



HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS
OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

No. 1859
20 June 2002
Belgrade

ADDRESS

to the bishops, clergy and believers in the Republic of Macedonia

Dear fathers, brothers and sisters in God,

With fatherly and brotherly love in our mutual God, we address all of you and we call each of you separately, as a person and as an orthodox Christian, to take your personal and catholic responsibility before the Living God and before His holy Church and together with us to do everything possible and necessary for overcoming the schism in our Orthodox Church. We must heal the wounds of disunity and non-communication between us in order to achieve a triumph of brotherly Christian love over the evil forces and passions. We must do all this in God's glory and to witness the truth of the holy Orthodoxy in the present turbulent world and for spiritual benefit and salvation of our souls. The essence of the spiritual venture to which God urges is to establish liturgical communion and canonical unity, not only between all of you and the Serbian Orthodox Church, but also with all local, most holy Orthodox Churches, that is, with the entire orthodox spiritual family in the world, "the family of the Only-begotten", according to the words of St. John Chrysostom.

You may well ask yourselves why does the Patriarch Paul address each one personally and individually, from the gentlemen bishops to the monks and nuns in the monasteries and to the believers all around the parishes of Macedonia? The reason is simple. After many years of official discussions between the two authorized commissions whose members were bishops from both sides, we came to a common draft agreement on establishing church unity. The text of the draft agreement was accepted by both commissions on 14 January 2001, at the monastery St. Naum near Ohrid. Our Holy Assembly of Bishops approved that draft agreement without a single amendment at its regular session in Belgrade in the month of May 2001, while the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia never informed us of their official position, neither positively or negatively. Regardless of that, we accepted without hesitation the proposal for a new meeting in order for the commissions to continue the dialogue. The commissions, in Nis on May 17 this year, improved and formulated the draft agreement more precisely and shaped it so that it would be acceptable for all Orthodox Churches in the world. Within a few days our Assembly, once again without a single amendment, approved this considerably revised draft agreement. And again no official reaction followed from Skopje but we were informed via the media that your Holy Synod did not adopt the draft agreement.

Because of all that, complying with the imperative of brotherly love in the name of Christ and intending to exhaust all evangelic means for the sake of the holy church unity, we are calling each dear brother bishop in the Republic of Macedonia, with love and faith, honestly and courageously, together with all his clergy, monastics and the pious people, to restore liturgical and canonical unity with us and thus with all Holy Orthodox Churches throughout the ecumene, with which he will become an actual follower of the Holy Apostles and the holy Fathers, the Holy Slavic enlighteners and teachers Cyril and Methodius and their numerous disciples in Ohrid and in all other church centres, ours and yours. We accept everyone with sincere and unconditional brotherly love. We cannot accept in unity and communion only those clerics, regardless of their hierarchical rank, who have canonical and moral obstacles for the clerical service.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that it is for the benefit and the future of the Church of God, life and salvation of all of us and in no way is it a matter of earthly interests and aims.

Brothers, as a Church, we do not act from a position of national exclusiveness and we do not have any national or territorial pretensions towards you. We respect the national determination and the national identity of the Macedonian people and of all the people in the Republic of Macedonia. Ethnophiletism, that is, the subjection of the Church to national and political ideologies and programmes, has long been condemned as a heresy. Ethnophiletism is generated precisely from the weakened consciousness of the catholicity of the Church, thus creating ground for divisions and schisms.

The unity of the Church is sacred. It is an utmost blessing and honour for all of us to serve to it. We are approaching sincerely, with no vicious intentions, in the name of God. You are as well invited to approach not only us, but all the rest, including your predecessors, “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit with the bonds of peace”, so that we can all be “one body, one Spirit” because there is “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all and in all of us” (Eph, 3-6) Amen.

Your prayer before God,

The Archbishop of Pec
Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovci and
Patriarch of Serbia
+Paul
president of the Holy Synod of Bishops