [the repetition of] all that was properly done, which means that the Holy Mystery is not repeated from the very beginning, but is *completed* (if judged needful), since the Church has always accepted even emergency Baptism by three affusions on the head.

8. Designation of Members to the Standing Holy Synod

With regard to the Standing Holy Synod, the Hierarchy re-elected its members for a second term (Oct. 2008-Sept. 2009), and thus its members will continue to be Their Graces, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi (Acting President of the Holy Synod), Bishop Chrysostomos of Christianoupolis, Bishop Ambrose of Methone, and Bishop Klemes of Gardikion (Secretary of the Holy Synod).

*From the Chancery of the Holy Synod
† Bishop Klemes of Gardikion*

*21 November 2008 (Old Style)
Entrance of the Theotokos*