

The Zealot Monks of Mount Athos: From 1924 Until Today

Leading up to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar by the Church of Greece in 1924, all newspaper deliveries to the Holy Mountain by the orders of the Venizelist government. When news of the Calendar change reached the monks on Athos, there was an uproar of protest. All nineteen monasteries except for Vatopedi stopped commemorating the Patriarch's name during the divine liturgy. In 1926, the Sacred League of Zealot Monks was organized by the Romanian Athonite Father Arsenios Kotteas. Dozens of monks joined this organization, which facilitated the publication of various encyclicals denouncing the Calendar Innovation written by the zealots. In the same year, Fr. Matthew Karpathakis, a disciple of Saint Nektarios of Aegina, renowned for his profound spirituality and oratory skills, was compelled by the faithful who adhered to the Patristic Calendar throughout Greece to leave the Holy Mountain and assume the spiritual leadership of the Genuine Orthodox. In 1926, the State Church of Greece issued an encyclical which declared the sacraments of the adherents of the Julian Calendar within Greece to be devoid of sanctifying grace.



Fr. Arsenios Kotteas (+1978)

In 1927, a settlement was reached between the monasteries and the Sacred Community (the governing body of Mount Athos), whereby the monasteries would continue to liturgies according to the Julian Calendar, while continuing to commemorate the Patriarch's name during the Divine Liturgy. This compromise was accepted based on the promise of the Patriarch's representative on Athos, that the Calendar issue would soon be resolved by a Pan-Orthodox Council, (to this day no such council has occurred). All of the monasteries agreed to this

compromise, except for Esphigmenou, which still refused to commemorate the Patriarch, while maintaining communion with the other monasteries which did commemorate him.

In 1930, a Council was held at Vatopedi monastery where the calendar issue was to be discussed by representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Slavic Churches. Vatopedi was chosen as the venue for this council because it was the only monastery on Mount Athos that had adopted the New Calendar, and the only monastery during the twentieth century which never stopped commemorating the Ecumenical Patriarch. Only representatives of the Serbian and Polish Orthodox churches were able to make an appearance however given that the Russian and Georgian churches were suffering from Stalinist persecution at the time. Representatives from the Bulgarian Church were not invited because the schism between Bulgaria and Constantinople which had started in 1872 was still in effect and would only be resolved in 1945. At the council the Serbian and Polish clergy refused to concelebrate with the Greek representatives, because of the calendar. Saint Nikolai Velimirovich who was present at the council in his capacity as Bishop of Ohrid, rigorously defended the calendar during the proceedings, and was even compelled to send holy chrism to the Greek Old Calendarists after returning to Serbia. At no point during the council did the Greek and Slavic delegates concelebrate despite the insistence of the Greeks.

Among the notable members of the zealot monks during this period were the young monks Elder Joseph and Elder Arsenios the Cave-Dweller. These two spiritual companions had immediately joined the zealots after the calendar change. Looking to immerse themselves in a life of hesychastic prayer they sought out an experienced elder to take them under his omophorion and instruct them in this mystical practice. They sought out the experienced Elder Daniel of Katounakia, who possessed the gifts of insight and foresight. He directed them to the Elder Kallinikos the Hesychast who also resided in Katounakia as a hermit. The Elder Kallinikos had gained notoriety for opposing an earlier controversy known as imiaslavism, a heretical doctrine which posited that the name of God was God himself. This novel theology had originated in Imperial Russia, and had made its way to the Holy Mountain during the earlier decades of the twentieth century where it had gained popularity among many of the Russian monks of Athos. The Elder Kallinikos emerged from his solitude in Katounakia and denounced this novel theological idea to the Sacred Community. It was largely due to his instigation that in 1913, the Tsar sent an Imperial Russian warship to the Holy Mountain and deported hundreds of Russian monks, mostly from the monastery of Saint Panteleimon to the Caucasus.

He was also a notable zealot, famously saying regarding the baptisms performed by New Calendarist clerics, "A bath it is, a baptism it is not!" However he was not willing to take on disciples, lest his own hesychia be disturbed. So the young monks Joseph and Arsenios sought out the Elder Papa Ephraim the Barrelmaker, another Zealot monk, to become their spiritual father. Although the Elder Ephraim was not experienced in the practice of hesychastic prayer, he was humbly willing to take up this struggle with his two young disciples. For years, they struggled in this pursuit with extreme asceticism and vigilance.

After the repose of the Elder Ephraim in 1929, Elder Joseph assumed the leadership of the brotherhood, despite being younger in age than his companion Elder Arsenios. In 1933, they were joined by Fr. Athanasios, Elder Joseph's brother according to the flesh. In 1935, after the return of the three hierarchs, the zealots rejoiced at the establishment of a hierarchy for the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece. In 1936, Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, a disciple of the Elder Joseph who nonetheless belonged to a different brotherhood led by his relative Elder Nikephoros, was ordained a hieromonk by Bishop Germanos the Cyclades. In the same year, two Romanian hieromonks (Fr. Ghimnazie and Fr. Glicherie Tanase), arrived on the Holy Mountain seeking a bishop to lead the struggle for True Orthodoxy in Romania, whose adherents to the Patristic Calendar were also suffering severe persecution from the New Calendarist State Church. They met Bishop Germanos of the Cyclades and Bishop Matthew of Bresthena, who were sojourning on Athos at the time, and they agreed to ordain a bishop for them. However they needed the consent of a third bishop, and since Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina was away in the Middle East at the time trying to rally support for the Genuine Orthodox of Greece among the Eastern Patriarchs, they were unable to proceed with consecrating a bishop for the Romanians. Fathers Ghimnazie and Glicherie were discovered by the Greek authorities and deported, so they returned to Romania without receiving an episcopal consecration.

The rejoicing of the zealots was short-lived however, and in 1937 there was a schism in the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece. The two factions formed around Germanos of Demetrias and Chrysostom of Florina, while the other was represented by Matthew of Bresthena and Germanos of the Cyclades. Elder Joseph and his synodia, along with Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, joined the latter faction, and they participated in written denunciations against Germanos of Demetrias and Chrysostom of Florina. During this time Elder Joseph would often go down from the Holy Mountain with Father Arsenios, to preach to the people, especially the newly-arrived refugees from Asia Minor (Father Arsenios spoke fluent Turkish and would translate Father Joseph's speeches to the faithful).

In 1938, the synodia of Elder Joseph decamped from their previous dwelling in Saint Basil's Skete and moved to Saint Anne's Skete. Years later, in 1945 having become discontented with the synod led by Bishop Matthew of Bresthena, Elder Joseph's brotherhood submitted themselves to Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina. In 1947, their synodia was augmented by the arrival of the Elders Ephraim and Joseph the Younger. Elder Joseph had come to the Holy Mountain from his native Cyprus, where he had been tonsured a monk at the famous Stavrovouni monastery, but was forced to leave over issues related to the introduction of the New Calendar there. In 1950, Elder Haralambos joined the brotherhood. Elder Haralambos had been an early participant in the Genuine Orthodox Church. He had been a trustee of a local Old Calendar church in Kavala of Macedonia, and was arrested when he refused to recognize the local New Calendar bishop and hand over the keys of the church to him.

In reaction to the 1950, encyclical of Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina which declared the New Calendarist State Church to be devoid of grace, Elder Joseph and his brotherhood decided to cut ties with the zealots. In October of 1951, Elder Haralambos and Elder Ephraim

were ordained hieromonks by the commemorating Bishop Hierotheos of Miletoupolis (1874–1956), who was living as a hermit in the Skete of Saint Anne's. In 1953, the synodia of Elder Joseph decamped to New Skete, a kellion outside of Pantokrator monastery. While the brotherhood of Elder Joseph sided with the monasteries and had communion with the commemorators, Elders Haralambos and Ephraim never commemorated the Patriarch during their liturgies. From 1939 onward Elder Joseph never left the Holy Mountain, nor did he allow any one of his synodia to travel outside the Holy Mountain. While the other zealots believed that Elder Joseph had fallen into plani (spiritual delusion), it was not because of his leaving the zealots that they thought this, but because he practiced frequent communion in the tradition of the Kollyvades fathers. The synodia of Elder Joseph was known for communing every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, as well as every other Sunday. While maintaining the fasts every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, Elder Joseph believed that one day of fasting combined with strict prayer and asceticism was enough before communing the following day.

As long as the Elder lived, he did not permit the two priests of his synodia to concelebrate at the Kyriakon of New Skete, due to the fact that priests from outside the Holy Mountain, who celebrated according to the New Calendar, would come to the Skete, especially for its Feast of the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God, and concelebrate. Many of the Elder Joseph's disciples continued to be zealots, including the Eldress Eupraxia the biological sister of Elder Arsenios, the group in Volos headed by Gerondissa Makrina which later became the Convent of the Odigitria Mother of God, as well as Father John the Vlach who who lived in the first ascetical cell of the Elder at Saint Basil's Skete. The biological sister of Elder Joseph as well as his mother, who both became nuns, remained Old Calendarists. Elder Ephraim of Katounakia also remained a zealot, until the repose of his Elder Nikephoros in 1973, after which he joined the commemorators and formed his own brotherhood.

After the repose of Elder Joseph in 1959, his disciples all formed their own brotherhoods according to his instructions. His disciples are invited to become confessors of major monasteries, with Elder Ephraim becoming the confessor of Saint Paul's monastery, and Elder Haralambos becoming the confessor of Dionysiou monastery. During this time both Elders gain many new disciples, however they still refrain from commemorating the Patriarch or concelebrating with visiting New Calendarist clergy. Elders Arsenios and Joseph the Younger remained at New Skete during this time.

During the 1950s and 60s, many zealots left and joined the commemorators, disheartened by the schism of 1937 and the single-handed consecration performed by Bishop Matthew of Bresthena in 1948. A third and final blow to the zealots occurred at the beginning of the 1960s when Archimandrite Akakios Pappas the Elder travelled to the United States and was secretly consecrated by two ROCOR bishops. When he returned to Greece he was unable to produce an ordination certificate, and was thus castigated as a "doll" bishop. One notable figure who left the zealots and joined the commemorators at this time was the Elder Euthymios, the future abbot of Esphigmenou monastery. He along with his synodia led by Elder Seraphim at Saint Anne's Skete joined the commemorators, and on June 25, 1965, he was ordained a hierodeacon by the New Calendar Metropolitan of Cusa, Nathanael, who was the rector of the

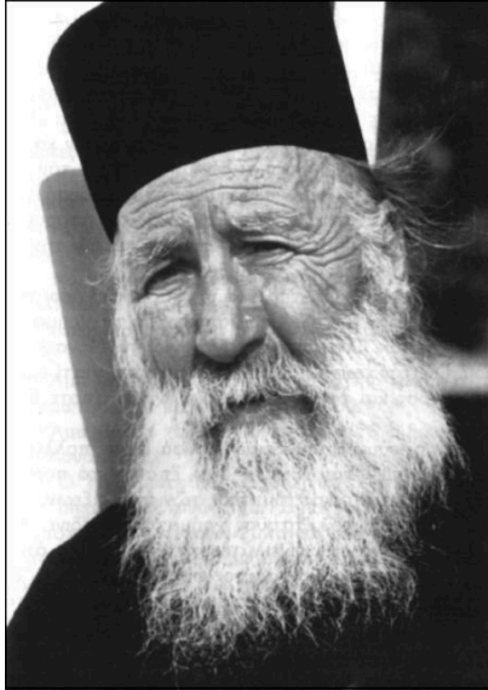
Athonias Church School at Karyes. The same hierarch ordained Fr. Euthymios a hieromonk on July 8, 1965.

In December 1965, the Anathemas between Rome and Constantinople were uncanonically lifted by Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI. A document was drawn up by the Holy Mountain Fathers protesting the breaking of apostolic and synodal canons by the Patriarch, and was signed by several Abbots and Elders of Athos. (See Appendix of Against False Union for a translation of this document into English.) Among the signatories of this document were all the members of Elder Joseph's former synodia.

During this time all the members of Elder Joseph's synodia were non-commemorators. Father Ephraim's brotherhood (20 monks) moved to the skete of Provata in 1967. A few months later Father Haralambos and his disciples (12 monks) moved to Bouzari near Karyes, along with Elder Arsenios. Elder Ephraim would often leave the Holy Mountain and liturgize to several Old Calendarist parishes throughout Greece. During the services, he would commemorate Archbishop Auxentios of Athens. According to one account he even received a laying on of hands from Archbishop Auxentios for this purpose.

Among the abbots of the major monasteries on Mount Athos who stopped commemorating the Patriarch during this time were, Abbot Vissarion of Gregoriou, Abbot Charalambos of Simonopetra, Abbot Andreas of Saint Paul's and Abbot Eudomikos of Xenophontos. In October of 1970, the monastery of Stavronikita under Abbot Vasileos also stopped commemorating Patriarch Athenagoras, with the encouragement of Elder Paisios who was residing in the Cell of the Holy Cross at Stavronikita at the time. In July of 1972, Patriarch Athenagoras reposed and was replaced by Patriarch Demetrios. His enthronement speech was purely ecumenical, and he pledged to continue the same ecumenist policies as his predecessor. In the same month, the Sacred Community of Mount Athos issues an encyclical demanding that the monasteries begin commemorating the newly enthroned Patriarch. By September, seven monasteries still refuse to commemorate (Simonopetra, Esphigmenou, Saint Paul's, Grigoriou, Xenophontos, Karakallou and Konstamonitou). It is around this time that Esphigmenou monastery under the leadership of Archimandrite Athanasios (abbot since 1956), breaks communion with the Sacred Community and all other monasteries on Mount Athos, and starts commemorating Archbishop Auxentios of Athens.

On November 25, 1973 the non-commemorating abbot of Simonopetra monastery Archimandrite Charalambos reposed. He is replaced as abbot by Fr. Aimilianos the former abbot of the Great Meteoron, the largest of the Meteoron monasteries. He was enthroned on December 17. The aged population of Simonopetra monastery is augmented by the arrival of Fr. Aimilianos and fifteen of his disciples. In the same year Elder Ephraim's brotherhood at Provata is invited to move into Philotheou monastery where Elder Ephraim becomes the abbot.



Archimandrite Eudomikos of Xenophontos (+1990)

In March, 1974, Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios issued a statement imposing penalties on thirteen monks for being in non-commemorating monasteries, among whom are: Archimandrite Athanasios (Abbot of Esphigmenou), Archimandrite Eudomikos (Abbot of Xenophontos), Archimandrite Dionysios of Grigoriou (who had taken over the abbacy after the repose of Abbot Vissarion in the same year), and Archimandrite Andreas of Saint Paul's. Archimandrite Dionysios is forced to resign, and is replaced as abbot by Fr. George Kapsanis, a former professor of theology at the University of Athens, who arrives at the monastery with a dozen young monks, and is enthroned in the presence of the New Calendarist Metropolitan Kallinikos of Edessa. The future New Calendarist Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos who was a witness to these events, states that it had been around ten years since a bishop from the State Church had visited Grigoriou.



Archimandrite Vissarion of Grigoriou (+1974)

In October, 1974, Archimandrite Andreas of Saint Paul's is mutinied upon by his own brethren and deposed as abbot. They seemingly did this out of fear of incurring reprisals from the State Church for remaining non-commemorators. The following month Fr. Parthenios is enthroned as the new abbot, and commemoration of the Patriarch resumes upon his enthronement. Archimandrite Andreas remained a zealot until the end of his life, and reposed peacefully in 1986. By the end of 1974, Esphigmenou remained the only major monastery on Mount Athos which refused to commemorate the Patriarch.



Archimandrite Andreas of Saint Paul's (+1986)

In 1975, Elder Joseph the Cypriot and his brotherhood moved from New Skete, to Koutloumousiou monastery where he becomes the Father Confessor of the entire monastery. In the same year, a group of eight monks, under the direction of Fr. Christodoulos, comes from a monastery on the island of Euboea and takes up residency in Koutoumousiou where Fr. Christodoulos becomes the new abbot.

It is also worth noting that in June 1975, at the request of the abbot, Archimandrite Athanasios, Fr. Euthymios moved to the Esphigmenou monastery. Although having briefly joined the commemorators during the early sixties, he had returned to the zealots after the lifting of the anathemas in 1965. He was reordained a monk, after which Archimandrite Athanasios appointed him as the father confessor of the monastery. In August, 1975, just before his death, Fr. Athanasios expressed his desire that Fr. Euthymios should succeed him as abbot of the monastery, which happened on September 8, 1975.



Archimandrite Athanasios of Esphigmenou (+1975)

In 1976, a second group of seventeen monks migrated from Meteora, led by Fr. Alexios (a disciple of Father Aimilianos who had succeeded him as abbot of the Great Meteoron after

the former's journey to Mount Athos). Fr. Alexios assumes the abbacy of Xenophontos after the deposition of its non-commemorating abbot Eudomikos two years prior.

In 1979, a group of ten monks led by Fr. Gregorios (a disciple of the New Calendarist Elder Amphilochius of Patmos), arrives at Docheiariou monastery. Fr. Gregorios assumes the abbacy there. In the same year Elder Haralambos moved with his brotherhood from Bourazeri to Dionysiou monastery where he became the abbot after the resignation of Archimandrite Gabriel. Elder Arsenios the Cave-Dweller also moves to Dionysiou and reposes in 1983, lying in the infirmary of the monastery next to Elder Gabriel who reposes around the same time.

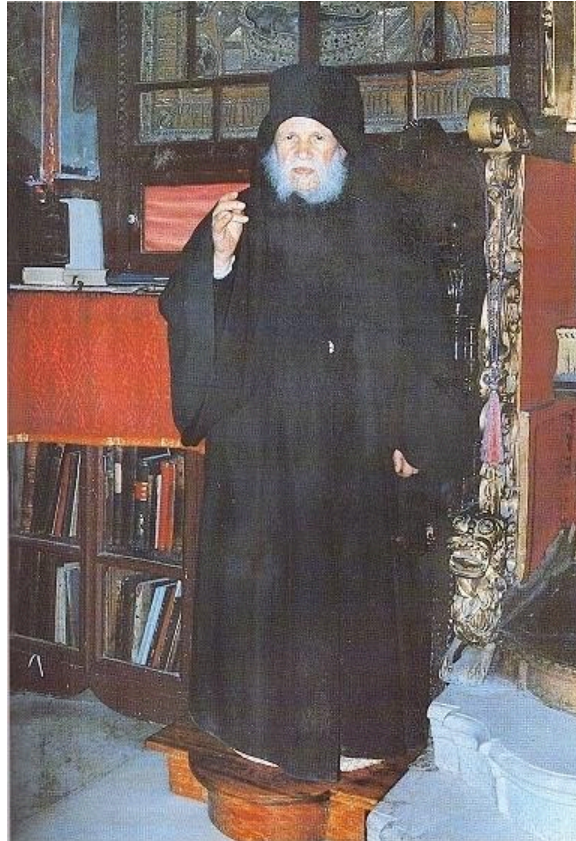
In 1980, two groups left Philotheou monastery with the blessing of Elder Ephraim. One led by Elder Ephraim Koutsibos decamps to Xiropotamou monastery, where Elder Ephraim becomes the abbot. The other group led by Fr. Agathon arrives at Konstamonitou where Fr. Agathon becomes the abbot. The following year, a third group leaves Philotheou led by Father Philaretos who assumes the abbacy of Karakallou monastery.

In 1987, Elder Joseph the Cypriot moved with his brotherhood from Koutloumousiou monastery to Vatopedi, where his disciple Fr. Ephraim assumes the abbacy. In 1990, Archimandrite Vasileos of Stavronikita moved to the monastery of Iveron, where he assumed the abbacy.

In the late 1970s, Elder Ephraim of Philotheou first visited North America, where he began to establish monasteries throughout the continent. In 1991, he resigned from the abbacy of Philotheou monastery and joined the ROCOR, supposedly prompted by a vision from the Mother of God to do so. However, his sojourn in ROCOR was short-lived and six months after joining, he returned to the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Rumours that he had been threatened with the seizure of his monasteries abounded, some even suggested that the Phanar had threatened his personal family members. Nevertheless he wrote an essay which defended the canonicity of the ROCOR (see appendix).

In 1973, Fr. Seraphim Bobich, a ROCOR monk, travelled to Russian Saint Prophet Elias Skete, a dependency of Pantokrator monastery on Mount Athos. The then hegumen at the time Archimandrite Nikolay Piven, who was very old, decided to appoint Fr. Seraphim as his successor, provided that he upheld certain principles. Since the introduction of the New Calendar in 1924, the Saint Prophet Elias Skete had not recognized the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and refused to commemorate him during the liturgy. Fr. Seraphim agreed to uphold this practice and was appointed as the prior of the skete after the repose of Archimandrite Nikolay in 1973. However in 1992, representatives of the Sacred Community arrived at the Saint Prophet Elias Skete along with a police escort and evicted Fr. Seraphim along with four other non-commemorating ROCOR monks, at the instigation of the newly enthroned Patriarch Bartholomew. The Skete was then repopulated by Greek monks who were loyal to the Phanar.

In 1995, three Serbian monks entered the Esphigmenou monastery on Mount Athos, having broken communion with the ecumenist Belgrade Patriarchate. Their leader Fr. Akakije Stankovic was received into True Orthodoxy there by the abbot Euthymios and given a blessing to establish True Orthodox parishes in Serbia under the omophorion of Metropolitan Kallinikos of Corinth of the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece. In 1999, Abbot Euthymios of Esphigmenou reposed. Archimandrite Methodios was elected by acclaim by the brethren of Esphigmenou to assume the leadership of the monastery. The monks respected the last wish of their abbot that Fr. Methodios succeed him as abbot, even though he granted them the option to elect whomever they wanted.



Abbot Euthymios of Esphigmenou (+1999)



Elder Euthymius with Hieromonk Akakios, Esphigmenou 1997

In 2005, a “New Brotherhood” of Esphigmenou was established by Patriarch Bartholomew composed of loyalists to the Phanar. They occupied a small dwelling outside of the Esphigmenou monastery and claimed that they were the legitimate brotherhood of the monastery. They were led until 2013 by Archimandrite Chrysostomos Katsoulis who was succeeded upon his repose by Archimandrite Bartholomew. To this day, Esphigmenou monastery is often besieged by police raids instigated by the Phanar to remove the zealot monks, however they remain resolutely determined to “defend the monastery to the death” in the words of Abbot Methodios. At present in addition to the 118 monks of Esphigmenou, there are other zealot monks on Mount Athos in the small sketes and kellion all over the Holy Mountain, with an estimated total of 300 zealot monks out of the 1800 monks on Athos.

Post-scriptum: A New Spirituality

While the New Holy Mountain Fathers such as Elder Ephraim of Philotheou, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra and Archimandrite Vasileos of Stavronikita/Iveron, can be commended for repopulating the Holy Mountain with young monks at a time when monasticism was in great danger of dying out on Athos, they have failed to follow the examples of their illustrious predecessors, who refused to commemorate the heretical Patriarch of Constantinople in order to preserve the unadulterated Orthodox faith. While outwardly criticizing ecumenism, they continue to commemorate an ecumenist hierarch.

Many of the commemorating monks on Athos will say that they are protected by the prayers of their spiritual father, as if the fact that their spiritual father preserves an Orthodox confession of faith while they continue to commemorate an ecumenist bishop during the liturgy means that they are still within the Church. Furthermore, the commemorating monks of Athos tell laymen who visit them that it is acceptable to be under an ecumenist bishop, as long as their personal priest is not an ecumenist. This is a gravely mistaken view. If the bishop is a heretic, then any priest or layman that continues to assist him, tacitly supports his heresy, and is an assistant to a heretic. It is incumbent upon every believing Orthodox Christian to come under the omophorion of a right-believing bishop, if they are to be considered a part of the Church. May the zealot monks of Mount Athos serve as an example to all of us as we struggle for True Orthodoxy in these dark days.

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A Private Letter Concerning Ecumenism by Elder Paisios the Athonite

The Holy Mountain, January 23, 1969

Reverend Father Haralambos,

In as much as I see the great uproar which is happening in our Church because of the various movements of groups in favor of unification [of churches], as well as the interaction of the Oecumenical Patriarch with the Pope, I was pained as Her child, and considered it good, besides my prayers, to send a small thread (which I have as a poor monk), that it too may be used as a means of stitching together the multipart garment of our Mother. I know you will show love and share it only with your religious friends. Thank you.

First of all, I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone for being bold to write something when I am neither holy nor a theologian. I trust everyone will understand me, that my writing is nothing more than an expression of my deep pain for the unfortunate stance and worldly love of our father Patriarch Athenagoras.

It appears he loved another modern woman—which is called the Papist Church—because our Orthodox Mother has not made an impression on him at all, for She is so modest. This love, which was heard from Constantinople, caused a sensational impression of sorts among many Orthodox, who nowadays live in an environment of such meaningless love, in cities across the entire world. Moreover, this love is of the spirit of our age: the family will lose its divine meaning from just such kinds of love, which have as their aim breakup and not union.

With just such a worldly love the Patriarch takes us to Rome. While he should have shown love first to us his children and to our Mother Church, he unfortunately sent his love very far away. The result, it's true, delighted the secular children who love the world—who have this worldly love—, but completely scandalized us, the children of Orthodoxy, young and old, who have fear of God...

With sadness I must write that among all the “unionists” I've met, never have I seen them to have either a drop or shred of spirituality. Nevertheless, they know how to speak about love and union while they themselves are not united with God, for they have not loved Him.

I would like tenderly to beseech all our unionist brothers: Since the issue of the union of the Churches is something spiritual, and we have need of spiritual love, let's leave it to those who greatly love God and are [genuine] theologians, like the Fathers of the Church—not the legalists—who have offered up and continue to give themselves in service to the Church (instead of just buying big candles), and who were and are lit by the fire of love for God rather than by the lighter of the church sacristan...

We should recognize that there exist not only natural but also spiritual laws. Therefore, the future wrath of God is not averted by a convocation of sinners (for then we shall receive double the wrath), but by repentance and adherence to the commandments of the Lord.

Also, we should know well that our Orthodox Church does not have even one shortcoming. The only apparent insufficiency is the shortage of sober Hierarchs and Shepherds with a Patristic foundation. “Few are chosen.” This should not, however, be upsetting. The Church is Christ's Church, and He governs Her. It is not a Temple built by the pious from rocks, sand and mortar, which is then destroyed by the fire of barbarians; the Church is Christ Himself. “And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” (Matt. 21:44-45)

When He must needs, the Lord will bring forth the Mark of Ephesuses and Gregory Palamas, so as to bring together all our scandalized brethren, to confess the Orthodox Faith, to strengthen the Tradition, and to give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

In times past we see that many faithful children of our Church, monastics and laymen, have unfortunately broken away from Her on account of the unionists. In my opinion, separation from the Church each time the Patriarch makes a mistake is not good at all. From within, close to the Mother Church, it is the duty and obligation of each member to struggle in their own way. To cease commemoration of the Patriarch; to break away and create their own Church; and to continue to speak insultingly to the Patriarch: this I think, is senseless.

If, for this or that occasional deviation of the Patriarchs, we separate ourselves and make our own Churches—may God protect us!—we'll pass up even the Protestants. It is easy for one to separate but difficult to return. Unfortunately we have many “churches” in our times, created either by big groups or even just one person. Because there happened to be a church in their *kalyve* (I am speaking about things happening on the Holy Mountain), they figured they could create their own independent Church.

If the unionists gave the Church the first wound, the aforementioned give the second.

Let's pray that God will illumine all of us, including our Patriarch Athenagoras, that union of these “churches” will come about first; that tranquility would be realized within the scandalized Orthodox fold; so that peace and love would exist among the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Then let's think about union with other “Confessions”—and only if they sincerely desire to embrace Orthodox Dogma.

I would further like to say that there does exist another, third group, within our Church. They are the brethren who remain as Her faithful children, but who don't have spiritual concord between themselves. They spend their time criticizing one another, and not for the general good of the struggle. The one monitors the other (more than himself) to see what he will say or write so as to ruthlessly nail him. However, if this person had said or written the same thing, he'd certainly have supported it with numerous passages from the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers.

Great harm comes of this; for while the one injures his neighbor, the other strikes him back before the eyes of all the faithful. Oftentimes, disbelief is sown in the souls of the weak, because they are scandalized by such people. Unfortunately, some from among us make senseless claims against the others. We want them to conform to our own spiritual character. In other words, when someone else doesn't harmonize with our own character, or is only mildly tolerant—or even a little sharp—with us, immediately we jump to the conclusion that he is not a spiritual person.

We're all needed within the Church. All the Fathers, both the mild and the austere, offered their services to Her. Just as the sweet, sour, bitter and even pungent herbs are necessary for a man's body (each has its own flavor and vitamins), the same is true of the Body of the Church. All are necessary. The one fills up the spiritual character of the other, and all of us are duty bound to endure not only the particular spiritual character, but even the human weaknesses we each have.

Again, I come sincerely asking pardon from all for being so bold to write. I am only a simple monk, and my work is to strive, as much as I am able, to divest myself of the old man, and to help others and the Church, through God, by prayer. But because heart-breaking news regarding our Holy Orthodoxy has reached even my hermitage, I was greatly pained, and thus considered it good to write that which I felt. Let's all pray that God grants His Grace, and may each of us help in his own way for the glory of our Church.

With much respect to all,

Monk Paisios

**A Letter of Resistance
by Elder Sabbas, Monk**

From the Cell of Saint Nicholas, Kapsala, Karyes, Mount Athos

The respected Elder, Father Sabbas, had followed the policy of the nineteen ruling monasteries of Mount Athos, which believed, as do many people, that we must make certain concessions and accommodations in matters of Faith for a period of time.

Since he was virtuous, with a sincere and good intention, the fathers who have only recently come to Mount Athos—the so-called New Holy Mountain Fathers—who hold communion with Ecumenists and commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarchate, would visit the Elder frequently. They would hold him up as an example to their disciples and would say that if the zealot dissent and protest were good, would not the virtuous Father Sabbas belong to it?

However, when the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios concelebrated with the Pope of Rome in December of 1987, the Elder roused himself; his soul could not bear to be found in such a blatantly Ecumenistic Church. Along with other ascetics, he protested and separated himself from all the other fathers of Mount Athos who followed the nineteen monasteries. He would not go to church in any of those nineteen or in any of the cells or dependencies which followed them.

All the commemorators were in an uproar; from monastery and cell, many ran to persuade the Elder. But the frequent visits, which became burdensome, were to no avail.

Finally, the Elder was obliged to answer in writing one monk who troubled him frequently, thereby answering all the others troubling him, for they were well-organized and committed to using every means to draw the Elder out of Orthodoxy into the embrace of hellish Ecumenism.

Below is the text of the Elder's letter.

The Cell of Saint Nicholas August 13,1991
Kapsala

Dear Father Nicodemos,

Bless!

During your visit to our cell a few days ago, you repeated your un-Orthodox dogmatic pronouncements that we are outside the Church because we do not commemorate Patriarch Demetrios. You also made some other statements as well, for which cause we feel constrained to write the following for your fuller instruction, since the evidence and refutations we tendered during our conversation destroyed your peace and made you angry.

In the Sayings of the Desert Fathers it is written that when Abba Agatho was asked if he were proud, a fornicator, and a heretic, he answered that he confirmed the first two accusations, for it was profitable for his soul to do so, but not that he was a heretic, for that signifies separation from God. [1]

According to you (and according to all the monasteries of Mount Athos as well, except for the Monastery of Esphigmenou, the Skete of Prophet Elias, and many zealot Fathers), we are deceived and are schismatics. You find it difficult to admit that the Patriarchate of Constantinople is preaching heresy, because you would be required to admit that your holding communion with these wolves and not shepherds is worthy of condemnation, or you would have to cease following them, according to the command of all the Holy Fathers and Councils.

You attempt to justify the Phanar, but their words and actions show you to be in error. In vain do you invoke the opinion of Father Paisios and of others who are indulgent with present conditions and make concessions, that is, they deal with it by "economy," but when the time comes (supposedly when Demetrios shall enter into communion with the Pope, as you said), you will separate yourselves from whatever is not in concord with the teachings of the Holy Fathers and Councils. You greatly deceive yourselves.

As for the admonitions to which you refer—whether of Elder Paisios, or of your neighbor papa-Isaac, or of anyone else—which maintain that Demetrios rightly divides the word of truth, how can you expect us to accept them as being pleasing to God when they are clean contrary to Orthodox teaching? Since the Truth is betrayed, should it not be called iniquity rather than economy, concession, accommodation, or indulgence? You maintain your stand because Elder Paisios said, "Demetrios is misled by the hierarchs around him to do that which he does not want," and "If we stop commemorating [the Patriarch] we will be outside the Church!" and much more, to which can be applied the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "All their words are foolishness, and the tales of foolish children." These words of theirs are the fruit of a new theology, which the Phanar used in the notorious Encyclical of 1920 by calling heretics "fellow heirs of the grace of God."

You bring forward the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "Not even the blood of martyrdom blots out schism," and of Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, "Let nothing be enacted without the bishop." You conclude that when we separate ourselves from our bishop, we are outside the Church.

The Saints made these true pronouncements, however, in a time of Orthodoxy and Church serenity. Today, when the hurricane of the Ecumenist pan-heresy sweeps away even the elect, the words of the same Saints have force. "If your bishop be heretical, flee, flee, flee as from fire and a serpent" (Saint John Chrysostom). "If thy bishop should teach any thing outside of the appointed order, even if he lives in chastity, or if he work signs, or if he prophecy, let him be unto thee as a wolf in sheep's clothing, for he works the destruction of souls" (Saint Ignatius). If Demetrios rightly divided the word of truth, you would have been justified in your use of those quotations you took from the two Saints; but now you edit the Fathers' writings to your taste, in order to justify your guilt for being a fellow-traveler of Demetrios, Parthenios of Alexandria, Iakovos of America, Stylianos Harkianakis of Australia. Are all the many quotations from the holy Councils and Saints not enough for you? Or do you fear, perhaps, being cast out of the synagogue of the heretics? The fact that the other patriarchates hold communion with the Phanar is not really important. What is important is, who follows in the footsteps of the Saints and is with the Truth? Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, said that he recognizes Mohammed as an Apostle who worked for the Kingdom of God, and other such blasphemies which you know. There is no need for us to write again the heresies of Iakovos Koukonzis of America, and Stylianos Harkianakis of Australia. You are in communion with these men as though they supposedly rightly divided the word of truth! Who is going to

condemn Iakovos Koukouzis? Parthenios? or the committee of Phanariotes under Bartholomew which has been "investigating" for two years now whether Harkianakis is a heretic? [2] Do you not understand that they do not want to pronounce a verdict?

The Phanar promised the delegation of three abbots from Mount Athos that they would retract and correct Patriarch Demetrios' statement to the United Press about receiving communion from the Latins, that they would replace Stylianos Harkianakis as president of the commission for theological dialogue, etc. Has anything been corrected to this day? Or do you believe that we have no responsibility, or guilt, and may remain in communion because Elder Paisios shamelessly says that the declarations and actions of Demetrios are not contrary to our doctrines and do not violate the truth?

History repeats itself. Saint Theodore the Studite, Saint Maximus the Confessor, and many of the other Christians who did not follow the hierarchy which at sundry times preached heresy, were all called schismatics by that hierarchy. Although Saint Gerasimus of the Jordan was served by a lion and was a wonderworker, he was in error because he would not accept the Fourth Ecumenical Council, drawing along with him thousands of monks in Palestine, until he was corrected by Saint Euthymius the Great and repented.

You ask "Could Elder Paisios and the seventy bishops of the State Church of Greece be in error?"

Do you want God to force them to confess Him? At the Iconoclast Council of 754 in the reign of Copronymos, we read in the minutes that fearsome acclamation of the 338 bishops present at the council, "Long live the King! The icons are idols and should either be destroyed or hung high so that they might not be venerated." Do you find it hard to believe that seventy bishops can be deceived today, when, as you see, so many were deceived then? Nowadays, monks desire to gain mitres, abbatial staves, while observing only a nominal confession of Faith—that is, protesting somewhat, but not stopping the commemoration of the Patriarch, and tolerating all the innovations to the Gospel introduced by Demetrios, Iakovos, Parthenios, and those like them. Saint Theodore the Studite, however, writes that the work of the monk is not to tolerate even the least innovation in the Gospel of Christ.

At the concelebration in Rome, Demetrios did not receive the host from the Pope in order to avoid hostile reactions from "conservatives." However, there in Rome, he did subscribe to the doctrine that the Latins possess the Mysteries of the Church, and he continues to do so. Is that not enough? When did the Saints and Christians of any century in which a heresy was widely preached ever react as do you, who continue to commemorate Demetrios? What precedent have you found in the history of the Church so you can say you are following it? If you are sons of the Saints (that is, imitators and followers of the Saints), "ye would have done the works of Abraham" as the Gospel says. In the time of Patriarch Beccos, the fathers of Mount Athos stopped commemorating him even though he had not been deposed by a Council; and because they remained steadfast in their adherence to the precepts of the Fathers (that is, had no communion with those who departed from the Orthodox Faith), Christ granted them the martyr's crown. As for those who concelebrated with the commemorators of the Latin-minded "official" patriarch, Beccos, their corpses are found to this day, as is well known, swollen, stinking, and undecomposed, to be an example to all.

You told us that if Demetrios does not go to confession for the things he has done, he will be damned. You are now admitting that you are following a man who is damning himself by what he is doing. For him to be damning himself [and indeed, for matters pertaining to the Faith and not personal and private sins] means that he is doing the work of the Devil. Consequently, you yourself admit that you have the Devil as a fellow-traveler.

Are you serious, Father Nicodemos, or are you jesting? If Athenagoras had "repented" and confessed his sin shortly before he died, then would he be saved? [3] Show me even one patristic witness which justifies remaining in a Church that preaches heresy, as does that of the "meek and quiet Leader of Orthodoxy, Demetrios." Would such an obedience to a hierarchy that does not rightly divide the word of truth sanctify us? If you do not wish to admit that the Monastery of Esphigmenou and so many zealot Fathers are worthy of honor—according to the Fifteenth Canon of the First-and-Second-Council— at least be silent and do not blaspheme by saying that they are schismatics and outside the Church. You ignore the existence of the Testament of Saint Mark Evgenicos of Ephesus, who did not want the Latin-minded even to come to his funeral.

First study and then make pronouncements. According to your way of thinking, both Saint Mark of Ephesus, Saint Maximus the Confessor, and hosts of others who did not hold communion with heretics are outside the Church!

Do you see where your "new theology" leads? Who would ever have thought that fathers of the Holy Mountain would have as their bible the book *The Two Extremes* by Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos? You recommend making protests like those recommended on pages 19 and 22 of that book, protests over—according to the Ecumenists—"sacred canons which are not applicable in our times because they are lacking in love." He also describes Athenagoras as "having a demonic love." Nevertheless, he remained in communion with those who have "a demonic love." Marvelous consistency!

We saw similar protests on the occasion when the representative of the Monastery of Grigoriou asked that it be recorded in the decisions of the Sacred Community that if the chief secretary were sent to Australia, he would not concelebrate there. The chief secretary finally did not go; but Father Basil, Abbot of Stavronikita, ignoring the decision of all the other monasteries, sent Father Tychon to "help" Archbishop Stylianos Harkianakis. When Father Tychon resumed, he was sent to the festival of the Cell of Bourazeri. There the representative of the Monastery of Grigoriou (Father Athanasios) concelebrated with Father Tychon and the rest. No commentary is needed.

Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos was silenced when they refuted his errors some twenty years ago. But you, with the same untheological arguments, want to justify your communion with patriarchs who preach heresies "with bared head," having a demonic love for heretics while persecuting the genuinely Orthodox, and so emulating Patriarch Beccos, the Emperor Copronymos, and all those like them. When you chant them many years and commemorate them, it is the same as if you said, "You are sound in the Faith, and obedience, honor, and commemoration are due to you." You do not help them understand that they are walking upon an evil path; whereas if you had broken communion with them, mayhap they would have had pangs of conscience and would search for the truth. Your guilt for your reprehensible silence—which Saint Gregory Palamas calls a third kind of atheism—grows day by day, in spite of your so-called protests.

When the Latin-minded were coming here during the patriarchate of Beccos to enforce the union with the Latins, our Lady, the Virgin Mother, the Guardian of the Holy Mountain Athos, spoke herself, saying, "The enemies of My Son and of me are coming."

Last year, when the successor of Beccos — Demetrios (the "Leader of Orthodoxy"!)—arrived, he found the Holy Mountain swathed in black from two weeks of continuous fires. [4] He that hath ears to hear, heareth the voice of the All-holy Mother of God.

May you find the path of good disagreement, as Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain teaches in his Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Saint Paul, saying, "If he [the abbot or bishop] is evil in Faith,

that is, he believes heretical and blasphemous doctrines, flee from him, though he be an angel from Heaven."

Elder Sabbas,
an un-monastic, but Orthodox monk

The ever-memorable Elder remained staunch in his good confession until his repose in October of 1991, despite the many efforts of the "new Holy Mountain Fathers" to persuade him to come over to their views. His worthy disciple and heir, Father Alypius, remembering the Will and Testament of Saint Mark of Ephesus, and following his example, would not permit the commemorators to hold memorial services at the grave of the Elder.

Elder Ephraim on the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

In a bizarre series of events last year [1991], the Abbot of the Monastery of Philotheou on Mt. Athos, Archimandrite Ephraim, left the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, joined the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, and then subsequently returned to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. While there are conflicting reports about his reasons for doing this, and while his actions have confused and disappointed a number of people, Father Ephraim's sojourn in the ROCA has left us with a very interesting statement about that Church. Forced to confront polemical and hostile voices from the Greek New Calendarists when he joined the Russian Church Abroad, Father Ephraim wrote a short note on the validity of that Church. Since the Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad Consecrated Bishops for us Old Calendarists when our last Hierarch in Greece reposed, his comments about the validity of their Church are of special importance to us—even more so, since they come from an adherent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who was compelled by unusual circumstances to speak objectively and truthfully about the ROCA. Such objectivity and truthfulness are rare commodities, indeed, among the modernists, who have so compromised themselves by political self-interest and the demands of the ecumenical movement. We have translated Father Ephraim's comments from the original Greek text, which was distributed by Father Ephraim last year in the United States.

My View of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Apostolic Succession

The Apostolic Succession of the Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad cannot be impugned, since all of the present Bishops hold canonical Consecrations from the Bishops of the pre-Revolutionary era and their successors.

Canonicity

Canonicity (i.e., a local Church's total conformity to the Holy Canons in its constitution and administrative functioning) is a rare commodity in nearly all of the Patriarchates and the autocephalous Churches today. The synodal system has been seriously weakened by diverse incursions from within and without, and there appears everywhere a move towards despotism among the major Hierarchs or local Synods. Were we to but begin with an examination of canonical impediments to the Priesthood and so on, I do not believe that we would occasion to find absolute canonicity anywhere. I can only say that the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad constitutes an exception to the foregoing, on account of its strict devotion to the Holy Canons and its freedom from the bonds of every worldly power. In response to the allegations which many have made against this Church's ostensibly uncanonical status as a self-governing Church body, these observations can be made:

Patriarch Tikhon, foreseeing a bleak future for the Russian Church, issued a decree to the Bishops outside Soviet Russia, granting them the right to organize self-governing synodal bodies. Despite this, the exiled Russian Hierarchs, having lived in an atmosphere of utmost loyalty to the law and obedience under the Tsar, insisted, during their first few years of exile, on maintaining contact with their base (Patriarch Tikhon and his successors) and to seek from there approval for their more momentous decisions at least—though this was difficult under their circumstances at the time (persecutions, banishments, etc.).

This communion was abruptly cut off by the capitulation of the locum tenens and later Patriarch Tikhon (Stragorodsky)* in his infamous declaration—something totally unacceptable to the Bishops in exile—, assuring the full submission of the Church to the atheist regime and ordering the faithful to show full obedience to and pray for the Soviet authorities. In my opinion, this rupture in communion was justified by the Canons, which provide for the cessation of all commemoration of the first Hierarch of a local Church in the event that he preaches heretical teachings; for Marxism is not only a political system, but entails a secular worldview, indeed a heresy.

The present Bishops of the ROCA, because of their isolation from the other Orthodox Churches, hearken back with genuine spiritual reverence to these events, directives, contacts, etc., which demonstrate the lawful and canonical establishment of their ecclesiastical body.

The most compelling argument in support of the canonicity of the ROCA, one insufficiently emphasized with regard to this issue, is that at the outset the Ecumenical Patriarch and all of the other local Churches maintained good relations with the Synod in Exile, which contained within her bosom, it is worthy of note, the "elite" of the Russian Hierarchs and theologians. Men of the stature of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev, who made a lasting impression with his memorable homilies at the Athens Cathedral and who cannot be likened to the low level of our own [Greek New Calendarist] Hierarchs, evoked respect and de facto recognition from everyone.

The position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with regard to the ROCA radically changed after the First Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1923, when the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad at the time, Metropolitan Anastassy,** distinguished himself as a leading personality by his resistance to the innovations of the acknowledged Mason Meletios Metaxakis. Things were somewhat more improved under the successors of Metaxakis, until the end of World War II and a full break in relations, when Soviet external political forces began, by various means, to urge all of the Orthodox Churches to cease communion with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and to recognize only the Patriarch of Moscow, who was fully under the control of Soviet political forces and whom these forces used to serve their own ends. The Patriarch of Moscow took the isolation of the ROCA as an opportunity to establish relations with the other Patriarchates and autocephalous Churches: "Either they or we." Thus for political reasons and out of self-interest, but also for ideological reasons, as we have seen, the Phanar cut off all official relations with the Synod in Exile and, in imitation thereof, so did most of the other local Churches, except for the Churches of Jerusalem and Serbia, which have maintained semi-formal relations with the ROCA to this day.

The isolation of the ROCA from the other local Churches—albeit, not a complete isolation (the Blessed Justin [Popovich] and his disciples and the present Patriarch of Serbia have been well disposed toward the ROCA)—can in no way be taken as evidence of doubt about the canonicity of this local Church, since many similar examples can be found in Church history.

Endnotes

* He means, of course, Patriarch Sergius.

** This is an error. Metropolitan Anastassy was not, at the time, First Hierarch of the exiled Bishops.

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