

ADDRESS
of
ARCHIMANDRITE GREGORY (GRABBE)
AT HIS NOMINATION AS BISHOP OF MANHATTEN

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When the ascent of a lofty mountain lies before a man and he stands at its foot, he is involuntarily seized by doubt: Has he sufficient strength to climb this distant, snowy peak? Will his foot slip over a steep precipice into an abyss? Will he plummet to his death instead of ascending beyond the surrounding countryside to enjoy a wondrous view of the wide horizon?

The goal of hierarchal service can thus be joyful and attractive. On each of its levels it can disclose to us newer and yet newer horizons; but therein acknowledging one's own weakness and sinfulness, how can one but tremble before each cliff that arises before one and which one must surmount on the way? The Apostle Paul says: "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3:1); but he also gives us a warning, saying: "A bishop then must be blameless" (v. 2). If a man is involuntarily seized with trembling at the sight of the steep cliffs and precipices which lie on his path to the lofty, snowy summit, how much more profoundly should he tremble before the spiritual mountain to which he is led, far from blameless, to stand before a fall into the abyss? Is it not natural to expect such in one's sinfulness and spiritual weakness? And it is all the more fearsome in that one may lead many of the souls entrusted to one's care after you.

I say openly: when the possibility of my election to the hierarchal see confronted me, I knew not which was better—to hinder it from the very outset, or to assent unquestioningly.

I recalled when, forty-three years ago, a similar question confronted me. When the Provisional Statute of the Church Administration was being worked out in Sremsky-Karlovtzy with Metropolitans Evlogy and Theophil, the responsibility of chancellor of the Synod was bound up with the priestly rank, or so it was deemed preferable. In regard to this, my abbas, Metropolitans Anthony and Anastassy, placed before me the opportunity to receive ordination to the priesthood. At that time I did not wish to submit to their invitation, for it seemed to me that I would be accepting the priesthood not so much for its own sake, as for that of the position bound up with it. And I refused it, not out of humility, but, on the contrary, vindicating my own independence and liberty.

Then, ten years afterwards, when circumstances themselves began to indicate that, for the good of my service in Synod, it was extremely important for me to appear before the military and civil authorities in the rank of priest, I sensed that by holding fast to my independence I was exhibiting more that pride of the nobility than the humility and obedience which are essential in serving the Church.

One of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Anthony's sermons on the Annunciation came to my mind. He set before us as an example the All-holy Virgin's obedience in response to the archangel's words concerning her being chosen. He acknowledges as fitting the refusal to accept appointment to an ecclesiastical position on grounds of humility, but calls us to obedience. "Obedience," he says, "is a far more lofty disposition than humility." And he concludes: "When there is talk of election to a high post, he that has been elected can have but one, true, guiding

principle—obedience." Replying to the possible declaration that one might not consider oneself worthy, he points out: "It is not necessary to state this, but one should keep in mind that the Church is sending you and expects obedience of you."

And thus, dear hierarchs, being already of advanced age I have arrived at the conclusion that every decision of the Council of Bishops should be accepted unhesitatingly, as an obedience; for this cause I now stand before you with the words prescribed in the rite: "I am thankful, I accept and say naught against it," although, mindful of my weakness and sinfulness, I might well be able to say much against it that would be convincing. In particular, it frightens me that at the Dread Judgment, in accordance with God's righteousness, they will be held more accountable, to whom more has been given in this life.

Much has been given me, and I feel that I have profited too little by these gifts. I know that another in my place would have acquired more knowledge and pious skills, and would have brought greater profit to the Church. The Lord granted me to grow up in a churchly family, with parents who were not only dedicated to the Church with all their heart, but were also knowledgable in theological matters. Very early they began to instil in me dedication to the Church and the theological interests inherited from my ancestor. Finally, the Lord arranged that I study the theological art in close proximity with such great hierarchs as Metropolitan Anthony and Metropolitan Anastassy. For all of my long life, I should have been able with sufficient diligence to acquire from them far more than these crumbs of their wisdom and piety which I managed to apprehend. With gratitude I recall them and other hierarchs, outstanding in their knowledge and theological wisdom, who favored me with their good will, as, for example, Archbishop Gavriil of Chelyabinsk and Bishop Nikolai of Okhrid.

All of these my teachers encouraged me, saying that we must not yield to the evil which is spreading around us, but denounce it and struggle with it. Bearing absolutely no one any personal enmity, I have called it forth against myself from various quarters. Attacks on me which have appeared in print and, even more, in anonymous letters, long ago became a perennial phenomenon in my life. I have even been threatened. Even the recent past has not been free of this.

What then? Of course I know and admit that I am a sinful man and am especially grieved if my sin is able to cause anyone else to stumble. However, in the malice it has been my lot to encounter, I have seen that, to a great degree, it has been called forth not so much by personal shortcomings as by disagreement with the direction of my ecclesiastical activity. Sometimes I have been attacked for what I have done in obedience. But (Glory to God!) in this regard I have never been ordered to do anything contrary to my conscience.

Not only from books, but also in living relationships has the Lord given me examples of strugglers for faith and piety, preparing me by degrees, in the course of many years, for this day. At my present age people usually end the course of their lives, but you have summoned me to begin a new task. And who will tell me what I will bring to the Holy Church: the experience of many years, or the infirmities of old age, which at my age can rapidly set in? However, it is now too late to think of this. The question has been decided not by me, but by our first hierarch, to whom we are all bound in humble obedience.

He is our leader, our standard in these days which are so troubled and grievous for the Church. We know that many zealots of the Faith in Russia and Greece honor him as such. It is all the more important for us to acknowledge this and follow him. The Orthodox system is a

hierarchal and theocratic order. Samuel condemned Saul, and Saul admitted that he was guilty of showing greater obedience to the people than to God. He said to Samuel: "I have sinned, in that I have transgressed the word of the Lord and thy direction; for I feared the people, and I hearkened to their voice" (I Kings 15:24).

From my youth I have understood that each rejection of this principle, either in the Church or in the government, can lead only to pernicious crimes. The significance of a hierarchy lies in that it follows the commandments of the Lord, paying no heed to this or that inclination of the people and not giving way or following their bent, but guiding them along the path of righteousness. The Russian Revolution took place when I was young, though sufficiently mature to understand all the perniciousness of that dreadful phenomenon. All the calamities which came about because of the betrayal of the Tsar were, for me, the natural consequences of the national sins of revolution. I very early noted how this sin grew, and, shaken by the people's betrayal of the Tsar, I attached myself with all my heart to those who, like my father, strove nevertheless to serve him even at that sorrowful time. Rising up against the revolution, I often sensed our feebleness, yet, on the other hand, the moral obligation of the people's oath of allegiance to the Tsar, even though I, young as I was, had not taken it. With horror I watched how the sin of oath breaking spiritually smashed the Russian people, depriving them of their best qualities.

Afterwards, when I was already serving in the Church administration, how often I beheld the consequences of this sin in the disorders in the life of our parishes and dioceses. Alas! Even certain hierarchs proved to be under the influence of these tendencies, losing their faithfulness to the canons, the Church authorities and the entire system of the Church. They usually justified their type of activity as the will of the majority. Alas! Their contempt for the canons fragmented the Russian Church both in Europe and in America.

Yet after these (as it were) purely Russian trials, others have arisen over recent years, directed against the very dogma of the Church and the fundamental precepts of the morality of the Church.

And, lo! we are now confronted by new heresies which were apparently impossible after the confirmation of the Orthodox confession of faith at the Ecumenical Councils.

Just as, when I was young, I beheld the growth of the evil of revolution and the misfortunes of the people attendant upon it, so have the contours of the heresy directed against the dogma of the Church begun to be outlined with increasing clarity. Beginning inoffensively (so it appeared), from a mere display of good relations with the heterodox, representatives of the Churches have more and more gone over to such rapprochement with them that communion in prayer has begun without oneness of mind as regards the dogmas of the Church. We have seen how the boundaries between heterodoxy and Orthodoxy, and even those between the Church and the avowed enemies of Christ, have been erased. They are striving to break down the boundaries of the Church in such a manner that all humanity, believers and non-believers, might be included therein, without, however, becoming Orthodox.

Do we not hear an insidious voice calling us to compromise, that the strictness of our ideals not impose an unbearable burden upon the flock?

This is already, in part, an old problem which has but grown more sensitive at this time. The Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, having laid down many strict canons, were also confronted by situations

where some proposed "to keep the strict canon," and others, "the canon of love and condescension." In a fatherly and God-pleasing manner they strove to bring both into union, that, as the third canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council states, "we neither carry meekness to excess nor leave an acrid impression of austerity." Still, if the holy Fathers permitted condescension to individual sinners, yet, remaining strict in principle, they clearly defined the boundary between Orthodoxy and heresy, between truth and falsehood. Service to the ecumenism and modernism now popular was foreign to them.

What then is this modernism? It is the lowering of the religious and moral requirements of even the existing spiritual level. But inasmuch as human nature is far more accustomed to its natural weakness than to podvig, the assimilation of this principle leads unerringly to an extreme lowering of the spiritual level of the life of the Church, and instead of leading us towards that perfection to which Christ calls us, it leads us in the opposite direction: not up, but down.

Only the abundant grace of God can, in the difficult circumstances of the apostasy which surrounds us, teach us what measures to employ "to bring back the stray sheep and to heal the one poisoned by the serpent." Where is sufficient wisdom to be found that we not, as the 102nd canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council puts it, drive such a soul "to the verge of despair, nor give it rein to dissoluteness and contempt of life."

This is a pastoral problem which, to varying degrees, has always existed. It has only come to the fore at this time because of the general collapse of morality and the indifference to truth which now surrounds us. Beyond all of this can be heard the heavy tread of the approaching son of perdition. With wicked words of feigned love, malice, hatred and unbelief are being poured forth abundantly upon the world through the wide gates and by the broad way that leads to destruction (Mt. 7:13). Alas! We have seen how, from within the former precincts of Holy Russia, under the cloak of patriarchal vestments, the doctrine of the accomodation of truth to the falsehood of the atheistic world has been proclaimed. In rejection of this evil, the voice of our leaders in the diaspora has mingled with the voices of the martyrs and confessors in our homeland.

Yet, on the other hand, the mingling of faith and unbelief, truth and heresy, love and malice, has spread throughout the whole world. When the preaching of false prophets is everywhere heard and apparently accepted as genuine, how easy it is to be carried away thereby, or to fall into fear and despondency. This can apply directly to those who are called to pastoral (and even moreso to the archpastoral) service. Should we be dismayed that we are in the minority? In no way! We should remember the Savior's words of encouragement: "Fear not, little flock" (Lk. 12:32)!

Yet there are foes whom I cannot but fear: my weaknesses and my sinfulness. Repeatedly in my life they have been dangerous for me. This is a threat to my salvation and the salvation of my spiritual children; it has existed always and is averted only by the mercy of God. Mindful of this, I commend myself to the prayers of the ascetics who have known me, and to the prayers and love of all of you, eminent hierarchs. Offer up for me your holy prayers. Pray that, having risen to the height of episcopal rank, I fall not from that height to be dashed in pieces on the rock of sin. Pray that in my new service I be strengthened by divine grace, which ever heals infirmities and fills that which is lacking.