

THE CYPRIANITE-AGATHANGELITE UNION

In November, 2007 Bishop Agathangelus of Odessa entered into communion with the "Cyprianite" Synod of Greek Old Calendarists headed by Metropolitan Cyprian of Fili. (The Cyprianites claim that there has never been a break in communion between them and Bishop Agathangelus, but this is not strictly true, since the Lavrite Synod, of which Bishop Agathangelus was then a member, broke communion with the Cyprianites in 2006.) Then, early in December, Bishop Agathangelus consecrated two further bishops for his jurisdiction with the help of the Cyprianite Bishops Ambrose of Methone and George of Alania (South Ossetia) in Odessa: Andronik (Kotliarov) for New York, and Sophrony (Musienko) for St. Petersburg. So the "Agathangelite" Synod, thanks to the Cyprianites, now has three dioceses: one each for the Ukraine, Russia and North America.

Some are hailing this expansion of the Agathangelite Synod as "the resurrection of ROCOR". Does this title correspond to the truth about the Agathangelite Synod? It would correspond to the truth only if: (1) the confession of faith of this Synod were purely Orthodox, (2) its apostolic succession were undoubted, and (3) it were the only Synod that could reasonably argue that it was "the continuer of ROCOR". I believe that the Agathangelite Synod fails to pass this test on all three counts. Let us look at each in turn:-

1. The Confession of the Agathangelite Synod is not purely Orthodox.

Recently I put the following question to Bishop Ambrose of Methone: "Can we take it that Bishop Agathangelus shares your ecclesiology in all respects? In particular, does he, like your Synod, regard the Moscow Patriarchate as having grace?" His reply (the bishop was speaking only in his own name, not for the whole Cyprianite Synod) was: "So far as I know, and so far as I have discussed [it] with him, yes."

In other words, Bishop Agathangelus recognizes the Moscow Patriarchate and the whole of World Orthodoxy to be grace-filled. Moreover, he embraces the false Cyprianite ecclesiology that heretics such as Patriarchs Alexis and Bartholomew are "sick" members of the True Church. One's immediate reaction is: has Agathangelus learned nothing from the fall of Metropolitan Laurus? Or rather, does he consider it a "fall" at all, since Laurus, according to his and the Cyprianites' understanding, is simply returning to union with his "Mother Church", the Moscow Patriarchate? Does he not understand that it was precisely when ROCOR entered into communion with the Cyprianites, in 1994, that the Synod began negotiations with the Moscow Patriarchate and began its rapid descent into union with heresy?

For further elucidation of the confession of the Agathangelite-Cyprianites, we should turn to the section on the Cyprianite website that begins with the words: "Yet more historic pages in the chronicle of the Orthodox Resistance" (!). Here we find the following phrases (often repeated more than once)

a. "[Bishop Agathangelus' Church] is fully conscious that it constitutes the continuation of the original Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, since it continues to preserve the latter's Historical Heritage". Now why speak about the historical heritage of ROCOR, and not its confession of

faith? Probably because the confession of faith of ROCOR in recent years has been far from clear, wavering between two different positions. In 1983 ROCOR under Metropolitan Philaret anathematized ecumenism and the ecumenists, thereby unequivocally aligning itself with the True Orthodox Churches that confess that there is no grace in World Orthodoxy. However, in 1994 ROCOR entered into communion with the Cyprianites, thereby reversing that position and confessing that there is grace in World Orthodoxy. In 1998 ROCOR temporarily reverted to its former position when it reaffirmed the anathema of 1983. But then in October, 2000 it not only reverted to Cyprianism, but went a fatal step further by petitioning to be received into the Moscow Patriarchate via the Serbian patriarch. From that moment ROCOR must be considered to have fallen in faith, and only those bishops who unambiguously separated themselves from the false council of 2000 can be considered to be Orthodox. Bishop Agathangelus did not separate himself for another six and a half years, and even condemned those who did separate, thereby revealing that for the whole of that period his sympathies were with those who wanted union with World Orthodoxy. Now Bishop Ambrose assures me that Bishop Agathangelus has repented of his anti-Orthodox statements in that period. However, we have seen no publicly expressed repentance on the part of Bishop Agathangelus. Or does he believe that the false council of 2000 is part of the "historical heritage" of ROCOR, which he has supposedly preserved? If he thinks that, then he is not Orthodox...

b. "In your person," said the Acting President of the Cyprianite Synod to Agathangelus, "we behold Holy Russia, from the times of St. Vladimir the Enlightener to the luminous cloud of the Holy New Martyrs of Orthodoxy. We embrace this Holy Russia with a holy kiss of love." Leaving aside the over-exalted tone of this speech, we are entitled to ask: how can Bishop Agathangelus represent the "luminous cloud" of the Holy New Martyrs of Russia if he does agree with their confession of faith? For the overwhelming majority of those martyrs confessed that the MP is heretical and graceless... Moreover, how can he represent the anti-sergianism of the New Martyrs when, as Archbishop Tikhon of Omsk has pointed out, he commemorates the neo-Soviet authorities of the Ukraine (and presumably, in his Russian diocese, of Russia, too)?

c. "[Bishop Agathangelus'] God-given decision to struggle, like another St. Mark of Ephesus, against this false union and for the preservation of the Historical Heritage of the original Russian Orthodox Church Abroad". But how can the Agathangelite-Cyprianites invoke St. Mark of Ephesus, when the latter was far more uncompromising in relation to the heretics of his day than they are? Consider what St. Mark said on the day of his death about his relations with the uniate patriarch of Constantinople: "I am absolutely convinced that the farther I stand from him and those like him, the nearer I am to God and all the saints; and to the degree that I separate myself from them am I in union with the Truth and with the Holy Fathers, the Theologians of the Church; and I am likewise convinced that those who count themselves with them stand far away from the Truth and from the blessed Teachers of the Church..." The Agathangelite-Cyprianites, on the other hand, have never used such language about the uniate patriarchs Alexis, Bartholomew and others. They condemn those who condemn the heretics as graceless, and themselves deliberately stand closer to the heretics, saying that they have grace, even that they are the "Mother Church".

d. "In your luminous person, we joyfully behold the Heritage of St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow, the Holy Russian New Martyrs, St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, and also of

the most saintly Metropolitan Philaret, that illustrious anti-ecumenist." Yes, Metropolitan Philaret was indeed an illustrious anti-ecumenist - and he rejected the Cyprianite ecclesiology. This is evident not only from his anathema against the ecumenists, which the Cyprianites are always silent about, but also from private letters he wrote declaring the MP and the new calendarists to be without grace. So is it not hypocritical of the Agathangelite-Cyprianites to invoke the authority of a holy hierarch who rejected their ecclesiology? Or will they now sign up to the 1983 anathema?...

2. The Apostolic Succession of the Agathangelite Synod is doubtful for two reasons: first, because their Cyprianite co-consecrators' Synod was formed in schism from the main body of the Greek Old Calendarists under Archbishop Chrysostom(Kiouis) of Athens, and secondly, because, as indicated above, Agathangelus has not yet publicly renounced the false and heretical council of 2000 - and heretics do not have apostolic succession.

3. There are other Synods having an equal, or greater claim to be the "continuer of ROCOR" - that is, ROAC, ROCiE and RTOC. Without going into a detailed analysis of the canonicity of these Synods, we know that they all reject the MP as graceless, which Agathangelus does not. Therefore they, and not Agathangelus, are in accord with the confession of faith of the last two first-hierarchs of ROCOR, Metropolitans Philaret and Vitaly.

Bishop Agathangelus' claim to be the sole canonical successor of ROCOR is founded on nothing stronger than the fact that he was the last to separate from the Lavrite Synod. But is that anything to be proud of? Is it not rather something to be ashamed of? After all, the Holy Canons - in particular, the 15th Canon of the First-and-Second Council of Constantinople - do not praise procrastination in matters of the faith, but rather praise those who separate immediately that heresy is proclaimed. And in the case of ROCOR that took place, not in 2007, as Bishop Agathangelus likes to think, but in 2000, if not in 1994...

Bishop Agathangelus' position is similar to that of a person who criticizes those who jump off a heavily listing ship that has been holed below the water-line, and himself "jumps" only when the water has reached his neck... And yet his position is still worse. For he claims that the ship he jumped off, ROCOR-MP, and which is now at the bottom of the ocean of this sinful world, is in fact floating majestically on the surface with Christ Himself at its helm! If that is what he believes, then we are entitled to ask: why did he jump in the first place? And still more pertinently: will he not be tempted at some time in the future to return to that ship, becoming one of those who, "having thrust away a good conscience concerning the faith, have made shipwreck..." (I Timothy 1.19)?

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