

A PROTEST
to Patriarch Athenagoras
on the Lifting of the Anathemas of 1054

December 2/ 15 1965

Your Holiness,

We have inherited a legacy from the Holy Fathers that everything in the Church should be done in a legal way, unanimously, and conforming to ancient Traditions. If any of the bishops and even primates of one of the autocephalous churches does something which is not in agreement with the teaching of the whole Church, every member of the Church may protest against it. The 15th Canon of the First and Second Council of Constantinople of the year 861 describes as “worthy to enjoy the honour which befits them among Orthodox Christians” those bishops and clergymen who secede from communion even with their patriarch if he publicly preaches heresy and openly teaches it in church. In that way we are all guardians of the truth of the Church, which was always protected through the care that nothing of general importance for the Church would be done without the consent of all.

Therefore our attitude toward various schisms outside of the local limits of particular autocephalous churches was never determined otherwise than by the common consensus of these churches.

If in the beginning our separation from Rome was declared in Constantinople, then later on it became a matter of concern to the whole Orthodox world. None of the autocephalous churches, and specifically not the highly esteemed Church of Constantinople from which our Russian Church has received the treasure of Orthodoxy, may change anything in this matter without the foregoing consent of everybody. Moreover we, the bishops ruling at present, may not make decisions with reference to the West which would disagree with the teaching of the Holy Fathers who lived before us, specifically the Saints Photios of Constantinople and Mark of Ephesus.

In the light of these principles, although being the youngest of the primates, as the head of the free autonomous part of the Church of Russia, we regard it our duty to state our categorical protest against the action of Your Holiness with reference to your simultaneous solemn declaration with the Pope of Rome in regard to the removal of the sentence of excommunication made by Patriarch Michael Cerularius in 1054.

We heard many expressions of perplexity when Your Holiness in the face of the whole world performed something quite new and uncommon to your predecessors as well as inconsistent with the 10th Canon of the Holy Apostles at your meeting with the Pope of Rome, Paul VI, in Jerusalem. We have heard that after that, many monasteries on the Holy Mount of Athos have refused to mention your name at religious services. Let us say frankly, the confusion was great. But now Your Holiness is going even further when, only by your own decision with the bishops of your Synod, you cancel the decision of Patriarch Michael Cerularius accepted by the whole Orthodox East. In that way Your Holiness is acting contrary to the attitude accepted by the whole of our Church in regard to Roman Catholicism. It is not a question of this or that evaluation of the behaviour of Cardinal Humbert. It is not a matter of a personal controversy between the Pope and the Patriarch which could be easily remedied by their mutual Christian forgiveness; no, the essence of the problem is in the deviation from Orthodoxy which took root in the Roman Church during the centuries, beginning with the doctrine of the infallibility of the

Pope which was definitively formulated at the First Vatican Council. The declaration of Your Holiness and the Pope with good reason recognises your gesture of “mutual pardon” as insufficient to end both old and more recent differences. But more than that, your gesture puts a *sign of equality* between error and truth. For centuries all the Orthodox Church believed with good reason that it has violated no doctrine of the Holy Ecumenical Councils; whereas the Church of Rome has introduced a number of innovations in its dogmatic teaching. The more such innovations were introduced, the deeper was to become the separation between the East and the West. The doctrinal deviations of Rome in the eleventh century did not yet contain the errors that were added later. Therefore, the cancellation of the mutual excommunication of 1054 could have been of meaning at that time; but now it is only an evidence of indifference in regard to the most important errors, namely new doctrines foreign to the ancient Church, of which some, having been exposed by St. Mark of Ephesus, were the reason why the Church rejected the Union of Florence.

We declare firmly and categorically:

No union of the Roman Church with us is possible until it renounces its new doctrines, and no communion in prayer can be restored with it without a decision of all churches, which, however, can hardly be possible before the liberation of the Church of Russia which at present has to live in catacombs. The hierarchy which is now under Patriarch Alexis cannot express the true voice of the Russian Church because it is under full control of the godless government. Primates of some other churches in countries dominated by communists also are not free.

Whereas the Vatican is not only a religious center but also a state, and whereas relations with it have also a political nature, as is evident from the visit of the Pope to the United Nations, one must reckon with the possibility of an influence in some sense of the godless authorities in the matter of the Church of Rome. History testifies to the fact that negotiations with the heterodox under pressure of political factors never brought the Church anything but confusion and schisms. Therefore we find it necessary to make a statement that our Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia as well as, certainly, the Russian Church which is at present in the catacombs, will not consent to any “dialogues” with other confessions and beforehand rejects any compromise with them, finding union with them possible only if they accept the Orthodox Faith as it is maintained until now in the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. While this has not happened, the excommunication proclaimed by the Patriarch Michael Cerularius is still valid, and the canceling of it by Your Holiness is an act both illegal and void.

Certainly we are not opposed to benevolent relations with representatives of other confessions as long as the truth of Orthodoxy is not betrayed. Therefore our Church in due time accepted the invitation to send its observers to the Second Vatican Council, as well as it used to send observers to the Assemblies of the World Council of Churches, in order to have firsthand information in regard to the work of these assemblies without any participation in their deliberations.

We appreciate the kind reception of our observers, and we are studying with interest their reports showing that many changes are being introduced into the Roman Church. We will thank God if these changes will serve the cause of bringing it closer to Orthodoxy. However, if Rome has much to change in order to return to the “expression of the Faith of the Apostles,” the Orthodox Church, which has maintained that Faith impeccable up to now, has nothing to change.

The Tradition of the Church and the example of the Holy Fathers teach us that the Church holds no dialogue with those who have separated themselves from Orthodoxy. Rather than that, the Church addresses to them a monologue inviting them to return to its fold through rejection of any dissenting doctrines.

A true dialogue implies an exchange of views with a possibility of persuading the participants to attain an agreement. As one can perceive from the Encyclical "*Ecclesiam Suam*," Pope Paul VI understands the dialogue as a plan for our union with Rome with the help of some formula which would, however, leave unaltered its doctrines and particularly its dogmatic doctrine about the position of the Pope in the Church. However, any compromise with error is foreign to the history of the Orthodox Church and to the essence of the Church. It could not bring a harmony in the confessions of the Faith, but only an illusory outward unity similar to the conciliation of dissident Protestant communities in the ecumenical movement.

May such treason against Orthodoxy not enter between us.

We sincerely ask Your Holiness to put an end to the confusion, because the way you have chosen to follow, even if it would bring you to a union with the Roman Catholics, would provoke a schism in the Orthodox world. Surely even many of your spiritual children will prefer faithfulness to Orthodoxy instead of the idea of a compromising union with the heterodox without their full harmony with us in the truth.

Asking for your prayers, I am your Holiness' humble servant,

✠ Metropolitan PHILARET
President of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian
Orthodox Church Outside of Russia