

Autonomous Orthodox Metropolia of North and South America and the British Isles

From the Office of the Metropolitan

July 13/26, 2013, During the Octave of St. Benedict, St. Mildred of Minster-in-Thamet, Abbess, Virgin

To the Clergy and Laity of the ROCOR Western Rite,

For the past few decades, there have been many attempts by many individuals to use an Orthodox Western Rite in the context of union with the Orthodox Church. These attempts have varied greatly over time. In the past few years, the ROCOR, united with the Moscow Patriarchate, has greatly expanded its Western Rite initiative. In this process, they have taken in a great deal of clergy and laity. Many came from different groups and of varied backgrounds. During this period, the newly formed “Russian Western Rite Vicariate” was not without its prominent critics, both those inside the ROCOR and those without. The writers of this letter were among such critics.

In the past few weeks things have progressed rapidly for the ROCOR Western Rite clergy and laity. Among other things, the Synod to which they profess loyalty has done no less than, in a few broad strokes, effectively ended the ROCOR Western Rite. The Bishop assigned to the Russian Western Rite Vicariate, Bp. Jerome (Shaw) was removed from his position and retired, and confined to a single parish church in the ROCOR, as well as the removal of Monk Anthony (Bondi) the pastoral vicar of the Vicariate. This, as is well known, was prompted by Bp. Jerome’s ordination of several men to the priesthood at a single Divine Liturgy. As many of you may know by now, the practice of multiple ordinations at the same Liturgy has been controversial, to say the least, in the past 700 years in Orthodoxy. Although the old Orthodox Western fathers (such as St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory the Great [the Dialogist], St. Gelasius, St. Martin the Confessor, etc.) regularly conveyed the

Holy Orders of Episcopate, Priesthood, and Diaconate at the same Liturgy upon multiple ordinands of the same rank in office, this has not been acceptable praxis for centuries in Orthodoxy. Thus, the controversy, since it was understood that this was not the traditional praxis in this manner (although there is no universal Canon in the Pedalion, other than a note by St. Nikodemus of the Holy Mount, quoting Symeon of Thessalonika and other authors from the 14th century and beyond, which note is attached to Canon 68 of the Holy Apostles). Whatever one thinks of these actions, it should be prudence that dictates the approach to such controversial matters.

Yet, can it be denied that, despite these actions of Bishop Jerome and their controversial nature, this was merely the occasion for the Synodal actions, rather than the root cause? Many prominent hierarchs in the ROCOR, such as Bp. Peter of Cleveland, and others, have been inimical to the concept of Western rite. There, are of course, others, and the clergy and laity receiving this letter are more than aware of all that has happened to them personally.

The ROCOR Synod, therefore, has suspended growth of the Western Rite, as well as declared uncanonical the actions of Bishop Jerome in the priestly ordinations. The ROCOR Synod (as well as Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral), the First Hierarch of the ROCOR Synod) has made it a prominent point that all the Western Rite Communities in ROCOR must conform to the practices of the Russian Orthodox Church. What can this mean other than encouragement to abandon ones own ancestral liturgical heritage? Even many prominent and well-known ROCOR writers (including Metropolitan Hilarion in his statement concerning certain potential Western Rite sites in Central America) have been explicit about this as an ultimate requirement. Those communities that, after this pressure is exerted, choose not to adopt the Eastern Rite, will be suspended from any further substantial growth, and will have to demonstrate their right to exist. Furthermore, even any possible reconsideration of allowing said ROCOR Western Rite Communities to continue and in any sense expand depends upon the good graces of sitting ROCOR hierarchs and clergy who were responsible for the recent actions. It is evident what the answer will be to any further growth in the future.

However, this is not to exonerate all the practices of the ROCOR Western Rite. The allowance, although, on a limited basis, of the so-called "Liturgy of St. Tikhon", devised formally by Antiochian clergy in the 1970s, was a profound mistake. The allowance of post-Reformation Roman Catholic Tridentinism was also another profound error. And, any other forms allowed that did not conform to Orthodox praxis and doctrine, as well as liturgical usages and principles not developed in an Orthodox time-period and within the Churches in conformity with said praxis and doctrine, must be seen as mistaken. Others have criticized the speed and rapidity with which many candidates were elevated to the Holy Orders.

Yet, despite all this, one wonders at the severity of the decisions. And, this severity has left many asking the question, "What is going on? Where does all this come from? Why are the innocent being punished along with the guilty?" The answer lies fundamentally in questions that many of you may have not considered seriously, or paid much attention to, up until now. The questions revolve around issues of Ecumenism, Modernism, and Sergianism combined with Ethno-Centrism.

Since the 1920s the Orthodox Church has been under constant assault from many different and various forces. Although Christ's Church has always been under pressure, She has never experienced what has happened since that sad period. In 1920 the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued an Encyclical entitled "To the Churches of Christ Everywhere"; this Encyclical equivocated the various heterodox religious bodies as being "Churches of Christ". It stated that existing dogmatic difference are of no matter to a "Union of Churches". This is the heresy of ecumenism, which teaches that the Church is divided into various and disjointed bodies that profess fundamentally irreconcilable dogmatic positions. This heresy is at the root of almost all the profound issues affecting those who seek Orthodoxy. As a result of this, the Ecumenical Patriarchate fell from its former Orthodoxy by professing this heresy. This heresy contradicts fundamental Canons of the Orthodox Church that prohibit praying with the non-Orthodox, or holding any joint religious service with them. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has indeed, gone much further; its current claimant has even supported "abortion rights."

Along with this heresy of ecumenism, there has also appeared the heresy of Modernism. This heresy teaches that the

miracles and accounts of the Scriptures are mainly fables, fictional mythologies, and simple moral tales. The very authorship of the Books of Scripture has been attacked. Indeed, supposed "Orthodox seminaries" in the United States teach these things.

The other great heresy is Sergianism, which attacked the Russian Church in the 1920s. The heresy teaches that the Church should be subservient to atheist and God-hating authorities that declare their joys to be also those of the Church! What blasphemy! The Holy Patriarch Tikhon, who was martyred by slow torturing to save the Russian Orthodox Church from this, was replaced, eventually, by the Soviet government in the person of the compliant Met. Sergius. And, it was only in 1942, after the Soviet government had murdered and imprisoned the bishops, clergy, and laity that would not consent to its control, that the Communists finally created a false "Moscow Patriarchate" in order to support the goals of the Communist state. The original clergy and laity who stood for the spiritual freedom of the Church from atheist powers were executed, and a false Church was created. The ROCOR during this period of time, under the leadership of the holy Metropolitan Philaret, was quite vocal in acknowledging this falsity and the lack of grace in the Holy Mysteries.

The Moscow Patriarchate, of which the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral) belongs, is under these very authorities and powers who are still the same people that held power in the Soviet Union. By virtue of the fact that the Moscow Patriarchate and ROCOR are in union with the arch-heretical see of Constantinople, and all the other fallen Patriarchates, and by virtue of its own forays into heresy, we have seen the horrific fruits. The heresies of Ecumenism teach that the Roman Catholic Church is a Sister Church of "Orthodoxy"; if this is so, many of these leaders in the different Patriarchates, especially Constantinople, see no reason for a "Western rite." And, those who do see a "need for a Western rite" only do this for the purpose of using innocent people in the role of a chess piece in an ecumenical game.

The Orthodox Faith must, however, be free from these heresies. It must be true to its Founder, Our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This means adherence to the Holy Ecumenical Councils, and all the Councils and Canons approved by the undivided Church (which has been only the Orthodox

Church for these nearly 2,000 years). Yet, this dogmatic foundation cannot be served by union with those who teach the heresies of Ecumenism, Modernism, Sergianism, and embrace a ethno-centric view that is contrary to the Church's Catholicity, or with Bishops allied with Patriarch Bartholomew, who seeks to encourage the principles of masonry and abortion rights.

For this reason we call upon the Clergy and Laity of the ROCOR Western Rite to consider long and hard their future. We call upon them to consider whether they wish to continue union with the Moscow Patriarchate, and its subservient organization, the ROCOR under Metropolitan Hilarion, which maintains unquestioned and uncontested union with the Patriarchate of Constantinople which is the center from which all these heresies radiate outward. Will their desire to seek the Truth of Orthodoxy be best served by the Ecumenist, Sergianist, and Modernist forces that control these Patriarchates? Or, on the other hand, would the witness to Orthodoxy that many profess to seek be better shared somewhere else? But where else?

During all these great heresies, many Orthodox Christians, both bishops, clergy, and laity stood up against Ecumenism, Modernism, and Sergianism. These began to be known as the True Orthodox Christians. For many years, the Old ROCOR was a prominent leader in this struggle, even issuing an anathema against the heresy of Ecumenism. But, sadly, this ROCOR, after many defections, renounced its old position and united with these Patriarchates that have taught heresy and left the Church.

Furthermore, our Autonomous Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas and the British Isles, whose First Hierarch is His Beatitude, Metropolitan John (LoBue) of New York and New Jersey, has remained steadfast in the True Orthodox Confession of Faith, together with the communion of our other True Orthodox Churches in Greece, Russia, Ukrainia, Bulgaria, Italy, France, Spain, the Philippines, and Lebanon. Metropolitan John and his clergy have long ago since restored the proper forms and usages of the true Western Rite in Orthodoxy that were in use before the time of the Great Schism of 1054. He himself, the First Hierarch, uses the Western Rite and was instrumental in its full translation from pre-Schism sources. The mission our Synod is to promote conversions to the Truth of Orthodoxy. We will never abandon

the Western Rite as given to us and practiced for so many years. Nor will we compromise and unite with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Moscow Patriarchate, or any in union with them. Indeed, Our Holy Church fought long and hard, and by God's Grace was saved from these pitfalls, and has taken a consistent stand with its Confession of Faith.

We offer to the sincere clergy and laity of the ROCOR Western Rite who seek the Truth of Orthodoxy in its complete Fullness, to leave the Moscow Patriarchate and to seek Union with our True Orthodox Church. Only here will you be safe in the profession of Genuine Orthodoxy, free from all taint of the heresies of Ecumenism, Modernism, Sergianism, and the erroneous ethno-centrism promoted in the ROCOR under the Moscow Patriarchate. Only here will those who seek the Genuine Confession of Holy Orthodox Christianity, the Pure Teaching of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, be able to express in perpetuity true Orthodox Western rite of old. Only here will those who are sincere and willing to learn the truth be able to take this Gospel not only to those whose ancestors once possessed it, but to those whose ancestors were never part of the Church of Christ.

For those who seek to be able to embrace the Fullness of True Orthodoxy and to use the true Western Orthodox rites as practiced by our Synod, we encourage you to contact us at the Abbey of the Holy Name at:

1-973-838-8795

Or the Contact Information Provided on Our Website at:

<http://orthodoxmetropolia.org/contact/>

From the Office of the Metropolitan