

A Study of the Ecclesiology of Resistance

The Writings of Metropolitans
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, Chrysostomos
of Florina, and Cyril of Kazan



by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

"God-pleasing resistance" may appear at first sight to be a contradiction in terms. Is not Christianity all about love, peace, and harmony? Indeed, the holy Apostle Paul addresses the following exhortation to the Christians in Corinth: "...Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (II Corinthians 13:11). "Resistance" is apt to conjure up images of people fighting against foreign aggressors with acts of bloodshed and sabotage. Moreover, the Greek word for resistance, "ἔνστασις," derives from "στάσις," of which one range of meanings is "[a] party formed for seditious purposes, faction, sedition, discord, division." How, then, can such attitudes as these be pleasing to God? Does not St. Paul rebuke the Corinthians for contentiousness, for saying, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (I Corinthians 1:12)?

The same Apostle, however, gives the following warning to the Church in Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31). The Apostle hereby exhorts us to exercise constant vigilance over the Church of which we are the members.

If we should form factions for personal gain, we are indeed guilty of dividing the flock. But when the Church is assailed by wolves in sheep's clothing, that is, by heretics masquerading as

Hierarchs, each one of us, whether a clergyman or a layman, has a sacred responsibility to guard the treasure entrusted to us (cf. I Timothy 6:20). St. Peter also advises us: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist ["ἀντίστητε"] steadfast in the Faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (I St. Peter 5:8-9). It is, after all, the devil who sows seeds of dissension among Christians; it is he who, as the "father of lies" (St. John 8:44), seeks to lead the flock astray with false teachings. And to him, we must react in a spirit of "steadfast resistance."

In a provocative and insightful article on the ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Greek theologian Father John Romanides maintains that the Church has two aspects, "one positive—love, unity, and communion of immortality with each other and with the saints in Christ; and one negative—the war against Satan and his powers, already defeated in the flesh of Christ by those living in Christ, beyond death."¹ All of us who belong to the Body of Christ must show ourselves worthy of our lofty calling, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."² But what, in view of Father Romanides' observations about the negative aspect of the Church, are we to do when "grievous wolves" enter in among the flock, sowing seeds of dissension?

There are times when such dissension is introduced into the Church by her leaders. In normal circumstances, of course, we should obey our spiritual leaders, as we are instructed by St. Paul: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their way of life.... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your

¹ "The ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 7 (1962): 63-64.

² Ephesians 4:2-3.

souls, as they that must give account" (Hebrews 13:7,17). But if our leaders are wicked, what are we to do? "Wicked?" asks St. John Chrysostomos. "In what sense? *If indeed in regard to Faith, flee and avoid him*; not only if he be a man, but even if he be an Angel come down from Heaven;³ but if in regard to life, be not over-curious." In other words, we should avoid contact with Hierarchs who pervert the Faith, "preaching heresy publicly, and teaching it with bared head in the Church,"⁴ but not necessarily with those whose way of life is, say, in some way immoral, solely on the basis of such immorality.⁵ The latter are not likely to cause as much direct harm to the Faithful, for even if they were the most wicked people on earth, they would still not be as dangerous as those who teach heresy. "But as respects Faith, [the evil] is not manifest to all, and the wicked will not shrink from teaching it."⁶

Such is the advice we are given by one of the greatest of the Church Fathers, who actually died outside the communion of the Church of which he had been Patriarch, because he had the courage to denounce the greed and corruption in Church life, corruption manifested not least of all by the Byzantine Empress Eudoxia. It is clear what our attitude should be towards error and

³ "But though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

⁴ Canon 15 of the First-Second Synod [Constantinople, 861] (*Pedalion* [Athens: "Astir" Publishing House, 1970], p. 358).

⁵ There are, of course, canonical grounds for deposing Bishops who fall short in the area of morality. The 25th Apostolic Canon requires that any Bishop who commits fornication, perjury or theft be deposed. Later on we shall see Metropolitan Chrysostomos arguing, on the basis of the 66th Apostolic Canon and the 9th Canon of the First-Second Synod, that the innovating Archbishop Chrysostomos of Athens should have been deposed for his violent persecution and complicity in the murder of Old Calendarist Faithful.

⁶ Homily 34 on Hebrews, tr. Frederic Gardiner (*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. XIV [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989]), p. 519.

corruption in the Church. If we are indeed, as the people of God and the very body of the Church, the “guardian of the religion,”⁷ the very guardians who prevent even Patriarchs and Synods from “introducing novelties” into the Church, are we not responsible for insuring that the deadly spirit of innovation does not infect the Body of Christ, of which we are the members?

Far from apologizing for taking a stand of resistance against error in the Church, as if we who are at present in resistance have caused the problems to which innovation gives rise, we should be proud of our resistance,⁸ bearing in mind that the course of Church history, at least in the East, has always been marked by controversy. Bishop Chrysostomos of Etna remarks, apropos of Father Romanides’ article, that “the Church survives conflict and separation,” that her “great triumphs...are commemorated by events closely related to conflict and trial,”⁹ and that “movements within the Church that have caused separation (the hesychastic controversy, the Kollyvades movement, and, of late, the Old Calendar movement) have also contributed to the theological richness of Orthodoxy.”¹⁰ We can go so far as to state that resistance to error is part of the very definition of the Church. Just as, on an individual level, we must constantly be on our guard against the prowlings of the devil and his minions, so also, on the ecclesiastical level, we must always be on the lookout, for the hireling “fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the

⁷ *Reply of the Orthodox Patriarchs of the East to Pope Pius IX (1848)*, §17, in *Dogmatic and Credal Statements of the Orthodox Catholic Church* [in Greek], ed. John Karmiris, 2nd ed. (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druckerei. Verlagsanstalt, 1968), vol. 2, p. 1000.

⁸ But not prideful in such resistance, as if we were personally endowed with a greater degree of purity than everyone else.

⁹ Such as the Œcumenical Synods and the restoration of icons, which are celebrated liturgically on four occasions during the ecclesiastical year (the First Sunday of the Great Fast, the Sunday before Pentecost, the Sunday falling between July 13-19, and the Sunday falling between October 11-17).

¹⁰ “Demonology in the Orthodox Church: a psychological perspective,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33 (1988): 49.

sheep.”¹¹

In the twentieth century, the Orthodox Church has been thrown into tremendous confusion. It could be said that the crisis through which we are now passing is no less severe than those crises faced by the Church during the period of the Seven Œcumenical Synods, and in particular the crisis provoked by the Iconoclast heresy in the eighth and early ninth centuries. In January 1920, the *locum tenens* of the Œcumenical Patriarchate, Metropolitan Dorotheos of Proussa, together with eleven other Metropolitans, issued an Encyclical “To the Churches of Christ Everywhere.” Stating that “the approach of the different Christian Churches to each other and their mutual communion is not excluded by the dogmatic differences that exist between them,” the Encyclical recommends, among other things, “the acceptance of a unified calendar for the simultaneous celebration of the great Christian feasts by all the Churches.”¹² The joint prayer services between Orthodox and heterodox that are such a normal part of the contemporary ecclesiastical scene were made possible, to a great extent, by this Encyclical, which ushered in our present epoch of apostasy from the true teachings of the Orthodox Church.

One example of the ecumenical compromises which have been quietly introduced into the Orthodox Church is the fact that, over the last few years, it has become a “tradition” for the Œcumenical Patriarchate to send representatives to the Vatican on June 29 (according to the Papal Calendar) to celebrate the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and for the Vatican to reciprocate for this gesture on November 30 (New Style), the Feast of St. Andrew (the Patronal Feast of the Œcumenical Throne), by sending Churchmen to the Phanar. In these latter ceremonies, joint blessings of the assembled Faithful by the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Cardinal representing the Pope are now

¹¹ St. John 10:13.

¹² *Encyclical of the Œcumenical Patriarchate “To the Churches of Christ everywhere,”* in Karmiris, *op. cit.*, pp. 957-959.

de rigueur, despite the fact that Tradition and the canons forbid the participation of non-Orthodox in the liturgical services of the Orthodox Church. Likewise, though the Moscow Patriarchate continues to follow the Julian Calendar, and has thus not yet adopted the ecumenical agenda regarding a universal Christian festal calendar, it is nonetheless avidly involved in the ecumenical movement. The fact that the largest of the Orthodox Churches has fully embraced the spirit of the Encyclical of 1920 is yet further evidence of the inroads that religious relativism and the mandates of world religion have made into the Orthodox Christian world.

The struggle that has been waged this century against innovation in the guise of ecumenism and the calendar reform shows that resistance to error in the Church is still a burning issue. Although all of the “official” Orthodox Churches are now members of the World Council of Churches, some who belong to these Churches—to say nothing of the Traditionalist (Old Calendarist) Orthodox Churches in resistance—, have considerable reservations about this ecumenical participation. But the present disunity has a more visible aspect. Just as Arius rent the seamless garment of Christ in the 320s, so Patriarch Meletios IV (Metaxakis) of Constantinople sundered the unity of the Church in the 1920s, when he proposed that all of the local Orthodox Churches adopt the “revised” Julian Calendar, which in reality was nothing other than the Papal or Gregorian Calendar with the Orthodox *Paschalion* [the method for determining the date of Pascha decreed by the First Œcumenical Synod of Nicæa in 325] crudely and imprecisely imposed upon it. The result of this proposal was that some Orthodox Churches accepted the New Calendar, while others retained the Old. In simple terms, this entails that one half the Orthodox world is singing “Thy Nativity, O Christ our God...” even as the other half is chanting hymns of praise to St. Spyridon or St. Herman of Alaska, or that one group of Orthodox keeps the fast even as another is celebrating its end!

The change in the *Heortologion*, or calendar of immovable Feasts, is customarily presented by those who follow this inno-

vation as an innocuous modification of something that does not at all impinge on the central dogmas of the Orthodox Church. After all, in celebrating the Nativity of our Lord on December 25 according to the civil calendar (which is actually December 12 by the Church Calendar), we are surely not denying that God is "Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided," or that Christ is truly God and truly Man. Therefore, the calendar is, we are told, an entirely secondary issue, or as some would put it nowadays, a "tradition" rather than part of "Tradition" (this popular distinction between minor and major traditions, incidentally, being one found in absolutely *no Father of the Church*).

As one writer points out, however, the Iconoclasts also mocked the Orthodox for believing that icons, which at one level are pieces of wood covered with paint, are a dogma of the Faith. Yet nobody today would deny that icons have dogmatic significance. "Concerning this question, Father Paul, a monk of the Holy Sepulchre, remarked most justly that a board, before it has the countenance of our Saviour portrayed upon it, is but a common piece of wood which we may burn up or destroy. From the moment, however, that we paint the icon of Christ, the King of All, upon it, this wood becomes sanctified and a source of sanctification for us, even though the wood be of inferior quality. Likewise, the solar calendar, insofar as it is a calendar of days and months is, in itself, nothing to be esteemed. But from the moment when the Holy Church placed Her seal upon it and organized Her life upon this foundation, even though it has become astronomically erroneous [as is the Gregorian Calendar, too, we would emphasize], still it remains holy! The calendar is no longer *Julian*, but *ecclesiastical*, just as the board is no longer a simple piece of wood but an icon."¹³

In this monograph, we shall focus on resistance in the Church as it touches on the issues of the calendar change and the Ecu-

¹³ Fr. Basile Sakkas, *The Calendar Question*, tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1973), p. 11.

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