

The Path of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Observations and Thoughts of an Old Priest

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In connection with the recent turmoil within the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, I think it would be beneficial to share certain observations and reflections. Recently there has been much talk about the path followed by the ROCA. Now it has become obvious that the “straight” path which some people refer to, has led in the end to a schism within the ROCA. This schism has been ripening over many years. In order to understand what is going on, one should look first of all at the Guideposts that actually have determined the course of the ROCA throughout its history.

The First Guidepost was Ukaz (Decree) No. 362 of Patriarch Tikhon, dated Nov. 20, 1920, paragraph 2:

In the event that a diocese, as a result of movement of the front lines, or changes of state borders, finds itself out of communication with the highest church authority, or that the highest church authority itself, headed by the Holy Patriarch, for some reason terminates its activity, the diocesan bishop should immediately contact the bishops of the adjacent dioceses in order to organize a higher level of church administration for several dioceses which find themselves in similar circumstances (in the form of a temporary church government or a metropolitan district, or in some other way).

This Ukaz was formulated at the time of the Civil War in Russia, whose consequence was the departure abroad of a sizeable lay flock (estimated at over a million), and of a substantial number of clergy and bishops.

The Second Guidepost on the path of the ROCA were the early Sobors (Councils) of Bishops Abroad, presided over by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky): the First Sobor in Constantinople in 1920, in which 34 bishops participated in person or in writing; the First Sobor of representatives of the entire ROCA, held in the town of Sremskii Karlovtsi in Serbia in 1921; and the Sobor of Bishops Abroad on September 13, 1922, which established a Temporary Synod of Bishops, based on the above-quoted Ukaz No. 362 of Patriarch Tikhon. At those Sobors, which led to the formal establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, were represented parishes in Europe, the Balkans, the Near and Far East, North and South America, including the soon-to-be-separated Metropolitan Districts: one known as the Paris Metropolia, presently under the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the other known today as the Orthodox Church in America in the USA.

The Third Guidepost was the Resolution of the Sobor of Bishops of the ROCA, in September of 1927, which rejected the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius and defined the following rule:

The part of the All-Russian Church located abroad must cease all administrative relations with the church administration in Moscow...until restoration of normal relations with Russia and until the liberation of our Church from persecutions by the godless Soviet authorities...The part of the Russian Church that finds itself abroad considers itself an inseparable, spiritually united branch of the Great Russian Church. It does not separate itself from its Mother Church and does not consider itself autocephalous.

This Resolution makes it clear that the emigré Hierarchs, while rejecting what later became known as *Sergianism*, did not separate the part of the church that was abroad from that in the homeland, thus showing compassion to those who did not withstand the terror. At about that time evolved the concept of the three parts of the Russian Church: the "Church enslaved", that is, the Moscow Patriarchate; the "Catacomb Church", i.e., the secret, persecuted, underground Church of confessors within the borders of the Soviet Union; and the "Russian Orthodox Church Abroad", which was the free voice of the whole Russian Church.

The Fourth Guidepost was the adoption of the Temporary Polozheniye (Fundamental Law) of the ROCA by the General Sobor of Bishops on September 22-24, 1936. Its first paragraph states:

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which consists of dioceses, spiritual missions, and parishes outside Russia, is an inseparable part of the Russian Orthodox Church, which exists temporarily under autonomous administration.

This Sobor, in effect, established an orderly administrative leadership of the ROCA for the entire period of its independent existence.

The Fifth Guidepost is defined by the Reply of the Blessed Metropolitan Anastassy in 1945, and of the Bishops' Sobor in Munich in 1946, in response to the address of the Patriarch of Moscow Aleksey I, who called for reunification after the Second World War. During this terrible period of manhunts by Soviet agents for displaced persons and non-returnees all across Western Europe, Metropolitan Anastassy, reasserting the necessity for the continued existence of independent ROCA, writes:

The bishops, the clergy and the laymen, subordinate to the jurisdiction of the Synod of Bishops Abroad, never broke canonical, prayer, or spiritual unity with their Mother Church.

The Sobor of Bishops in its message writes to the Patriarch of Moscow:

We trust that...on the bones of martyrs a new free Russia will arise, strong in Orthodox truth and brotherly love...then all of her scattered sons, without any pressure or force, but freely and joyfully, will strive to return from all over into her maternal embrace. Recognizing our unbroken spiritual bonds with our

homeland, we sincerely pray to the Lord that he may speedily heal the wounds inflicted upon our homeland by this heavy, although victorious, war, and bless it with peace and well-being.

This message was signed by Metropolitan Anastassy, three archbishops, and ten bishops.

The Sixth Guidepost, and probably the most important one in our days, is the Corporate Charter in the USA of our Church Abroad, which was signed by its most prominent Hierarchs, Metropolitan Anastassy, Archbishop Vitaly (Maximenko), Archbishop Tikhon, Archbishop Hieronim, Bishop Seraphim, and Bishop Nikon, and registered in the State of New York on April 30th, 1952. It states:

II. The principal aim and purpose of the corporation shall be to provide for the administration of dioceses, missions, monasteries, churches and parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church, which are located in the United States of America, the Dominion of Canada and other countries which are outside of the Soviet Union and the satellites of the Soviet Union, but including dioceses, missions, monasteries and churches which recognise the corporation as the supreme ecclesiastical authority over them.

III. The corporation in its corporate functions and operation, and all of its trustees and officers, shall maintain no relations whatever with the Russian ecclesiastical authorities and organizations within the boundaries of the Soviet Union and the satellites of the Soviet Union, so long as the said countries, or any of them, shall be subject to Communist rule.

Further on, the next paragraph of the Charter refers to Ukaz #362 of Patriarch Tikhon of November 20, 1920, and its acceptance by the Sobor of Bishops on November 24, 1936. This demonstrates that Metropolitan Anastassy and all Bishops, signatories of the Charter, just as, in their time, Metropolitan Anthony and the founding Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad, accepted the fact that the validity of the Ukaz of Patriarch Tikhon, which, in effect, is his Patriarchal Blessing, is limited in time. In turn, they also blessed the time-limited independent existence of the Russian Church Abroad until the fall of the Communist regime.

The Seventh Guidepost is again the Polozheniye (Fundamental Law) of the Russian Church Abroad, revised and approved by the Sobor of Bishops, presided over by Metropolitan Anastassy, in 1956. Its paragraph #1 states:

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is an inseparable part of the Local (Pomestnoy) Orthodox Church, temporarily self-governing until the fall in Russia of the godless authorities, in compliance with the Decision of Holy Patriarch Tikhon and the Highest Church Council of the Church in Russia of 7 /20 November 1920, #362.

The same Paragraph is repeated word for word in the Polozheniye, reviewed and re-approved in 1964.

In 1956 the Reply of Metropolitan Anastassy was reprinted by Holy Trinity Monastery. The same themes were voiced by Archbishop Vitaly (Maximenko) of blessed memory, in his work *Motifs of My Life*. Archbishop Andrew (Fr Adrian) used to refer to the Church Abroad as a temporarily self-governing Diocese of the Russian Church. Holy Archbishop John of Shanghai and San Francisco wrote:

The Russian Church Abroad does not separate itself spiritually from the suffering Mother Church. She offers up prayers for her, preserves her spiritual and material wealth, and in due time will reunite with her, when the reasons which have caused the separation will have vanished.

Similar statements were made by many other archpastors, priests and writers in the church press. It is from them that our generation, which came into the Church after the end of the Second World War in 1945, has acquired the understanding of the temporary existence of the independent Russian Church Abroad until the liberation of Russia from the Communist yoke. The calls of Metropolitans Anastassy and Philaret of blessed memory to abstain even from conventional contacts with the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate had to do with the period of the 1960s and 1970s, when the Soviet government began to use the Church for its own ends throughout the Western world. And Metropolitan Vitaly was completely correct when he said that we cannot declare that the Church in Russia is without Grace, but certain specific deeds of its clergy, performed on orders of the godless authorities in order to harm the Church, are, of course, graceless.

In 1991 the Communist regime fell and the totalitarian Soviet state ceased to exist. The leftovers of the Soviet mentality and even of the State government still remain, but the country and the Church consider themselves free and feel free, and there is no more party ideology to interfere with Church communications. Therefore, with the fall of the Soviet government and cessation of terror in 1991, there also ended the time span, blessed by Holy Patriarch Tikhon and the founding Archpastors of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad for the existence of ROCA as a separate entity.

The Path marked by the abovementioned Guideposts began to be subtly changed with the secret (and canonically questionable) consecration of Bishop Varnava (Barnabas) in about 1984. A new ideology began to be evident, subtly but deeply russophobic. Under the guise of restoring the archpastorship of the Catacomb Church, new church bodies began to be created within Russia, subordinate to the Church Abroad. The old Catacomb Church, which was highly respected as the Church of true confessors, was soon forgotten. The new ideology promoted the idea that the Russian Church Abroad is the only true Church, and the bearer of the restoration of the Church in Russia. This led to estrangement and unnecessary confrontations between the Russian Church Abroad and the Mother Church, and then to a strange set of attitudes and actions on the part of some ROCA bishops, first in Russia, and more recently abroad. Now that these bishops and their followers have expelled themselves

from the Church Abroad and created their own church organizations, the Church Abroad has regained freedom of opinion and an opportunity to return to the path blessed by Holy Patriarch Tikhon and the Founding First Hierarchs and Archpastors of blessed memory.

The new obstacles to normal relations that have been brought forward within our Church Abroad, such as the absence of repentance, failure to glorify the Royal New Martyrs, Sergianism, and participation in the ecumenical movement, have today ceased to be insurmountable. Back in 1993 His Holiness, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, AlexeyII and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church proclaimed, before God and the Russian people, repentance for the sin of regicide. Their Epistle on the 75th anniversary of the murder of Emperor Nicholas II and his family states:

With augmented prayer and great pain in our hearts we commemorate this sad Anniversary... The sin of regicide, which took place amid the indifference of the citizens of Russia, has not been repented of by our people. Being a transgression of both the law of God and civil law, this sin weighs extremely heavily upon the souls of our people, upon its moral conscience. And today, on behalf of the whole Church, on behalf of her children, both reposed and living, we proclaim repentance before God and the people for this sin. Forgive us, O Lord! We call to repentance all of our people, all of our children, regardless of their political views and opinions about history, regardless of their attitude toward the idea of Monarchy and the personality of the last Russian Tsar. Repentance of the sin committed by our forefathers should become for us a banner of unity. May today's sad date unite us in prayer with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, with whom we so sincerely desire restoration of spiritual unity in faithfulness to the Spirit of Christ... .

The call was, unfortunately, ignored.

The Royal New Martyrs were glorified, and Sergianism and ecumenism rejected, by the Jubilee Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in the year 2000. Sergianism, being in fact not a doctrine but a mode of behaviour, was rejected in the chapter *Fundamental Conceptions of Society* in the published Acts of the Sobor, and ecumenism in the chapter *Fundamental Principles of Relations of the Orthodox Church to the Heterodox*. In October of 2001, in his *Brotherly Epistle to the Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad*, His Holiness, Patriarch AlexeyII again called for mutual forgiveness and restoration of liturgical communion. The answer of the ROCA Sobor of Bishops was only mildly encouraging.

Just as in the Church in Russia the veneration of the Royal New Martyrs was widely practised by believers long before their official glorification, so it is that parishioners of the Church Abroad, when they visit Russia, pray, confess, and partake of Holy Communion in their beloved churches and monasteries of the Moscow Patriarchate, and have humbly done so for many years, without making an issue of it. And after visiting Russia, many of our clergy, including American converts to Orthodoxy, state in private conversations that those who say there is no Grace in the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate do not know what they are talking about. As no one has wanted to provoke the ill winds of dissension within our ranks, it

has been customary not to make such observations publicly. However, now that the bearers of ill winds have expelled themselves from the Church, showing no respect for anyone including the Sobor of Bishops, the possibility has arisen again and perhaps for the last time, of restoring God-pleasing spiritual unity and normal relations with the whole Mother Church.

Sinful individuals and bad deeds have always existed, exist now, and will continue to exist both there, in Russia, and here in our midst. But a division which was lawful must not be allowed to evolve into sectarian schism, a phenomenon much discussed and feared by many of our priests and parishioners, both, Russians and Americans. If the Russian Church Abroad is allowed to become "a broken-off vine", it will be doomed to a slow but inevitable drying out, an atrophy from which no collection of selected quotations from the Canons will save us. On the other hand, the restoration of Eucharistic and Canonical unity with the Mother Church, with an autonomous administration of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, appears to be the natural next Guidepost in the current History of the Church of the Great Russian Exodus into Diaspora.

December 11, 2001. Boston

New Martyr Metropolitan Seraphim

(Chichagov) of St. Petersburg.

(Translated and revised by the Author)