

Nota bene. The following document, translated from the Bulgarian, was drawn up and written by His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza, the First Hierarchy of our Sister Church, the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria. It is an articulate, thoughtful, and challenging essay on the nature of Orthodoxy, heresy, resistance, and the conciliar and pastoral testimony of the Church. A theologian and classicist who taught at the University of Sofia before entering the religious life, His Eminence is not only a gifted and erudite scholar, but is a perceptive, circumspect, and enlightened Archpastor. As our own Spirit-bearing Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, has so often said, Bishop Photii works in the light and serves in the spirit of one of Orthodoxy's great luminaries, St. Photios the Great. In his moderate and Patristic thoughts below, Bishop Photii justifies these words of Metropolitan Cyprian—†*B.A., Editor.*

The Ecclesiological Position of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria

FUNDAMENTAL TENETS

The ecclesiological identity of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria is based upon the following fundamental tenets of Orthodox ecclesiology:

- The main criterion for membership in the Church of Christ is the “correct and salvific confession of Faith” (St. Maximos the Confessor),¹ the true and correct Faith (St. Gregory Palamas).²
- This criterion, or principle, applies both to every single individual, with regard to the Church, and to the local Churches, with regard to the Catholic Church.
- The Catholicity³ of the Church of Christ is Her qualitative, not quantitative characteristic; it is Her ontological attribute, revealing the integrity and the completeness of the Truth preached by Her. Therefore, the Catholicity of the Church does not depend on the number of Her members, on Her territorial and geographic scale or on any other empirical conditions.
- The Catholic Church cannot be identified with one particular church, nor can She be regarded, as is the case with Roman Catholic ecclesiology, as a sum of all the local Churches constituting the Œcumenical Church (i.e., the globally distributed Church, from a geographic point of view). What defines the Church as Catholic is the confession of the Orthodox Faith. Moreover, the “Catholic Church (καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία) Herself is the correct and salvific

confession of Faith” (St. Maximos the Confessor).⁴ Consequently, “the correct and salvific confession of Faith” in God (i.e., Orthodoxy) is the ontological foundation of Catholicity as a characteristic of the Church, and it is exactly in this confession that church communion, as communion with Christ and in Christ, is achieved. Church communion attests to unity in Christ precisely through this communion with and in the Catholic Church, and does so to the utmost extent. However, of itself, church communion is not a condition for unity with the Catholic Church. Communion is a manifestation of unity, and not a means for attaining it. Unity with the Catholic Church is determined not by communion, but by “the correct and salvific confession of Faith.”

- Hence, abiding in the Orthodox Faith and its protection is not simply a matter of ideological conviction and abstract dogmatic debate, but a question of supreme existential significance. The Fathers, who fearlessly confessed and defended the Orthodox Faith, did so on behalf of the Catholic Church and in the name of Her real existence: “For the sake of the Catholic and Apostolic Church” (καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν) “the Apostles, and in their turn the Holy Fathers, teachers, and martyrs sacrificed themselves, in deed and word, in struggle and sweat, with suffering and blood, and finally with their remarkable deaths” (St. Maximos the Confessor).⁵

It follows from the aforementioned that everybody who confesses the Orthodox Faith is a member of the Catholic Church (or joined to Her) and is in communion with Her, whereas whosoever preaches a doctrine incompatible with Orthodox doctrine separates himself from the Catholic Church and communion with Her. This is valid for individuals and entire ecclesiastical organizations alike, even if they continue to function institutionally as Churches and to call themselves Churches. “Those who do not belong to the Truth do not belong to the Church of Christ, either; and all the more so if they speak falsely of themselves by calling themselves, or are called by each other, holy pastors and hierarchs; because it has been instilled in us that Christianity is characterized not by persons, but by truth and exactitude of Faith” (St. Gregory Palamas).⁶

THE NAME

The name “Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria” does not exactly reveal its ecclesiological nature. It follows an established tradition. The ethnic definition “Bulgarian” reflects the historically established institutional structuring of the local Churches

according to the criteria of ethnicity (subsequently nationality) and state, which gradually replaced the old territorial structuring of local Churches within the multi-ethnic Roman Empire. The term “Orthodox” is identical with the term “Catholic.” Its widespread use in relation to the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church has existed since the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The term “Old Calendar” denotes a distinctive feature of the prevailing liturgical practice of the Church, which was employed from the seventh century up until the 1920s by all local Churches without exception, in concord with the *Paschalion* and the calendar system of the Great Indiction. Although inaccurate from a strictly ecclesiastical point of view, additional denotations of the Church have appeared at various times in history. It is well known that the Catholic (Orthodox) Church was first called “Eastern” in contrast to the Western Church, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church was called “Greek Russian,” “Eastern Orthodox” and even “The Russian Church of the Greek Rite.” Besides, depending on the political and legal circumstances in the different countries, some local Church structures received various additional denotations because of emerging church issues. For example, since 1996, in Estonia two local Orthodox Churches have existed simultaneously within so-called official Orthodoxy. One is called the “Estonian Orthodox Church,” and is a self-governing local Church under the Moscow Patriarchate. The other is the “Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church,” an autonomous local Church under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. A number of clergy and lay people who left the Estonian Church’s jurisdiction under the Moscow Patriarchate belong to it.

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF APOSTASY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Modern ecclesiological heresies corrupt the very concept of the Church. Ecumenism, as a theological concept, organized social movement and religious practice, is such a heresy. Many Spirit-bearing Orthodox hierarchs and theologians of the preceding twentieth century defined it as heresy in its essence. One of the major steps in the attempt to implement the ecumenical idea of uniting “divided Christians” and reconstructing the “undivided Church” was the church calendar reform in a number of local Orthodox churches during the twentieth century. It should be noted, however, that as a multi-stage, infiltrative heresy, ecu-

menism defies exhaustive and accurate definition, since, unlike the ancient heresies, it does not seek to find clear and consistent doctrinal expression by claiming to be accepted conciliarly or pose as a truth of the Faith formulated by the consciousness of the Church. On the one hand, for the time being, few are those hierarchs, clerics, and theologians who simultaneously consider themselves Orthodox and profess ecumenism in its most extreme forms of inter-religious syncretism, or in its “pure” form of ecclesiological heresy, claiming that, owing to the divisions among Christians, the one visible Church of Christ no longer exists and, therefore, has to be recreated in the womb of the ecumenical movement. On the other hand, ecumenism continues to coalesce with official Orthodoxy. The official Orthodox episcopate is responsible for this phenomenon, demonstrating a crafty political and diplomatic attitude towards the process, categorically refusing to condemn ecumenism as a multi-stage, multi-faceted ecclesiological heresy, albeit it is nonetheless indisputably so in its true nature. In this context, the exit of the Bulgarian Patriarchate from the World Council of Churches in 1998, unfortunately, proved to be only a tactic with a certain ecclesio-political purpose, and not a step determined by a reevaluation of its attitude towards ecumenism rendered in principle.

Another phenomenon with an ecclesiological dimension is so-called Sergianism, which in the unprecedented circumstances of the persecution of the Church in the former Soviet Union surrendered an outwardly proper church institution to the Bolsheviks so that, in their hands, it could become a tool in a fierce battle against the Church Herself, as representing the fullness of the Truth of Christ. In fact, Sergianism is not simply a characteristically Russian phenomenon. It also embraced the local Orthodox churches in the countries of Eastern Europe, where, after World War II, communist régimes were established. Both in the Soviet Union and in these countries, the essence of Sergianism manifested itself in the (self-)delusion that deception could be used as a means to help Truth “survive,” and that collaboration with the enemies of the Church was the way to “protect” Her. In practice, the logical consequence was just the opposite—the episcopate adopting this position became a tool in the hands of the communist atheists, who schemed to achieve full control over the Church, to the end of Her moral and spiritual enfeeblement and with a view to Her ultimate annihilation, which they intended. More specifically, the ecclesiological aspect of Sergian-

ism comes down to distorting the concept of “canonicity.” In the Sergianist context, canonicity is unnaturally torn away from the Spirit and the Truth of canonical tradition and turns into formal adherence to the norm, which can be used to vindicate any act of lawlessness committed by the governing episcopate. Ultimately, canonicity degenerates into a managerial technique for the subordination of the people of the Church to that episcopate, regardless of the direction in which it leads them. In other words, as Archpriest Michael Polsky, an eyewitness to the cruel persecutions and the perfidious fight against the Russian Church in the 1920s, writes, “Metropolitan Sergius and his bishops differ from the Renovationists in that they keep to the canons at all costs and safeguard them more than anything else. They (the Sergianists) do not disregard the canons, as do the Renovationists. But there arises a gross discrepancy. When the Renovationists lied, slandered, or deceived, that was bad because they were not canonical. However, when Metropolitan Sergius slandered and lied, this was considered good, since he was canonical. It turns out that to him who is canonical, everything is allowed. This mocks the canons and morality alike by distorting their meaning.”⁷⁷ After the collapse of the totalitarian régimes towards the end of the twentieth century, under the new conditions of political freedom, Sergianism was preserved as a legacy of the past and, at the same time, was transformed. Having long incorporated unscrupulousness, deception and pathological servility to those in positions of authority into its inner nature, it not only continues to betray the Church—now no longer for fear of reprisals but for the sake of mercenary motives—but has also started to sell Her freedom, under the guise of “canonicity,” in exchange for gaining the friendship of the powers that be, with the ensuing material benefits and prestigious social status. In this modified form, today Sergianism (as neo-Sergianism or post-Sergianism) affects a large part of the episcopate of the official local Churches around the world.

Once phenomena such as ecumenism and Sergianism become systematic and universal, even when they do not seek a clear doctrinal expression but penetrate and spread into the body of the Church in a “creeping” manner—that is, once they have been actively adopted or passively allowed by all bishops of one or more local Churches—then the essence of the struggle against these phenomena comes down to the termination of ecclesiastical communion with those bishops who instill heresy in the

Church in a conciliar manner, either by preaching it or by contributing to its dissemination though their passivity and silence (see Canon 15 of the First-Second Synod of Constantinople).

THE CONCEPTS OF “OFFICIAL ORTHODOXY” AND “OFFICIAL LOCAL CHURCHES”

These concepts have an idiosyncratic ecclesiological substance and reveal the specifics of the processes of apostasy in the contemporary Orthodox world. Orthodoxy is *sui generis* and does not need further clarification by any additional denotations. The need to add one or another modifier to the term “Orthodoxy” has arisen because of the replacement of its original and authentic substance under pressure from ecumenist and Sergianist mentalities, from liberalism, relativism and other apostatic phenomena. The meaning of the concept of “official Orthodoxy” is closely connected with the meaning of the concept of “official Church” and “official local Churches,” respectively. “Official Orthodoxy” is the peculiar ideology of the “official local Churches.” It represents an increasingly diluted, pluralistic Orthodoxy, which is gradually tearing itself away from its spiritual identity and increasingly becoming a surrogate for authentic Orthodoxy, without reforming it abruptly or defiantly. The main distinctive feature of official Orthodoxy is its Sergianist conjuncture; i.e., its collaborative adjustment to the realities of our time, with a view towards accommodating various political and ecclesiastical courses: outwardly as an expression of the catholic consciousness of the Church, but in essence, as a situational strategy, with terminology or behavior typical of the corporate mentality. For example, official Orthodoxy may resound with loud ecumenical tones; and contrariwise, at times, the prevalent tone may be that of traditionalist rhetoric. Moreover, as already mentioned, “official Orthodoxy” never takes a clear, principled, conciliar stand on the nature of ecumenism as the ecclesiological heresy with which it is entwined, inasmuch as the majority of the supporters and propagators of this heresy still avoid designating it wholly openly and clearly as an article of their religious creed. In official Orthodoxy, the connection between announcements and intentions, between speaking and believing, between words and conscience fades out, becomes debased in a Jesuitical manner, and in this sense is severed. Thus, for example, in a private conversation a bishop might dissociate himself from some official deed of his—from a public statement or from a document he has signed containing views contrary to Orthodoxy, i.e.,

heretical views—but that same bishop chooses not to do this publicly since it is at variance with official church policy.

What does the term “official Church” mean? It is what the Russian catacomb believers called the Church recognized by the Soviet régime (and completely dependent on it), headed by Metropolitan (and later Patriarch) Sergius Stragorodsky (†1943). The terms “Official Church” or “official local Churches” refer to the known, historically formed local Churches whose hierarchical leadership officially accepts, advances, or authorizes ecumenism as a theological concept and religious practice, uses conciliar deception on sundry occasions, hides under the cloak of “canonicity” as understood in the spirit of Sergianism, and adopts other forms of apostasy from Orthodoxy. In brief, the term “official Churches” extends to the known, historically formed local Churches which are in a state of apostasy—a process that has been coördinated or permitted to develop conciliarly by the episcopate.

THE QUESTION OF GRACE IN THE MYSTERIES (SACRAMENTS) OF THE OFFICIAL LOCAL CHURCHES

The Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria has no communion with the official local Churches. Walling oneself off from such communion does not require an unequivocal affirmation that these Churches have completely fallen away from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and that the Mysteries performed in them are deprived of Grace. Sufficient grounds for the cessation of ecclesiastical communion is the fact that the episcopate of these churches preach heresy or allow its dissemination through their passivity and, therefore, abide in ecclesiastical communion with bishops preaching or tolerating heresy. Clergy, monastics, and laity who break ecclesiastical communion with bishops “preaching heresy publicly and openly in the Church” are worthy of “honor befitting the Orthodox,” since not only do they not destroy the unity of the Church, but, on the contrary, they show diligence in protecting the Church from divisions and schisms.⁸

Currently, the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria refrains from a definitive answer on the question of whether the Mysteries performed in the official local Churches are valid or not. Indeed, the heresy that is propagated or is being allowed to spread—mostly by bishops—ultimately leads to a falling-away from the Orthodox Church of individuals, groups of people, or

even of entire local Churches. This can also happen gradually, in the course of a shorter or a longer period of time. For instance, such is the case with the Roman church. It deviated from the “correct and salvific confession of Faith” in stages, and only after a fairly lengthy period of time did it completely fall away from the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, from a theological perspective, it is precisely the question of the presence or absence of Grace in the Mysteries of the official local Churches that came to be the main rock on which the unity of the True Orthodox Christians crashed. In the tense atmosphere of decades of disputes, undue theological absolutism was reached on a question, the answer to which was not formulated dogmatically by the conciliar consciousness of the Church. This is why it should be addressed with special caution in the light of the theological consensus of the Fathers, and also in the light of the conciliar pastoral experience of the Church of Christ. This precludes debate which uses one-sided quotations gleaned from the Holy Fathers, and also precludes the absolutism of the theological opinion of specific persons or groups.

THE PROSPECT OF A CONCILIAR CONDEMNATION OF ECUMENISM

It is well known that only the conciliar mind of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church can ascertain and proclaim the final falling-away from Orthodoxy (from Catholicity) of a local Church (or Churches) which was Orthodox but has ceased to be so in essence, regardless of the fact that it continues to call itself Orthodox (i.e. Catholic). For example, with regard to the Roman Catholic Church, the voice of this conciliar mind was manifested in the testimonies of many of the Holy Fathers: from St. Photios of Constantinople, St. Gregory Palamas, and St. Mark of Ephesos to the Venerable Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, St. John of Kronstadt, St. Nectarios of Aegina, and the Venerable Justin of Serbia, as well as in the decrees of several Councils of Constantinople (1170, 1450, 1722, and 1838) and in the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848.

The realities of the modern Orthodox world do not provide sufficient grounds to assume that the example of the Seventh Œcumenical Council is applicable to our epoch. In keeping with this example, we should be seeking the testimony of the Orthodox Church in the hope that the way out of the crisis of apostasy would be a “Council of Unity,” which will condemn ecumenism

(and probably other contemporary manifestations of apostasy as well), will unite all Orthodox Christians in the “correct and salvific confession of Faith,” and will declare the excommunication from the body of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of all those who continue to confess the heresies and misbeliefs condemned by the Council. Unfortunately, comparatively recently just the opposite event occurred. Through the union of the larger part of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007, those who had abandoned Truth did not join the Orthodox; on the contrary, the Orthodox renounced their long-standing witness of Faith and united with the ecumenists and Sergianists whom they used to denounce.

Taking into account the current trends in the development of Church life (in its broadest sense), it can be assumed that in the future, favorable conditions for holding a Unifying Orthodox Council will be even less likely to arise. Moreover, it is not impossible that the present crisis in the Orthodox world will sink even further into apostasy. This, in turn, could lead to emendations of our ecclesiological assessment of the developments within the official local Churches, such an assessment being determined by an analysis of variables, not constants. Ultimately, the road of apostasy that official Orthodoxy continues to follow leads outside the Church of Christ.

No less disturbing is another fact: the lack of agreement and coöperation among the True Orthodox Churches. What is needed are goodwill and patient, long-lasting labor, in order to overcome the tragic divisions among us and to create conditions for convening a Pan-Orthodox Council, which would condemn ecumenism and provide an assessment of the entire spectrum of the apostate processes of our times.

THE VALUE OF THE CONCILIAR PASTORAL EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH

The conciliar pastoral experience of the Church of Christ regarding the manner (rite) by which penitent heretics and schismatics were received into Her bosom is reflected in the works of various of the Holy Fathers and, above all, in the acts and decisions of a number of Œcumenical and Local Church Councils.

The variety of ways of accepting various repentant heretics or schismatics does not in the least signify relativism or ecclesio-political pliancy in this practice of the Catholic Church, but reveals the spiritual depth of Her conciliar pastoral experience. In

receiving penitent heretics and schismatics, the Œcumenical and Local Councils very often apply the principle of *oikonomia*. The pastoral canonical principle of *oikonomia* does not imply a compromise determined by conjuncture, neither does it represent ordinary leniency, but reflects in large measure a responsible pastoral action in extremely difficult circumstances, with the nature of this action being determined exclusively by its desired beneficial consequences (religious, spiritual, and moral). *Oikonomia* is a canonical and pastoral act in which the letter of the canon can be broken without, however, contradicting its spirit. Yet, *oikonomia* can never, under any circumstance, allow the exoneration of any sin or of any compromise whatsoever in the “correct and salvific confession of Faith.”

The application of the principle of *oikonomia* in receiving heretics or schismatics into ecclesiastical communion does not mean at all that the Church recognizes the validity of their Mysteries. A classic example of this is the 95th Canon of the Quinisext Council, according to which the followers of heresies condemned by the Church—Nestorians and Monophysites—were received in ecclesiastical communion only through the renunciation of their heresy and their confession of the Orthodox Faith.

Considering the specifics of the ecclesiastical situation in Bulgaria, the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgarian strives to approach with careful attention those clergy and laity willing to join Her. What is most essential in pastoral work with them is to help them make their choice freely, consciously, and responsibly. To date, the laity who have faith and ecclesiastical awareness, and have been participating in the church life of the Bulgarian Patriarchate, are received into communion during the Mystery of Confession. Monastics and clerics submit a written request and are received into communion by following a brief repentance rite, composed especially for such cases.

According to the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, every single True Orthodox Church has the pastoral freedom to determine—based on the specific nature of the church life in the respective country or region—the manner of receiving bishops, clergy, and laity from the official local Churches who wish to join Her. The Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria does not insist on a standardization of the practices of reception into ecclesiastical communion, and in doing so is guided by the words of St. Cyprian of Carthage: “In this matter we do not co-

erces or impose a law on anyone, since every prelate has freedom of will in the administration of the Church and will have to account for his actions before the Lord.”⁹

† *Bishop Photii of Triaditza*

Notes

1. See “The Life and Struggle of Our Venerable Father Maximus the Confessor,” *Patrologia Græca*, XC, col. 93D. Cf. “Letter to John the Chamberlain,” *PG*, XCI, col. 461BC.

2. “Refutation of the Letter of Patriarch Ignatios of Antioch,” *Codex Coislianus*, 99, f. 144a, cited by George Mantzarides, “Περὶ θεώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: Μυστηριακὸς καὶ ἐκκλησιολογικὸς χαρακτῆρ τῆς θεώσεως” (Concerning the deification of man: The mysteriological and ecclesiological nature of deification), in *Παλαμικά* (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1998), pp. 197-198.

3. From the ancient Greek adjective καθολικός—“universal”; since the third century, the word has been used to mean “all-embracing,” “comprehensive,” “global.” As far back as the end of the first century, καθολικός was used in the language of Christians with a specific meaning, denoting a fundamental feature of the Church of Christ.

4. See “The Life and Struggle of Our Venerable Father Maximus the Confessor,” *PG*, XC, col. 93D.

5. “From a Letter Written in Rome,” *PG*, XCI, col. 140AB.

6. “Refutation of the Letter of Patriarch Ignatios of Antioch,” *Codex Coislianus* 99, f. 144a, cited by Mantzarides, “Περὶ θεώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: Μυστηριακὸς καὶ ἐκκλησιολογικὸς χαρακτῆρ τῆς θεώσεως,” pp. 197-198.

7. Польский, Михаил протопресвитер. Положение Церкви в Советской России, очерк бежавшего из России священника. Параклит, 2004, с. 83. Available from: <http://paraklit.org/knigi/Ispovednicheskye/Polskoj.pdf>.

8. Canon 15 of the First-Second Synod in Constantinople.

9. “Letter to Pope Stephen,” in *Concilia ad regiam exacta*, Vol. I (Lutetiae Parisiorum: Impensis Societatis Typographicae Librorum Ecclesiasticorum iussu Regis constitutae, 1671), col. 741.