



**ORTHODOX OHRID ARCHBISOPRIC
HOLY METROPOLIS OF VELES AND POVARDARJE**

Protocol No. 35 from 22 February 2003

Dear Sirs,

According to the survey conducted by the cabinet of our humbleness, the Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid John, in regard to the credibility of the information related to our name presented to the public in the period from 23 June 2002 to 31 January 2003, we concluded that 99% of these were not based on statements given by the participants of the respective events but, as people say, on hearsay. That gives us occasion to address the abovementioned title and ask for an opinion, or, to initiate a wider-reaching survey on the extent to which the media preserve the human rights and freedom and how democratic they are in the case of Metropolitan John.

It is not because now we are personally concerned, for we are used to drawing our identity from the communion with God, and not from the media's opinion, but this is a blatant example of the violation of the human freedom and rights of the many who, for various reasons, do not have the opportunity to entertain the public that they have been insulted, humiliated and slandered upon. We do not know of a journalist in Macedonia that has been punished because of slander or calumny against somebody. Or perhaps there are no such criminal acts in Macedonia?

The fact that there is no liability, leaves room to the creators of the public opinion to lower the criterion of their ethics to such an extent that they can hardly be called journalists, as their reports are more gossips and calling names than real information and analysis. Luckily there are exceptions, to a great misfortune they are but a few, but still they exist. The other countries that were under communist slavery and that had no independent journalism have almost the same problems, however, the Macedonian journalism takes the leading position. It is very difficult to find a journalist and a medium who work solely for the truth of information and not for a certain sponsor. It seems to be natural, considering the spiritual and financial crisis that has befallen Macedonia, but neither do we think that one can buy the truth nor have we offered money to anyone so that s/he will inform impartially. We are told that this is why we are compromised. Still, we are guided by a different thought. The kingdom of the truth can be delayed for some time, but it can never, by any method, be destroyed. May God give us strength and blessing to endure all the injustices we suffer for the truth.

We hope that your kindness will be interested in the reason why some media in Macedonia are violating the human rights and freedom and there is nothing in the way they act that makes them any different from the media during the totalitarianism.

First, the journalists who treat the church issues have not shown by any means that they have at least the elementary knowledge of the subject they treat. They need not be theologians, but it is utterly uncivilized if one knows nothing of the Church, that it is not of this world, that its head is Christ the Lord, that it does not function the way worldly institutions do or that its ultimate criterion is the sacrifice after the example of the first-martyr Christ. So it is not possible to understand the actions of its members or to comment on them impartially. Unfortunately, the journalists who have some knowledge

of the Church are very rare in Macedonia, while the others comment on the Church as one does with football or boxing. The Church is not a secret organization, but a public one, and despite the fact that its service is termed a Holy Mystery, the type of organisation is distinct from the one of the other worldly institutions. The superior in the Church is placed there to serve and not to rule. That is why its structure is in the form of an overturned pyramid. The superior, that is the episcopo, although at the top of the pyramid, is at the lowest of all, to serve and not to be served. And how can an episcopo serve the others? By opening public food services and feed the poor until the richer become poor and there is nothing left for anyone? Certainly not, his most important duty is to offer sacrifice to God in the Trinity, in behalf of all and for all. To offer gifts, bread and wine which after the descending of the Holy Ghost are transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, but also, if necessary to sacrifice himself for the truth, for justice, for love, for the neighbour, for God. That is why the episcopo's work is called enlightening. The episcopo does not obtain his identity from the surrounding environment, but he obtains it directly from God in the form of light. It was arranged long ago in the Church that the episcopo should be called a saint since he should be enlightened directly by God, and he should enlighten his entrusted reasoning flock.

It seems necessary that all this should be taken into consideration before we get to the main focus of this address. We, as an episcopo of a local Church, the Holy Metropolis of Veles and Povardarje, with the consent of the clergy and the believing people, have entered liturgical and canonical unity with the SOC and via it with the rest of the Orthodox Churches in the world. We have tried to overcome the schism, which for 35 years has been tearing up, not only the MOC, but the entire Church in the world, for the pain of one member is pain of the entire body. We have done that without any changes in the church organization of the metropolis. The ill-intentioned and ignorant journalists presented this as if a part of the Church in Macedonia had been put under Serbian jurisdiction. Regardless of our numerous attempts to explain that this was not the case and that this was not recorded in the written documents with which the liturgical and canonical unity was sealed, most of the media that have the right to inform on the territory of R.M. remained uninterested in the facts and gave only arbitrary political comments. The essence of the problem has still remained untouched. We were called a Serbophile, a Greekophile, a traitor, a spy and much else, and all this for two reasons: because they treated wrongly the church issues out of ignorance, but what is worse, because they did not want to give us an opportunity to explain it to the people. We were accused of things for which in some healthy democracies people answer for slander, and they were not even willing to give us room to deny these.

After we were appointed an Exarch of Ohrid by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church they started calling us the "Serbian Exarch". There is no such title in the Church terminology, due to the fact that exarchates are not named after national, but on a territorial basis. With several announcements we tried to inform them of their complete lack of professionalism as we have a written confirmation of our title in which it is stated that we are: Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid, but most of them have remained persistent in their misinformation until now.

We do not know if the reason for this is their complete uninformedness, or, if they are doing this with an intention to degrade our humbleness, but in the public they address us with our profane name "Zoran", which we had before becoming a monk. A monk changes his name at his monastic tonsure and from five years ago my name is John (Jovan). That name has nothing to do with the bishop's dignity, so even if we had not been a bishop our name would still have been John. That means that even if we did not have the bishop's rank we would still be John (Jovan), for the name is not altered with the possible dethronement. But we have neither been dethroned, nor does the Macedonian Orthodox Church have such a right. We are the actual and not the dethroned Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid, for if a bishop is to be dethroned first he is to be convicted by a Church court. We have neither been tried at a Church court nor have we been convicted. Furthermore, a few days after our monastic tonsure we changed the name in our identity card and passport from Zoran

to Jovan (John). Therefore, the persistence of some media in their labelling us as a dethroned bishop Zoran Vranishkoski, is considered the culmination of the uninformedness and ignorance on behalf of the journalists, or a malice which, having no limit, becomes nonsense.

The *AI* television and the daily newspaper *Dnevnik* excel in this. We have told them on several occasions that our civil name with which we are registered with the authorities is Jovan (John) Vranishkoski but if they wish to call us Zoran, or Zoki, as my mother used to, let them do so, the entire world will still know who they are referring to. Yet, the intention of *AI* television is to humiliate us and to misinform the public that the Church, which is under our episcopacy, has a different character. The owner of this television is a Muslim who has given an assignment to his employees to work systematically against the reputation of the Church. The objective of establishing liturgical and canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and through it with all the Churches in the world was only a symbol to them. They have not only worked against the reputation of our serenity but against the whole Church. How can one interpret differently the fact that in seven months not once have we been given the opportunity, even for five minutes, to defend against the things we have been slandered of. Speaking in church terms it is called barbarism, as it is a feature appropriate to people who belong to the low level of civilization. To utter someone's name for seven months, almost everyday, and not once to invite the person to explain or to defend himself from what he is accused of is not only barbarism but also a crime against democratic rights, human rights and the freedom which is guaranteed by international conventions.

As opposed to this, they show themselves as extremely unprofessional, particularly in cases where certain matters need to be investigated and analysed. We shall give a simple example. No journalist wants to analyze whether the self-declared autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from 1967 can automatically lead to an actual autocephaly. Autocephalous is what one is in regard to others. They (the others) are the ones to recognize one as self-governing. If no Church has done that for full 35 years; if no Church treats this region as ecclesiastically autocephalous, but on the contrary, if all Churches consider this region still under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church, than what does it mean if an illiterate journalist terms the Church in Macedonia autocephalous? Will that make it autocephalous in practice? If, on the other hand, we are recognized by all Churches in the world as Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid, and the entire Church under our episcopacy is recognized, then aren't we actually autocephalous, regardless of the fact that some rude journalist call us Zoki Poki and extends our title by the adjective "Serbian" or furiously calls us "schismatic". Every lie has a period of expiration. So the end to the lie came, the lie which for 35 years was presented as truth, that the MOC was not a schismatic organization. Schism is, gentlemen journalists, when someone separates from the wholeness, and the wholeness of the Church is the body of Christ which is identical with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in the world. Anyone who is not in unity with the Orthodox Church in the ecumene is considered a schismatic. A much bigger Church, such as the Roman Catholic, is considered a schismatic church, let alone the Macedonian Orthodox Church which for 35 years hasn't had liturgical and canonical communion with any of the Churches in the world. You needn't be well-informed to know that you cannot call a schismatic the one who is in unity with and recognised by all the Orthodox Churches in the world, or vice versa, not call the Macedonian Orthodox Church a schismatic one, for it has no communion with any of the Orthodox Churches in the world.

However, due to the pursuit against Metropolitan John other people began to suffer. The most recent is the case with sister Anita, who has decided to devote her life to God in the monastery under our episcopacy. Without any interest in the truth and with but a desire to spite us, Metropolitan John, certain journalists have treated the case totally unprofessionally, and have humiliated and insulted the abovementioned sister to an inconceivable extent by wanting to determine her future and show her the direction of her life, although she is an adult, they did not care that they were actually violating her

freedom and denying her human right to decide about her future. What they found most annoying was that she was under the spiritual guidance of Metropolitan John. If this had happened in any other monastery, no fuss would have been raised. This hooliganism and spiritual violation over sister Anita, whose only guilt was her being in a monastery under our episcopacy, was again lead by *AI* television and a local Bitola TV station *Orbis*. The reporter for both TV stations was the same, Mr. Pece Stefanovski, a sort of journalist from the totalitarian time who has no intention to inform but only to judge, and he even tries to bring the verdict himself.

Nothing in this life is precious enough for a man to entirely sacrifice himself. Everything is transient and proves to be decayable. The only sacrifice that has meaning is the sacrifice for God and for the faith which gives salvation. It is worth bearing insults, humiliations and maltreatments, it is worth suffering and enduring, for, the prize is great, eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why we shall try to endure all injustices against our person by the unprofessional, unreasonable and corruptible journalists in the media we mentioned. Today we are the victim, but, tomorrow it is going to be someone purer, someone who might not have been born yet.

Yours respectfully,

+Jovan Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje
and Exarch of Ohrid

This letter has been sent to: The Assembly and Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the Foreign diplomatic missions, the forums for human rights, the institutions for monitoring of the media and the editorial offices in the Republic of Macedonia.`