

METROPOLITAN PHILARET (DROZDOV) OF MOSCOW

"I only know the style of Karamzin and Philaret". With these words Count M.M.Speranskiy expressed his attitude to disputes about Admiral Shishkov's work on the old and new style of writing, the work that divided the Russian literary society of the time into two hostile parties¹. Slavophile I.S.Aksenov commiserated in his eulogy published in the *Moskva* Magazine that "the word full of meaning and artistic beauty which was heard in Russia for more than half a century, has gone quiet, the word that, on the one hand, penetrated deeply into the mysteries of the knowledge of God and, on the other, wrapped the Divine Truth into the beauty of clarity and strength". Admiral Shishkov, on the contrary, criticised Metropolitan Philaret's translation of the Holy Scripture into modern Russian for perverting the Holy Books in which the Metropolitan allegedly replaced the language of the Church with the "language of the theatre".



The person who caused such controversy - Vassiliy Mikhailovich Drozdov - was born on 26th December 1782 in the city of Kolomna of the Moscow province. He was the son of the then deacon and later proto-priest of the city's cathedral Mikhail Fedorovich Drozdov. Having received primary education in his parents' home Vassiliy Mikhailovich entered Kolomna Seminary in 1791. After the seminary was closed in 1800 he moved on to the Seminary of the Holy Trinity St.Sergius Lavra. In 1803 he finished the course and in November of the same year was appointed the teacher of Greek and Hebrew at the Seminary.

From 30 August 1806 Drozdov taught Poetry and was appointed a preacher in the Lavra. In 1808 he was made a teacher of High Oratory and Rhetoric while keeping the position of a preacher. While still a student and a teacher in the Holy Trinity St.Sergius Lavra V.M.Drozdov lead the life of an ascetic and spiritually came close to the ideal of monastic life. On 6th November 1808 he was tonsured a monk with the name of Philaret. On 21st November of the same year he was ordained a hierodeacon.

On 1st March 1809 hierodeacon Philaret was summoned by the Holy Synod to Saint-Petersburg. As a Bachelor of Theology he was appointed the inspector of Saint-Petersburg Theological Seminary and a professor of philosophy. At the same time he taught Rhetoric at the just opened Theological Academy. Within a short period of time he was ordained a hieromonk (28.03.1809), and then elevated to the rank of archimandrite (08.07.1811) after

¹This research was written (in German) during the years Vladyka Mark worked at the university, long before the glorification of the Luminary Philaret.

which followed his elevation to the Bishop of Revel and Vicar of St.-Petersburg Diocese (05.08.1817).

After having been inspector of St-Petersburg Theological Seminary he became Rector in the newly established Alexander-Nevsky Uyezd (District) School. On February 8, 1810, as a Bachelor of Theology he was invited to the Theological Academy where he first taught Dogmatic Theology and History of the Church and later also *History and the Church Antiquities*. On March 11, 1812 he was appointed Rector of the Academy. He was a member of St-Petersburg Theological Consistory (from 27.03.1812), the Board of Theological Schools (from 30.08.1814) and the Main Board of Schools (from 7.04.1817).

On 15th March 1819 the Gracious Philaret was appointed Archbishop of Tver and, at the same time, a Member of the Holy Synod. Remaining Member of the Synod throughout his life he took an active part in all important matters of the Church and the State of the time.

On 20th September 1820 Philaret was appointed Archbishop of Yaroslavl and on 3rd July Archbishop of Moscow and Archimandrite of the Holy Trinity St.Sergius Lavra. On August 22, 1826 he became the Metropolitan of Moscow, the title he retained till his death on November 19, 1867.



In the early years of his service Metropolitan Philaret had to combine lecturing in St.-Petersburg and various administrative duties with research work. Saint-Petersburg Academy did not have any teaching material on the History of the Church or "the Church antiquities". His own studies at the Seminary of the Holy Trinity St.Sergius Lavra did not equip him with enough knowledge on these subjects. So he had to make new lecture notes which lay the foundations for his books "Outline of the History of the Church and the Bible" (St.-Petersburg, 1816) and "Notes on the Book of Genesis", (Saint-Petersburg, 1816)

Whatever work Philaret would undertake he would do to the best of his ability, disregarding his already poor health. The future Archbishop of Tobolsk Afanasiy (Alexander Fedorovich Protopopov, 1783-1842), who was a student at the Academy at the time, made a remark that Philaret's health was so weak that during lectures his handkerchief was full of blood. And he later admitted himself that on the way to the classroom he sometimes wondered whether he would come back. Archbishop Afanasiy mentions also that in those years Philaret was teaching practically all theological subjects.

Among Philaret's theological works his *Catechism* deserves a special place. It was approved by the Holy Synod and published in Slavonic in 1823. It is worth mentioning that, as a revolutionary phenomenon of the time, the Creed, Our Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments were printed in parallel columns in Slavonic and Russian; and that all the quotations from the Holy Scripture and the works of the Holy Fathers were given in Russian and not in Church-Slavonic. It was achieved thanks to Philaret's support for the translation of the Holy Scripture into Russian. The translation was carried out by the Russian Biblical Society founded among others by Philaret.

Philaret's conviction of the necessity of a Russian translation of the Bible, according to Korsunsky, was founded in his "deep patriotic feeling". *Children are not to be deprived of bread!* - the then archimandrite wrote in January 1813 after the first meeting of the Biblical Society in St.-Petersburg where the necessity of the Bible translation for non-Russian ethnicities of the Russian Empire was discussed. However, such necessity for the Russian people was not recognized. Ex-Admiral Shishkov thought that the Biblical Society was trying to spread not the faithful translations of the Holy Scripture but free interpretations of it, replacing the high and mighty language with "a folk dialect", and saw these attempts as a weapon of revolutionary revolt. By his initiative the publication of both *Short* and *Complete Catechisms* was suspended and then banned by the Order issued on November 17, 1824. Philaret was allowed to publish the Creed, Our Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments only in Church-Slavonic.



The new, significantly edited, *Catechism*, with the language changed into Slavonic even in the notes to the text, was issued again in 1828. Since then it was published annually and sometimes even several times a year, so that by 1837 it had already seen 29 editions. After further revision in 1839 the *Complete Catechism* was published unchanged. It had 91 editions and was translated into English, Arabic, Greek and Polish. The *Short Catechism* had to be revised more thoroughly and was also published again in 1828, together with the "*Principles of Christian Teaching, or the Summary of the Holy History*" and had 252 editions. It was translated into Aleut, Finnish and Cheremish languages.

Metropolitan Philaret's part in the translations of the Holy Scripture was just as fiercely criticized as his *Catechisms*. The Holy Synod appointed Philaret a supervisor over the translation work of the Biblical Society in 1816 and offered its approval until 1825. The situation changed radically as the time of Emperor Nikolai Pavlovich came. Former admiral Shishkov, completely incompetent in the questions of theology and philosophy, was appointed Minister of Education and subjected Philaret to fierce attacks. Although Philaret continued to support the translation work he had to submit to the authorities. Only when Emperor Alexander Nikolayevich came to power, e.g. after 1856, the translation of Holy Scripture could be officially continued. In 1862 the whole of the New Testament was published in Russian, with the significant part of translations done by Philaret himself, or edited by him. It could be truly said that the Word of God became known to the simple souls and hearts of the Russian people. Philaret had to convince the Metropolitan of St.-Petersburg Seraphim (+1843), who did not share Philaret's enthusiasm for it, in the necessity of the translation of the Bible. Philaret's permanent concern about the translation of the Holy Scripture into Russian can be illustrated by 50 pieces of writing dedicated to the issue.

The review of Philaret's writing shows that he was involved in such diverse subjects as interpretation of the Holy scripture, translation of Holy Scripture and other theological texts, indoctrination, writing of prayers, sermons, descriptions of the lives of the Saints, history of the Church, Christian polemics and apologetics, Russian history, poetry and letters.

How did the contemporaries see Metropolitan Philaret as a person?

Wilhelm Von Humboldt who visited the Moscow Luminary on the way to Siberia was impressed by Philaret's extraordinary intellect and erudition.

Describing Philaret's appearance and manners Strudza writes that his features are proportional, his pronunciation clear, every expression of his speech is precise, apt and worthy of attention. Sometimes his remarks are characterized by subtle, not offending irony, which is made softer by the dignity of his cloth. Strudza's opinion is that Philaret is more revered and feared than loved.

All contemporaries unanimously witness that Philaret led a strict ascetic life during his 59 years of monasticism. N.Dobronravov remarks that the simplicity of his house did not seem to reflect his high rank at all. In his cell in Gethsemane Skete one could see bare wooden walls and simple seats. Both in the Lavra and in Moscow he stayed in old, simple, small chambers which lacked in contemporary style of decoration and were almost unchanged since the times of Metropolitan Platon. His whole lifestyle was extremely unassuming. Clothing, appropriate for his rank, was never elegant. Food was always scarce, never any wine; a bit of fish, a bit of bread, some ordinary vegetables, some tea – this was all that supported the Metropolitan's bodily strength. Similar account about Philaret was given in the memoirs of French Cardinal Pitra and Quaker Stefan Grelier who visited St.-Petersburg in 1818-1819 and described him as "a man of science", emphasizing his simple lifestyle, his humility, his strict fasting and prayer, which served as an example to follow for his contemporaries.

In all these accounts outer simplicity, modesty and humility are the most prominent features. Contrary to that, his opponents described him as arrogant and even despotic. A clear picture of the two sides of Philaret's character, one of which could give rise to such accusations, is described by Florinsky: if the Philaret of Kiev was known to be good-natured, the Philaret of Moscow was called a wise father, at times good-natured and sometimes strict, depending on which way it was easier to do good for the Church and its members – a father who was accessible at any time of day or night. There are several instances known when priests came to him at midnight or 2 o'clock in the morning with difficult cases, and the blessed memory Vladyka would receive those in need of advice and, in spite of the midnight hour, resolve their doubts.

Archbishop Amvrosiy of Kharkov (Alexei Klucharev, who founded the Magazine *Dushepolesnoe chteniye*, or *Reading Useful for the Soul* in 1860) writes, "So in the great soul of Philaret there were two men: the man of intellect, law, duty, truth, order, and the man of deeply hidden love, humility and mercy. Only those who were fortunate enough to see this inner side of the great luminary can have a correct and wholesome idea of what he was like."

From this we can draw a conclusion that there existed an image of a strict but also merciful and, first of all, just patriarch. This is confirmed by the evidence of other contemporaries. Archbishop Amvrosiy recalls that when he was still an ordinary parish priest, he was able to persuade the Metropolitan to change his mind on several occasions, even to the extent of changing the already made decisions, when he saw that the arguments of his opponent were convincing. Philaret let his subordinates have complete freedom of opinion and was even displeased if someone was too shy to address him directly with a question or request.

As administrator and judge in his diocese Metropolitan Philaret insisted on strict subordination being observed on all levels. At the same time he reprimanded any, even insignificant, case of servility. In numerous stories about Philaret's attitude to subordinates and relatives the Metropolitan is portrayed as a strict but fair hierarch.

Charity work was always important for Philaret. The words of Tolmachev, a lecturer at St.-Petersburg Theological Academy fired by Philaret, that he had not seen a single act of good performed by Philaret out of Christian love in 6 years, are contradicted not only by the abundant evidence of his contemporaries but also by a great number of indirect indications in Philaret's letters. Philaret never rejected any request for material help. Cardinal Pitra had to make his way through a throng of beggars surrounding Philaret's residence. Philaret was more preoccupied with charity than decoration of churches or church services. In 1854, a hard year for Russia, he denied an offer to have the Cathedral domes gilded at St-Sergius Trinity Lavra and wrote to Archimandrite Anthony, "Is it appropriate to gild anything when the times are so lacking in gilt?"

In another letter he refuses to have new vestments for liturgy made and writes that if God blesses the forthcoming year with enough bread for people to eat then it will be possible to rejoice with them and start thinking of the new vestments. Many times over we find instructions in his letters to the Vicar of the Lavra to give out money on particular feast days to priests, monks, the poor and the beggars from Philaret's own means.

One of his works of charity was to establish the Foundation of Help and Encouragement at St.-Petersburg Theological Academy. In 1815 he compiled a report concerning the conditions of students with low income at the parish and district schools. He took part in the work of the Imperial Humanitarian Society and founded a diocese orphanage-school for girls of clerical background. Countless cases of personal unnoticed charity witness about Philaret's innate sense of justice. Thus, Sushkov is telling a story of a deacon whom Philaret had to suspend from service. The Metropolitan knew that the family needed support, so he would send someone the deacon's wife did not know with the sum of money equal to her husband's salary. Quite frequently personal memos can be found indicating Philaret's concern for people close to him. For example, he writes to the Superior of the Holy Trinity Sergius Lavra Archimandrite Anthony urging him to look after his own health as well as the affairs of the Lavra. However, there were not many people with whom Philaret had such trusting relationship as with Anthony. In his letters to Anthony he addresses him as a close personal adviser and a spiritual friend. In his letters to Alexis we see him as a kind, loving and considerate father and protector.

Since he led a strict ascetic life it is no wonder that Philaret limited his contacts with the world to the areas related to his service to God. In his very essence he was a true servant of God. His attitude to this world based on the concept of "vanity of vanities" often brought him the accusation of coldness. "The cold Philaret who is doing good for a person as a sacrifice to Heaven and not to man does not feel the need and does not accept the moral duty for hearty friendly connection and communication between those doing good and those receiving it". Having been asked by the Chairman of the Synod, Metropolitan Amvrosiy, if he wanted to fulfill the wish of Metropolitan Platon, who had supported his teaching and preaching and was like a father to him, and return to him, Philaret answered that "having taken the monastic vows he had denounced his own will and had given himself totally to the will of God and authority". Knowing that total obedience and denunciation of own will is the fundamental monastic rule we

cannot accuse Philaret of coldness and should respect his demands on himself in the struggle for self-perfection. If we look at it this way we shall see that his frequently mentioned strict asceticism is in full harmony with his spiritual make-up and is not just a reflection of it. However, it is mentioned in many letters and memoirs that Philaret was accessible to people at any time and was not cold or distant towards them. His deep humility, so frequently mentioned but wrongly understood, to a certain extent is shown in the very fact that he addressed those people who mentioned it with objections and reproach. Throughout his life Philaret remained modest and did not impose his thoughts on others, while they remained his own thoughts and not the dogmatic issues or the questions of the good of the Church. Thus, he writes to his vicar, bishop Alexiy, (in a review to his essay), that he would not wish Alexiy to be restricted in any way by the thoughts that he, Philaret, was expressing. Metropolitan Philaret's modesty is also shown in the instructions to the Superior of the Lavra Archimandrite Anthony regarding a greeting ceremony: he writes that he would try and arrive at the Lavra well in advance, so that no people or bells in the Lavra or surrounding area were moved on his account.

So we have a portrait of Philaret, a man of humility, a strict ascetic, filled with the spirit of monasticism, charitable for the sake of God, treating the world strictly and justly.

Published in the *Vestnik of the German Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad* magazine, No 6, 2002, pp 24-28.

Translated into English: May 2007

