

The Synod of Archbishop Auxentius and the Traditional Orthodox Christians in North America and Europe

For twenty years, since the “lifting” of the Anathemas of 1054 by Patriarch Athenagoras in 1965, the Russian Church Abroad, under the leadership of Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory, had accepted both clergy and laity from jurisdictions in the United States, Canada, and Europe that were sinking deeper into doctrinal innovations and their offspring, Ecumenism.

Although priests and monastics who had left the jurisdiction of the Greek Archdiocese were approached by bishops of the Matthewite and Florinite Synods, and although these Synods did have some parishes in the New World and Europe for decades, the facts of Church history demonstrate that there already was a local church in the western hemisphere that was fully canonical. It was unwise and unlawful to divide the traditional Orthodox Christians in the New World into different jurisdictions along ethnic lines, even as the new calendarists and “World Orthodoxy” jurisdictions are divided to this day. It could be well demonstrated that the Russian Church had uncontested jurisdiction in North America until the political upheavals in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Asia Minor made it possible for opportunists such as the former Archbishop of Athens, Meletios Metaxakis—who was later dethroned as Ecumenical Patriarch—to establish independent jurisdictions along national lines. Nonetheless, the Russian Church was the first to establish missions on this continent in the eighteenth century. Under its jurisdiction there were—for pastoral reasons—a number of exarchates for various ethnic groups. In contrast, the embarrassing overlapping of numerous new calendar jurisdictions seen today is indicative of a lack of canonical and doctrinal seriousness in other matters as well, as has become more evident with the passage of time. Also, since most of the Orthodox jurisdictions on this continent—with the exception of the Greek, Syrian, and Romanian churches—observed the traditional festal calendar until fairly recently, the growing innovationism of these churches was not very obvious until the middle to late sixties and early seventies, when ecumenical meetings and dialogues gave way, with increasing frequency, to ecumenical and syncretistic joint prayers and intercommunion, on both an official and an unofficial basis.

After despairing of seeing any change of direction on the part of their innovating hierarchs, many Orthodox faithful were grateful to find a haven of Orthodoxy in the Russian Church Abroad. Over the years the Synod of Metropolitan Philaret accepted clergy without canonical releases from their former bishops who were obdurate in innovation and heresy. Metropolitan Philaret made a heroic stand against the growing modernism, writing several “Sorrowful Epistles” to the bishops of “World Orthodoxy,” warning them that they were on a dangerous path. This culminated in the Anathema against Ecumenism, which all the bishops of the Russian Church Abroad signed in 1983. The text of this historic document and the names of those who signed it are as follows:

The Anathema Against the Heresy of Ecumenism and Its Adherents

To those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ’s Church is

divided into so-called branches which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all branches or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore, to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians,

Anathema

+ Metropolitan Philaret

Chairman of the Synod of Bishops

Members of the Council:

+ Seraphim, Archbishop of Chicago and Detroit

+ Afanasy, Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Argentina Paraguay

+ Vitaly, Archbishop of Montreal and Canada

+ Anthony, Archbishop of Los Angeles and Texas

+ Anthony, Archbishop of Geneva and Western Europe

+ Anthony, Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco

+ Seraphim, Archbishop of Caracas and Venezuela

+ Paul, Archbishop of Sydney and Australia-New Zealand

+ Laurus, Archbishop of Syracuse and Trinity

+ Constantine, Bishop of Richmond and Britain

+ Gregory, Bishop of Washington and Florida

+ Mark, Bishop of Berlin and Germany

+ Alipy, Bishop of Cleveland

In a letter to Father Anthony Gavalas of Astoria, New York, His Eminence, Metropolitan Philaret personally explained the significance of this contemporary patristic statement:

14/27 October, 1983

Dear Father Anthony:

I pray that the blessings of our Savior be with you and your Parish.

Please be informed that the Bishops' Council during its meeting last August unanimously adopted the following resolution concerning the pan-heresy of Ecumenism, which in one word encompasses all forms of modernism and innovation:

To those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ's Church is divided into so-called branches which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all branches or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore, to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians:

Anathema.

The text of this Anathema is to be attached to the Synodicon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, to be read with the rest of the text of the Synodicon.

Please extend my prayerful greetings to your family and the members of your Parish.

With much love in our Lord,

+ Metropolitan Philaret

President of the Synod

After the blessed repose of Metropolitan Philaret on the feast of the Holy Archangels, November 8, 1985, many of the faithful began to note with alarm that, whereas for the past twenty years the Russian Church Abroad had been progressively cutting all ecclesiastical contact with the innovating local churches, these contacts now began to increase, especially at a hierarchical level. Those of non-Russian background especially protested, since they saw this turn of events as a repudiation of the reason they had left the ecumenistic jurisdictions they had belonged to before. Such tendencies had been observed for a time in some of the bishops of the Russian Church Abroad, but now, with the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, and the repose and retirement of other bishops, these tendencies became a full-fledged policy "by economia" and later by synodal decree.

Despite the repeated protests of the clergy and the faithful over these violations, by November of 1986, the Anathema of 1983 had become a dead letter by all the observable facts.

In the face of this turn of events, the clergy of the New England deanery addressed a letter to Metropolitan Vitaly. <http://www.homb.org/archives/November%208.pdf>

This letter, like the many other letters and clergy representations which had preceded it since February of 1986, went unanswered. In another sense, however, the letter was answered indeed. Shortly after this letter was sent, the clergy and the faithful in France communicated with members of the clergy in North America and confirmed that "point eight" of the foregoing letter—Archbishop Anthony of Geneva's encyclical allowing concelebrations with new calendar clergy of ecumenist jurisdictions—was now officially being implemented in France and elsewhere in Europe. For the clergy and faithful who had left these same modernist jurisdictions at great personal sacrifice, this was a total betrayal. Despairing, therefore, over this latest development and the consistent

disregard with which their concerns had been treated, some thirty clergy, twenty-five parishes, one monastery, one convent, and many faithful in North America left the Russian Church Abroad in December 1986, and asked to be accepted by Metropolitans Akakios of Diavlia and Gabriel of the Cyclades. Thus, these traditional Orthodox Christians, wishing to remain faithful to the legacy they had received from Metropolitan Philaret, were in accord with Church Tradition in their departure from the Russian Church Abroad. This departure was further justified within a few weeks by Metropolitan Vitaly's Nativity Epistle of 1986, in which he gave an entirely novel interpretation to the understanding the Church has always had of the terms "anathema" and "economy," thereby effectively negating the Anathema against Ecumenism.

After half a year, it became evident that Metropolitans Akakios and Gabriel were not cooperating with each other as shepherds of the same flock. Upon further examination, it became evident that these bishops had no doctrinal reason to be separated from their lawful president, Archbishop Auxentius. Since Metropolitan Akakios had not left the Synod of Archbishop Auxentius but had only withdrawn from participating in it, the North American Flock was entitled to appeal to the rightful Archbishop when it found that its own bishop could not or would not meet its pastoral needs. Further, at a meeting with the North American clergy in Boston in June of 1987, Metropolitan Akakios affirmed that he did not recognize the supposed "deposition" of Archbishop Auxentius by the Synod of Chrysostom Kiouisis (which, he maintained, was itself uncanonical); he had even stated this in print only one year before in a publication entitled *An End to Silence*, in which he declares:

In view of the manner in which it was formed and established, we consider the formation and assembly of the new "Holy Synod of the Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece" [under Chrysostom Kiouisis] as *lawless, anticanonical*, harmful to the lofty advancement and authority of our sacred struggle, and *therefore unacceptable* [emphasis in the original].

A good part of *An End to Silence* is devoted to quoting, word for word, many of Metropolitan Chrysostom Kiouisis's letters, in which he relentlessly attacks on every possible canonical ground the very bishops who now formed the new synod under him!

At the meeting with the North American clergy in June of 1987, Metropolitan Akakios stated, in addition, that the clergy were free to find another hierarch who would be able to provide for their needs. In July of 1987, after meeting with Archbishop Auxentius and the clergy who accompanied him, the North American clergy, monastics, and laity petitioned to be received by them. The North American Flock also appealed to Metropolitan Akakios of Diavlia to be reconciled with his archbishop, but he refused to do so. Thus, in September of 1987, Archbishop Auxentius received the American Flock under his omophorion.

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The Holy Orthodox Church in North America,

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