



ENCYCLICAL EPISTLE “THE CHURCH IS ONE”
TO THE GOD-LOVING CLERGY, THE REVEREND MONASTICS AND
THE VENERABLE PEOPLE IN THE GOD-SAVED OHRID ARCHBISHOPRIC

Because the media in the Republic of Macedonia have shown remarkable persistence in their intention to disparage the ultimate criterion of the Church of God, which is its unity being "a pillar and a fortress of truth" as spoken by the Apostle Paul, enlightened by God's grace and inspired by the Holy Ghost, we, the Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid, have decided to address via this pastoral epistle everybody who seeks salvation and eternal life in the Church, and not just gain and personal profit, as is unfortunately the case with a number of those who represent the highest officials of the schismatic church, who see the meaning of life only in their own comfort. Profane people may find it difficult to understand that comfort and welfare have nothing in common with the real Church, because it is constantly confronted with evil and is ever prepared to risk any comfort for the sake of the true life, which is worthless unless in communion with God. It is not a sin to be rich but it is an unforgivable sin if fortune and welfare become your god and if you sacrifice the truth for your comfort's sake.

With great sadness and spiritual pain, today, every reasonable Christian knows that the “dignitaries” of the schismatic Church in the Republic of Macedonia prefer a lie wrapped up in an expensive package rather than the bare truth, which is painful, distressing and stinging at times, but it is the only eternal one and the only that leads to communion with the Triune God. Isn't it a great lie, our brothers, that the schismatic church in the Republic of Macedonia is autocephalous? Isn't the autocephaly for the others and not just for our selves? We have always been autocephalous. Every local Church with an enthroned bishop is autocephalous. However, that very autocephaly has to be recognized by others. In this particular case, the autocephaly of the schismatic church has not been accepted by anyone. Is it because the others hate us? Certainly not, but because for thirty-five years that church has been living in the lie of its own schism.

It has been founded as a political church. It shouldn't be forgotten that it is the only church in the world founded during the communist regime. What a parody! The communists, who devastated the churches in Macedonia, created a church. The politics needed it, not as a Church that will save and guide to eternal life, but to control the diaspora through it. At the time, we are referring to 1967, the diaspora was opposed to the communist authorities and there was no other way to control it except through the church. On the other hand, to avoid apostasy and disobedience of the church to the communist authorities, there was an imperative to find bishops unworthy enough to be controlled by politicians at any time. So the first candidates for bishops, the now deceased, priest Nestor Popovski and the later metropolitans Naum and Methodius, were declared by the SOC unsuitable to the conditions for episcopal rank, simply because they wanted to stay married and be bishops at the same time. In the Orthodox Church this is not possible, to be married and a bishop. However, the impossible in the whole Orthodox Church, seems to be possible in Macedonia. Likewise, it should not be possible for a bishop to be evicted from his chair by police force, especially when the Church is supposed to be separated from the state, and yet it is considered a normal thing here. We were evicted from our residence with a gun pointed at our head, ordered by the schismatics who demonstrated that, since 1967 up to the present, they have been a political organization tending to be close to the authorities at any price.

As far as Cyril and Stephen are concerned, theirs is a wide-known story. After having been in prison for murder, the former was considered the most convenient for a bishop by the

communists for they intended to have him up their sleeve at any time. And indeed, they have had him ever since. The latter, by nature is a person who can easily be led by the nose wherever one wants, was seen as the most appropriate to the government set of that time, and again, by political methods he was positioned to be an archbishop. The fact that this man has no reputation among the flock does not seem to be a matter of great interest. It resembles the period of communism when the vice-president of the Government of the R. Macedonia, who was at the same time President of the Commission for relations with the religious communities, would come and tell the members of the Synod who the subsequent archbishop would be.

Anybody well acquainted with the history of the Church, knows that there is no way to witness the truth without a sacrifice. Witnessing the truth presupposes one's readiness to suffer. Therefore, it is no wonder that wishing to replace the lie and heal the schism, we, together with the entire living Church in the Republic of Macedonia were put in a situation of being persecuted with methods similar to the ones used by the pagan Roman emperors during the first three centuries AD. The people who know us are certain that we have agreed to accept the episcopal title only in order to change the unsound state of the schism that was splitting the Church in the Republic of Macedonia for thirty-one years until our enthronement. Inspired by the unity, which is the fundamental purpose of the Church, we have made attempts, during these four years, to find a less radical way to cure the schism. However, to no avail, for the schism is not an external state of the Church, it is an internal state of schizophrenia of the people who make decisions about the future of the Church. If one is internally split, if one is in a state of potential schizophrenia, for schizophrenia is a schism in one's own personality, then there is no possibility for that man to be in unity with others, let alone to contribute to the unity of the Church. The schizophrenia, or the schism of the soul, is the most widespread disease in the world nowadays. It is a disease of a man who wishes to possess two or more identities, or to seat on two or more chairs. But the bishops should have only one throne, only one chair and preserve the honour of that chair because, as St. Ignatius of Antioch puts it, God Himself is seated on that very chair where the bishops seat. But if they, the bishops, who are supposed to be guardians of the Church unity, live in a personal schism, if they are spiritually split and have a schism within, how can it be possible for them not to be in a schism with others?

But, this situation might have been nothing more than a personal tragedy of certain bishops provided that such a state of a personal schism, which has generated a church schism, had not been promulgated as a normal state of the Church. Hence, we live as if the schism was a normal thing. We may even find an excuse saying that everybody hates us or everybody envies us, but we never look inside ourselves to see if our personal schism is the reason for the schism in the Church. If a bishop does not draw his identity from God, if he lives for any purpose other than the communion with God, may it be a purpose of the highest humanism, this man is in a schism with himself and leads the entire Church into a schism. Gradually we have come to the point of accepting the thirty-five-year-old schism as a normal situation, the hatred towards the other churches and nations a field to raise our future generations. And that exactly is why we have ended up like this. We have no friends or, better to say no brothers when they are most needed. It is not possible for the entire world to be wrong, the entire Orthodox World not to recognise our autocephaly and only Cyril and his like-minded bishops of the Synod to be right. That precisely is the catastrophe of the schizophrenia, that is, of the schism, everybody else is wrong and only you are right.

They have not succeeded in proving that the liturgical and canonical unity is opposed to church procedures. Now they want to impute to us the various financial scandals made throughout the country. But such things happened before, St. Athanasius, who is venerated by the Church as the Great, was evicted out of his cathedra in Alexandria five times. Being unable to prove that his teaching and deeds were against the Church, they accused him of financial scandals. And not only that. They evicted him from his cathedra on the grounds of a certain case with the so-called "linen albs". Yet, for the Church, Athanasius is the Great, while the names of most of his opponents are not even noted. There is no comparison between our humbleness and St. Athanasius, but has the

history of the Church known anybody who became a confessor of the faith without effort, without pain, without false accusations, without having slanders and hostility from the evil-one, without suffering or being persecuted? Confession together with martyrdom is the ultimate criterion of the Church, because the one who is prepared to suffer for the faith and truth, even before his biological death, has in fact inherited the Kingdom of God.

God will give that all accusations against us are proven false for not a single denar was spent to the detriment of the Church. But those who accuse us will need to answer: Why did they sign in Nis an Agreement for something that has now, with our liturgical and canonical unity, become a reality, and then they withdrew their signatures? Does it not seem like children playing hide and seek and later shout: jailbreak?

The Church of God is supranational. This does not mean that it is unnational. It is consisted of various nations but that is not its identity. Its identity is the liturgical unity with God, first, unity of every separate person with Him, and then, unity of every person with every other person in God. In our personal relations we do not differentiate according to our nationalities, but according to the quality of love. Therefore, it is absolutely absurd if somebody considers us traitors only because we have entered in liturgical and canonical unity with the whole orthodox ecumene. Unity is the purpose and the meaning of every true Church, except for those who have greater affection for the schism than for the unity due to the fact that they have personal profit from such a state. We are by no means lesser patriots now after we have entered the unity with the whole ecumenical Church. On the contrary, now we are genuine patriots, since others can receive and accept us just as we are. The Serbian Patriarch Paul and the Russian Patriarch Alexy have recognised the identity of our people as well as the territorial integrity of our country. What else should they do in order to prove that our nation is not a problem to them but it is the schism since it is an unsound ecclesiastical state, in other words, the problem is that the indigenious schismatic bishops as well as the atheists and pagans in the Republic of Macedonia don't mind the thirty-five-years-long lack of communion with the other sister Churches.

Unfortunately, we have remained the last in the world to live through the national romanticism. The European countries went through it in the nineteenth century; the Balkan countries in the first part of the twentieth century and we are the last ones to live it in the twenty-first century. Lacking religious education, we cannot make distinction between faith and national affiliation. The faith is supranational. It gives salvation and eternal life. Nationality is a biological feature, and to a certain extent, a cultural acquisition. But nationality does not bring salvation nor does it solve the man's ontological problems. For that reason we need faith in unity with God and God's people. Only this kind of faith solves man's problem with death.

Your ardent prayer before God,

Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje
and Exarch of Ohrid
+John