

--REGARDING THE SCHISM IN LOUISIANA--

By Sava Beljovich

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Dearest brothers and sisters,

Before reading this article, I would recommend reading the documents on the ROACUSA.org website, and my two defenses I wrote on the St. Euphrosynos Cafe for much needed context. Everything I write concerning is public information, it is not my attempt to gossip, rumor, reveal the faults of others or to make a polemic article.

Before I write about the Canons and how important they are, I think it is necessary to lay out some necessary facts about the state of the St. Peter the Aleut Church in Louisiana: On November 3rd (O.S, November 16th N.S.) a parish council meeting was held at the St. Peter the Aleut Church. I was personally at this meeting and from the very beginning noticed the irregularity of the meeting; the election of officers was completely rushed through, as if it was only a formality.

There was also very little in terms of voting for new officers. From previous parish council meetings done in years prior, they were much more orderly and formal. The main point of this meeting as we found out was for Fr. Mark Templet to announce his intention to leave the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church to join the GOC under Abp. Kallinikos.

As was soon discovered, in violation of the protocols of ROAC, this meeting was done without His Eminence Archbishop Andrei of Pavlovskoye and Rockland's blessing. From previous parish council meetings I attended, topics such as ecclesiology, theology etc. were never discussed. The point of a parish council meeting is to elect officers, deal with issues with the parish itself, not to announce change in Church policies overall.

The original reason given for leaving Vladyka Andrei was due to a “change in his mindset” towards the GOC-K and an implication that he has early onset dementia or Alzheimer's. Fr. Mark made it very clear Vladyka Andrei is not in heresy. For His Eminence's health, anyone can call him and very clear see that he is not losing his memory; not to mention the complete lack of a diagnosis to support any such

claim.

In common English, the noun “slander” means to utter false charges or misrepresentations which defame (a synonym for slander) or damage another's reputation, according to the Merriam-Webster English dictionary.

To go over the first charge, that Abp. Andrei has “changed his mind/praxis” towards the GOC-K, on the ROACUSA.org website there are documents that were on our website since 2014 by Vladimir Moss and one Vladyka wrote himself, posted there shortly after the union of the GOC-K with the Synod in Resistance (the Cyprianites), which showed our mindset towards that union.

In 2008 the Sobor of the ROAC condemned Cyprianism as a heresy, writing an anathema against it, we were the first True Orthodox Church to do so. The acts of that Sobor were translated into English and can also be found on the ROACUSA.org website.

One of various rebutals to the idea “Cyprianism died in 2014” comes from several of the former Synod in Resistance members themselves: Met. Chrysostomos (Gonzales) of Etna wrote on February 16th 2014 regarding the union:

“First, be assured that none of our principles, none of our moderation, and none of our spirit bequeathed to us by our late and venerable Metropolitan Cyprian have been set aside, as some naysayers have suggested.”

(the article with the full text can be found on NFTU.net)

Further, Bishop Auxentios of Etna – Met. Chrysostomos' successor – in his July 2nd 2015 article: “An Unpleasant But Necessary Statement About Certain Misrepresentations of Historical Fact” repeatedly claimed they were never asked to repudiate Cyprianism, nor have they abandoned it, but like Met. Chrysostomos consider it to be a “theological opinion”, as he himself wrote in said article:

“No prayer of any kind was read over either of us, nor did we submit to any sort of confession for our supposed past heresy. Nor would we ever have accepted such provisions. I think this fact speaks for itself.”

(the full article can be found on the imoph.org website)

So according to the Cyprianites themselves, they have not abandoned Cyprianism. How can the ROAC – us having condemned Cyprianism as a heresy, following the spirit of Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) of blessed memory – consider this to be anything but a union in falsehood? It is true that Vladyka Andrei has allowed certain people with the GOC-K – mainly those who were with them prior to the 2014 union with the SiR – to commune with us, but these were special exceptions given, not a general rule.

The ROAC's condemnation of Cyprianism was not unique, as other groups such as the RTOC, STOC, ROCANA, HOCNA, various Matthewite Synods and the GOC-M have all condemned Cyprianism similarly as a heresy. Even the former first-hierarch of the GOC-K, Archbishop Chrysostomos II (Kioussis) and the Synod of the GOC(K) on November 4th 1986 declared Cyprian of Oropos and Fili's teachings to be heretical, as the Synod wrote:

“The Holy Synod defrocked the Metropolitan Cyprian (Koutsoubas) of Oropos and Fili and returned him to the order of monks, because he fell into the heresy of Ecumenism and fell cut himself off from the Church.”

(the full text can be found on trueorthodox.eu)

The same GOC that has now gone into communion with the “Ecumenist” SiR (the same charge that Vladyka Gregory Grabbe of Washington gave, that Cyprianism is a form of crypto-Ecumenism) had previously condemned the teachings of its first-hierarch as heretical.

All of this presented, it would appear that the GOC-K has changed its mind and praxis, not Abp. Andrei and the ROAC. At the 2024 Youth Conference of the GOC-K, Dr. Demetrios Albertis said:

“(the) ROCOR's Anathema against Ecumenism was local, and did not affect other local churches, meaning that they, the other churches had to have adopt such resolutions on their own. I hate to break it to everyone, and I know there's some in here that will not agree with me, but he was right. A regional council is precisely that, a local regional council. It's not an ecumenical council.”

It appears since the 2014 union, the GOC-K has adopted more of the SiR's ecclesiology, rather than the SiR adopting the position of the historical GOC (compare to Met. Chrysostomos of Florina's 1935 Epistle, 1951 Epistle and the

1974 Epistle of Abp. Auxentios of Athens, all of which can be found on trueorthodox.eu).

The recording of this 2024 Youth Conference can be found on the ROACUSA.org website in the provided link within the article written by Daphnis Brown: “Regarding the GOC-K, Cyprianism and the Current Parish Situation.”

Secondly, to go over the claim that Vladyka is losing his memory: I believe it goes without saying that one should not make false claims about their Bishop. Several of the Optina Elders spoke extensively about this, including St. Barsanuphius of Optina and the great sin that falls upon those who do so. According to Canon VI (6) of the First Council of Constantinople, which we recognize as the Second Ecumenical Council:

“Because many men, in the spirit of enmity and for purposes of slander being desirous to confound and subvert ecclesiastical discipline, connive to fabricate certain charges against Orthodox Bishops managing the churches, in an attempt designing nothing else but to sully the reputation of the priests and to raise disturbances among people who are at peace; on this account it has pleased the holy Council of bishops who have convened at Constantinople to decree that informers are not to be admitted without examination, nor are all men to be allowed to bring accusations against those managing the churches, nor yet are all to be excluded. But if anyone lay a personal grievance, that is, a private complaint against a Bishop, on the ground that he has been a victim of the Bishop's greed or other unjust treatment, in the case of such accusations neither the personality nor the religion of the acuser is to be inquired into...

And they are not to lodge the accusation until they themselves have in writing agreed to incur the same penalty if in the course of the trial it be proved that they have been slandering the accused Bishop. But if anyone, scorning what has been decreed in the foregoing statements, should dare either to annoy the emperor's ear or to trouble courts of secular authorities or an Ecumenical council to the affrontment of all the Bishops of the diocese, let no such person be allowed to present any information whatever, because of his having thus roundly insulted the Canons and ecclesiastical discipline...”

If such a claim is to be brought to the Church – which it would have to be, it cannot be claimed without a Synodal trial and accepted as legitimate – and it is found to be false, according to Canon VI of the Second Ecumenical Council, whatever

punishment would have come on the Bishop would fall upon the accuser.

None of this is to mention is that it was made explicitly clear that Vladyka Andrei is not preaching any sort of heresy. Such actions upon canonical examination could render one liable to the condemnation described in Canon 31 (32) of the Apostolic Canons

“If any presbyter, despising his own bishop, shall collect a separate congregation and erect another altar; not having any grounds for condemning the bishop in regards to religion or justice, let him be deposed for his ambition; for he is a tyrant; in like manner also the rest of the clergy and those who would join him; and let the laymen with him be excommunicated. Let this be done after a first, second and third admonition from the bishop.”

On the ROACUSA.org website one can see that Abp. Andrei has sent multiple emails attempting to admonish Fr. Mark on this decision three times. Besides the Apostolic Canons, Canon 15 of the 1st-2nd Council only regards heresy as being an obligation to leave your Bishop, granted he is actually teaching it. St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite is very clear in his interpretation found in the Pedalion (the Rudder) that by leaving for reasons besides violation of Canons or heresy, one creates a schism.

Vladyka Andrei suspended Fr. Mark in the early morning hours of Nov. 4th (O.S. Nov. 17th N.S.) after he had sent an email asking for a canonical release to join the GOC-K. Canonical releases usually only are given to transfer to a Bishop in the same Synod that one belongs to, and cannot be given to go to Bishops that your Bishop is not in communion with. This suspension has been characterized as being “unjust”, with the specific claim being given that a priest can “only be suspended for disobedience.”

This parish council meeting done without Abp. Andrei's blessing would definitely fulfill such a requirement, as St. Ignatius of Antioch writes in his Epistle to the Smyrnaens:

“Wherever the bishop appear, there let the multitude be; even as wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church... he who honoureth the bishop, is honoured of God; he who doeth anything without the knowledge of the bishop, serveth the devil.”

Or as Apostolic Canon 39 (40) states: “Let not the presbyters or deacons do anything without the sanction of the Bishop.” Per the protocols of the ROAC, following the example of the historical ROCOR, it is considered improper for a clergymen to even do something such as buy a house or a new vehicle without their Bishop's blessing.

There are various reasons a clergymen can be suspended, besides disobedience, one only has to read through the Canons to see the various reasons one can be excommunicated or deposed for various infractions. Even if the suspension was unjust, the tradition and practice of the Church is that any sort of suspension can be taken to a higher authority by appealing to the Synod, for which it would be the decision of the collective of Bishops to make a ruling on the suspension. A priest cannot by himself declare his suspension to be unjust. This would have to be done by the Bishops.

The praxis of the Church has been that even if a priest is unjustly suspended, by not following it, they would still be under the condemnation of it as if it were justified. Canon IX (9) of the Council of Chalcedon, the Fourth Ecumenical Council, elaborates on this:

“If any Clergyman have a matter against another clergyman, he shall not forsake his bishop and run to secular courts; but let him first lay open the matter before his own Bishop, or let the matter be submitted to any person whom each of the parties may, with the Bishop's consent, select. And if any one shall contravene these decrees, let him be subjected to canonical penalties. And if a clergyman have a complaint against his own or any other bishop, let it be decided by the synod of the province. And if a bishop or clergyman should have a difference with the metropolitan of the province, let him have recourse to the Exarch of the Diocese, or to the throne of the Imperial City of Constantinople, and there let it be tried.”

Next in the series of events that have occurred here in Louisiana, around four days after the “parish council meeting”, the first claims that Vladyka Andrei does preach heresy came up, with the heresy in question being Imiaslavie or Onomatodoxy. On the ROACUSA.org website there are already articles explaining the issue, as I already did in my two defenses, as I was also accused of this charge as well.

In short it is a bogus charge being made by people who themselves have admitted they do not understand the issue, nor can they even read the sources as they do not

know Russian. As I have previously written, reading the Canons above, one has to believe that Abp. Andrei is a heretic, or else they would have to admit they are in schism.

False accusations of heresy are nothing new to Orthodoxy, Saint George (Konissky), Archbishop of Mogilev, was falsely accused of heresy by several priests in his diocese, as was St. Dimitri of Rostov. St. Basil the Great was accused of being a heretic, as was St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Athanasius the Great and so on, and so forth. The list is endless of Saints who were falsely accused of heresy.

It is nothing new and as we can see, it did not affect our usage of St. Basil's Liturgy during Great Lent. These people believe the impetus is on us to prove our Orthodoxy to them, but as I wrote in one of my previous articles: We believe in innocence until proven guilty by a burden of proof as Orthodox Christians.

They can't prove us guilty because they simply don't know what they are talking about. It has also been brought up – in similar manner to claims made by the world Orthodox – that people shouldn't investigate or know the Canons, to which St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite says in his foreword to the Pedalion:

“To your holy embrace, O common Mother of Orthodox Christians, holy great CHURCH OF CHRIST, is dedicated this Rudder of the Catholic Church, the present Book interpretative of the Sacred Canons; and the dedication is one that is most proper and on every score of rightness fitting. For, I well know, all persons, without exception, will concur in the admission that to the same extent that a mariner's compass is needed by sailors, and the rudder is necessary to ships, the collection of the Holy Canons, too — this figurative Compass, that is to say — is needful and this spiritual Rudder is necessary and indispensable to you, the spiritual and venerable SHIP prefiguring and representing the ecumenical universal transport of the Catholic Church.”

All of this presented, how is the situation in Louisiana not a schism? St. Paul writes to the Romans (Romans 16:17) to avoid those who cause divisions in the Church; which the word “schism” literally means “to split”. Undeniably, there was a split. Just how the word “schizophrenia” means “splitting of the mind” in Greek, there was a schism in Louisiana. Several people have objected to the usage of the word, but by the Canons, one would be forced to admit that some sort of schism occurred.

Another idea that has been presented is that the GOC-K “intervened” and took in the St. Peter the Aleut parish. What canonical basis was there to do this?

Shortly after Vitus Bering discovered Alaska on behalf of the Russian Empire, in 1741 two priests, Hieromonk Ilarion (Trusov) and Fr. Ignatij Kozirevsky celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the first time in the Western Hemisphere. St. Juvenaly, the Protomartyr of America and a priest under the Russian Church, shed his blood for Orthodoxy in 1796.

St. Juvenaly was of a group of ten monks sent as missionaries to convert the native Alaskans to Orthodoxy, by the Russian Church. Two monks who joined this mission later, St. German of Alaska and Fr. Ioasaf (Bolotov) founded the first Monastery in the North American continent. Shortly after the Martyrdom of St. Juvenaly, the Most Holy Synod of the Russian Church created a new Diocese for Kodiak, and elected Fr. Ioasaf as its Bishop.

On April 10th 1799 Ioasaf (Bolotov) was consecrated as the First Orthodox Bishop for America. In 1812 the Russian-American Company set up Fort Ross in California, where they had a Church and served the Divine Liturgy. In 1815 St. Peter the Aleut – a member of the Russian Church – was martyred by Franciscans in San Pedro, California (near modern Los Angeles) for refusing to leave Orthodoxy.

The first Divine Liturgy served in the United States proper was on April 15th 1865 in New Orleans, Louisiana by a Fr. Agapiy Honcharenko. Being local to that area, I have seen the house where the first Divine Liturgy in the United States proper was served several times.

The first Orthodox Bishop consecrated on American soil was Bishop (St.) Rafael (Hawaweeny) of Brooklyn, who was a Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. One of the last Archbishops of North America prior to the Revolution was St. Tikhon, who later became the last Patriarch of Moskva.

All of these events I mentioned were under the direct auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. But as some may ask, why is any of this relevant? The Russian Church founded the Orthodox mission in America, and the dioceses for America. Prior to the Russian Revolution, all priests, whether they be Serbs, Bulgarians, Arabs, Greek etc. had to be received into the Russian Church if they wanted to serve in America.

Per the Canons of the Church, America exclusively is the ecclesiastical territory of the Russian Church. The Greeks, Serbs, Arabs, Bulgarians and so on only started consecrating Bishops and setting up parallel jurisdictions in America after the Russian Revolution. The years after the Revolution were difficult, but I do not see how that invalidated the canonical mission of the Russian Church in America.

Canons 33 to 35 (34 to 36) of the Holy Apostles all forbid Bishops from serving in another Bishop's diocese without proper permission, as does Canon XX (20) of the Council of Chalcedon. Thus it must be concluded, the basis of a Greek Church in America is dubious, at best.

These are not obscure Canons from local Councils, these come from the Ecumenical Councils or the Holy Apostles. We say that the Ecumenical Councils are infallible parts of our Faith and that we received the Holy Orthodox Faith from the Apostles; did we not receive the Canons they gave us as well?

As early as the Synod of Ancyra in 314 A.D. – the Canons of which are found in the Pedalion – it was declared that if a priest violates a suspension, they are de facto defrocked. A similar canon can be found also in the Acts of the Council of Carthage 397-398 A.D. (the Canons of which are also in the Pedalion) which St. Augustine of Hippo personally attended and was one of the earliest Councils that produced a Canon for Holy Scripture which we still use to this day.

If these Canons were good enough for St. Augustine of Hippo – who at the Fifth Ecumenical Council was declared to be a Holy Father of the Church – and the same Holy Fathers who gave us the same Canon of Scriptures that we still use, why is this not good enough for us?

After Fr. Mark's suspension, he led reader services (which was publicly livestreamed), gave a sermon and gave a priestly blessing, which he was forbidden from doing, he has since served the Divine Liturgy multiple times as well. The former claims could be argued, but he did absolutely serve the Divine Liturgy, publicly, multiple times since his suspension.

St. John Chrysostom writes that not even the blood of Martyrdom can wash away schism. Apostolic Canon 32 states that a Bishop cannot receive another priest who has been suspended or excommunicated by another Bishop. One can only refer back to Apostolic Canon 31 which also clearly states that anyone who prays with a

priest who unjustly leaves his Bishop, comes under the same condemnation.

The Canons of the Orthodox Church are of an utmost important and not an “unimportant” thing like certain people have suggested, or that we live in a “postcanonical age” like others suggested.

One only has to read the forewords found in most copies of the Pedalion to see multiple Saints, including many of the Kollyvade Fathers, such as St. Makarios, Metropolitan of Corinth, stating the importance of the upholding of the Canons.

Which Saint in the 20th century (or any century for that matter) has written that we have lapsed into a post-canonical age? None of the Hierarchs or Elders of the historical Greek Old Calendar movement or the glorious ROCOR, such as St. John Maximovitch, St. Philaret of New York and especially not Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) of Washington has presented this idea. Where does this idea come from?

How would the Canons of the Holy Church not fall into the category of the Charismata of the Orthodox Church? The working of the Holy Spirit in the Church through its Canons is clear in the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Holy Apostles, where the Holy Apostles said: “It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us...”

It has been presented also that leaving Abp. Andrei was done out of “pastoral necessity”. This term “pastoral issue” is thrown around quite often in our days; I have heard from priests in the GOC-K that allowing the Cyprianites to persist in their heretical ecclesiology is a “pastoral issue”, and even one priest telling me that he allowed his parishioners to go to Protestant marriage counsellors and pray with them due to “pastoral issues.”

It seems “pastoral issue” is a carte blanche to do whatever one wants. Certain Canons cannot be fulfilled in entirety, or can be loosened for a reason, but what spiritual or pastoral reason would be given to allow one to pray with heretics? Not to mention, who gets to decide this? The pastor, or shepherd of the Church, the person who could make such a ruling, is the Bishop.

Priests are called to be obedient to their Bishop, on the antimins a priest must have in order to serve the Divine Liturgy, the Bishop's name is on it, not the priest's. It is not the priest's flock that is at the parish, it is the Bishop's. If priests can decide to do things without their Bishop's consent, then why are there Holy Fathers or the Canons of the Holy Apostles saying otherwise?

The only reason a priest can take “matters into his own hands” so to speak would be if the Bishop was preaching heresy. When a priest is ordained, he gives a vow before the Gospel and Cross on the altar to stay loyal to his Bishop. There has be very good reasons for such a vow to be invalidated.

If each priest can do whatever he wants, why even be Orthodox? If the Canons don't matter, why even be Orthodox? It's been presented that Fr. Mark is a “spiritual father”, a term which in Russian has a very exclusive meaning, or that Vladyka Andrei has “gone rogue” from the ROAC Sobor.

The former claim is just a result of the English speakers using terms incorrectly, the second is outright false. When I visit or speak to Vladyka Andrei, he has spoken to Met. Fyodor that same week, sometimes within the same day. If these people actually bothered to learn Russian (which several people have told me they don't think they should have to), they would be able to contact the Bishops of the ROAC in Russia and see that our positions are clear.

St. Paul says in his First Epistle to the Corinthians that slanderers (false charges or misrepresentations meant to damage one's reputation) will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 6:9-10). The Greek word for a slanderer is Diabolos, the Hebrew word is Satan.

Furthermore, it's been presented by the party that has caused a schism that following the Canons is “spiritually damaging” and that by following them, we in the ROAC are essentially pharisees – I suppose the Fathers and the Holy Apostles who gave us these Canons were pharisees as well – with this logic. Another claim is that Fr. Mark is walking the “royal path” by leaving Vladyka Andrei: This term, royal path, comes from St. Gregory of Sinai in his book “the Sunflower”. It refers exclusively to the spiritual life, prayer, fasting etc. not an upholding of the Canons or the Faith, which there is only one path to follow, not multiple.

It has been said also we are “super-correct zealots” by staying with Vladyka Andrei. I will copy what I wrote in my first defense and a post-scriptum to that article:

“I have been accused for holding this position that the Canons in fact do matter of being a 'super-correct zealot'. St. Nikolaj Velimirovich says being called a zealot is a compliment. 'Super-correct' comes from a writing of Fr. Seraphim of Platina,

someone I deeply respect and even use the writings of in my catechism. Fr. Seraphim was a very ascetical man but his writings alone do not constitute the entirety of Church belief.

Super-correctness has never been condemned as a heresy by any Council and is a vague term. I would even purpose that super-correct is a synonym for right-believing, which in Greek is the word *Orthodoxia*.

I will also add that I understand in some cases it is impossible to be 'canonical maximalists' in the modern world. I understand super-correct to be exemplified by the Matthewites who use the Canons to achieve a certain goal of feeling or appearing correct. In other words it's a hypocritical usage of the Canons for a self-serving, worldly interest.

Even blatant schismatics and heretics will claim to canonically regular. I still stand by my point however that shouldn't we try to be more strict about the Canons and hold ourselves to a higher standard? We are called to this as Christians regardless.”

The attempts to discredit ROAC have not ended with accusations of heresy, but now a claim that I would not allow people who have gone into schism to return and pray with us at our reader mission. Ironically this is an accusation of heresy, rather than *Imiaslavie*, it is now being claimed that I am a Novatianist; the same heresy that Tertullian of Carthage – and later left to found his sect as it wasn't strict enough – fell into.

This claim is completely false and I believe it was started with the attempt to get people not to return to their Church in repentance. If people wish to return to ROAC, they can come back – not as clergy if they were previously – full stop period.

One can see the personal attacks made against me, Abp. Andrei and others in the ROAC, which is often what schismatics do to justify their schism. It is behavior completely unbecoming of Christians to do these things. As with my previous writings and with the articles on the ROACUSA.org website, I doubt people will read them, or will continue to claim things that have been thoroughly rebutted.

The mindset exhibited is more in line with Protestantism – with individuals thinking they can re-define how the Church should operate how they think it

should rather than following how the Fathers defined its operation – and is not in line with Orthodox ecclesiology.

It seems that the people who left are stuck in a predicament where they either have to admit they never believed ROAC was a real Church or that we are in heresy or schism, which would lead to questions such as: “Why aren't they demanding to be properly baptized, or re-ordained?” If this is the case, then they would have to believe they have been under a fake priest, received fake mysteries and prayed with fake Christians the entire time they were in the ROAC.

Alternatively, they would have to admit they left without following the Canons, and think that somehow since the 20th century, schism is no longer a state one can find themselves in. If schism is no longer possible, then by extension, heresy no longer exists either, as St. Basil the Great writes that schism always leads to heresy. St. John Chrysostom writes that schism and heresy both constitute “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”, the sin that cannot be forgiven. If one such state of it doesn't exist anymore, then why would the other still exist?

If heresy and schism no longer exist, then why not go to the New Calendarists, or the Sergianists, or the Roman Catholics? It would be impossible to hold this position and still claim the former position.

Lies change all the time, but the Truth stays the same.

In Christ,
- Sava, the sinner