

Dear Father Alexis,

The following answer is not directed against you personally. Certainly, your letter has given me the opportunity to answer you, but above all to point out an evil that has been gnawing at and dividing our Archdiocese for decades and which I wanted to formulate for a long time.

My answer probably exceeds the intentions of your letter, which unfortunately reflects the ideology conveyed in our diocese since the Fifties. And this ideology, let me say it, is not that of the Church.

As it happens, I think that the crisis we are going through is providential because it highlights this fundamental divide that goes far beyond the question of preferences for this or that patriarchate.

The probable return of our Archdiocese to the Moscow Patriarchate gives us the opportunity (for the reasons that you will read) to burst the abscess. This is healthy and, I think, salutary.

In my opinion, the spiritual teaching was sorely lacking in the Archdiocese. For a long time, for example, we have been fighting against the very idea of monasticism, and this deficiency has opened the door to new ideas about the Church in which part of our emigration is engaged.

Orthodox monasticism is the crucible of the high spiritual and ascetic tradition of Orthodoxy.

The monastic presence came to thwart an already rampant ideology among us by obstructing the development of a "liberal theology." But monasticism is the heart of Orthodoxy, its perfume, its specificity. It embodies the spirit of the Fathers. "He who despises monasticism," writes the holy hierarch Ignatius (Brianchaninov), "despises the whole Orthodoxy."

Liberal theology needs "freedom" to express itself. Submission to patristic education is uncomfortable for it, it seems oppressive, non-creative, routine. The divine services seem long and monotonous. It often feels the need to change its "menu" and to experiment with novelties... These agitations betray the absence of spiritual life and an adherence to the spirit of the world. It is a stranger to the Fathers, a stranger to Orthodoxy.

If God does not enlighten us, we will not be able to see our mistakes and we will not know His will. There is no other way than humility and repentance.

Reply to Archbishop Alexis Struve's letter

By protodeacon Alexandre Kedroff

Dear Father Alexis,

Allow me to respond to your letter and be very frank with You. It is now time to say things openly.

First of all, let me say that all my comments will not be directed against your person for whom I have esteem, but against the IDEAS that appear to me reprehensible as expressed in your letter. We are Orthodox Christians; the love that must reign between us demands a dialogue of truth.

Whatever you may say, your letter is political and ideological. Moreover, it is, most often, supported by psychological and not spiritual considerations. There are also many contradictions.

You begin by saying that "we all agree that this deleterious time must end."

And you spend your time asserting that the time is too short for a mature reflection, that the conditions of a serene vote are not met... I cannot follow your thought.

You also say that there is no transparency, that everything is done secretly. But Archbishop Jean, at the risk of provoking the crumbling of the diocese, has already pushed back thrice the decision-making process so that things are not perceived as forced or brutal. At each diocesan or pastoral consultation, a report was presented on the current situation and on the different contacts with the Orthodox jurisdictions.

On the other hand, the fact that members of the Diocesan Council allow themselves to discredit the state of the dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate by derogatory and misleading claims (because they were not there) does not shock you. Did you take the opportunity to ask the Archbishop if these allegations were true or not?

The fact that these same people allow themselves against any ethics to expose by means of social networks the setbacks of the last council of the Archdiocese without the people involved confess their misdeeds and defend themselves from having been at the origin of these leaks

does not shock you either?

On the one hand, you say that "the stake goes beyond our traditionalist or modernist inclinations," and, in the following sentence, you affirm that "the challenge is to preserve the inheritance of this extraordinary space of freedom which our fathers, the founders of our Archdiocese, bequeathed."

But it is obvious that for you the challenge is the adoption of the liberal and modern theology, some of its representatives belonging perhaps to the so-called "School of Paris." However, if we designate by this "school" the Institute of Theology, St. Serge, it appears that most of its teachers were linked to a "conservative" line, starting with its founder, Metropolitan Euloge, of blessed memory. And what about his successors: Metropolitan Vladimir, the two Archbishops George (one of whom taught there), Bishop Cassian who was its rector? What about Archimandrite Cyprien (Kern), Professor of Patrology, Father Georges Florovsky, Father Jean Meyendorf (although the latter two emigrated later to the United States), Father Alexis Kniazeff, Nicolas Ossorguine? Could we have imagined from these eminent professors innovative liturgical practices or subversive theological developments? How many times have I heard in their mouths: "Even if such a liturgical reform seems justified, no one is allowed to put it into practice on his own initiative, much less to spread it around him as the norm for the church. This must be the subject of a consensus of the Church by a conciliar decision as it is appropriate to the Orthodox tradition."

Among these glorious representatives, I recommend that you read the comments of Fr. Nicolas Affanassieff on the participation of the laity in the administration of the Church according to the Moscow Council of 1917-1918:

If the administration is a special gift that is given to those whom God has called to this ministry, it means that it does not belong to the people of God. [...]

The people of God is entrusted to the bishop because he was called and established by God for the ministry of administration; that is why he leads the people of God as pastor.

Not possessing the charism of the administration, the laity cannot be coadministrators with the bishop, just as they cannot administer themselves. They cannot serve beside the bishop in this area [...] because it is a ministry. However, a ministry presumes the existence of a corresponding charisma.

The Moscow Council of 1917-1918 invited the laity to the administration. [...] How can an election of representatives of the laity invest them from the ministry of administration and grant them the corresponding grace?

The two-round election of representatives to sit on the Diocesan Council can not guarantee fidelity to the Church because it does not bring charismatic gifts. If the elected representatives of the laity do not possess the gift of administration, how could they lead the Church? The most amazing thing is that this question has not even been asked. Is it not a vengeance of the law that reigns in the modern ecclesial body? Since things are such, is there still room for grace in the Church? [...]

The administration of this charismatic organization becomes non-charismatic, it is secularized in the bad sense of the word. It is the dead-end in which Law has led the ecclesial consciousness.¹

This text, like many other writings, corroborates the observation that many of those who refer to this school know it very poorly and retain only a few names whose writings are "to their liking."

Thus, you reproach Monseigneur Jean that the Assembly on September 7 was decided without consultation. But how can you say that when in February the Archbishop wanted precisely the Assembly to take the path to follow. We had just voted overwhelmingly to refuse to submit to the order of the Holy Synod to dissolve the Archbishop. It was already quite clear that the only constructive and hopeful way for a canonical way out of the crisis was that proposed by the Moscow Patriarchate.

The decision of February 23 to withdraw from the injunction of the Holy Synod put Monseigneur Jean in an untenable position; it engaged the Archdiocese in a way that can no longer remain unresolved. Monseigneur Jean has never ceased to make everyone aware of the impossibility of remaining in the current state (although most of them understand it very well). On the other hand, you associate yourself with the voice of the few members of the Council—mentioned above—who claim that nothing is pressing, that the conditions necessary for a calm decision are not met, that the communication is non-existent, that the time allotted is too short...

¹ Cf N. Afanassieff: *"The Church of the Holy Spirit"* - Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1975 and reprint in 2012 - chapter *"The ministry of the laity"*

The truth is that the Archbishop's decision to enter into talks with the Moscow Patriarchate displeases you and the few members of the Diocesan Council who systematically oppose the Archbishop. I would like to recall that they are advisors and not decision-makers and that in the Church, the Archbishop is invested with the charisma of directing, while those who are established to help and advise him have not received the power to contravene his initiatives, let alone scuttle them. The Archbishop himself will account in front of God for what he has done with his flock. It is clear that for these advisers disintegration is preferable to Moscow, so hatred of Russia and its Church is patent.

Nevertheless, the delegation negotiating with Moscow is also composed of other members of the Council of the Archdiocese, and this is known to all. Do not pretend that everything is done secretly.

As for forcing the Archbishop to return to Constantinople, you know it would be a suicide. The Archbishop reiterated it publicly.

Moreover, it seems that the delegation who went there did not accurately report what was said.

As for the allegations that the Patriarchate recognizes the brutality of its communication and that it is willing to reconsider its position, I cannot believe it; it is obviously a trap and I doubt, dear Father, that you are not aware of it.

You are uncomfortable with "the notion of a choice of jurisdiction," whereas this is our canonical survival. It is clear that your decision is already made: You will remain at the Patriarchate of Constantinople whatever happens. So be it, but it appears from this that you do not think much of the future of our Archdiocese since it will eventually disappear and I do not understand why you defend its specificities and originality. On the other hand, you will hardly convince us that Constantinople is an ardent defender of the Council of Moscow and that it is disposed to render us our lost autonomy. As for the parishes located outside the French territory, you abandon them without flinching.

Your parents, so you say, were born in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. As for me, I was born in the Moscow Patriarchate. And our Archbishop, as well as his parents, were born outside of one another. I think that emotional melancholy here is secondary.

What is more useful to remember is that our Archdiocese was born in the Russian Church and has its roots in it.

You affirm that the Patriarchate of Constantinople "remains the first"

and ensures the catholicity and unity of Orthodoxy. I would reply that the ecumenical patriarchy, alas, is going through a deep crisis and its desire to embody the unity of Orthodoxy is less and less credible. You are not ignorant of the fact that the Council of Crete ended in an obvious failure, just as the policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine provoked the reprobation of all the Orthodox Churches. The schismatic group recently recognized by Constantinople is divided in turn. One of the reasons can be explained by the astronomical sums of money claimed by the Patriarchate from the "new Church" that received the Tomos, but it is above all the sign that this enterprise is not spiritual. It is eminently political.

You defend a free and poor Orthodoxy. But who ignores the pressures that Constantinople is undergoing between American money and the political leverage that leads to "concessions" consistent with American hegemony? Surely you are cognizant of the fact that a special Secretary of State has been specially appointed in the United States to regulate religious affairs in the world and, in particular, in Eastern Europe,—that is to say, in the Orthodox world—, that this minister intervenes in Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria to force the chancelleries of these free nations to submit to the decisions of Constantinople. The thing is known throughout the East and more or less revealed in the Western press.

You speak of ecclesial freedom, the ideal of poverty and political independence, inciting us to recognize in the Russian Church an interference by the State. But at least his president frequents churches and monasteries!

I must add that no patriarchate, whatever its age and prestige, can claim to embody on its own the unity and catholicity of the Church. Orthodox ecclesiology manifests itself in the conciliarity expressed by the Ecumenical Councils and their unanimous reception in the Church of Christ. Today, the actions carried out by the Patriarchate of Constantinople divide and know no reception.

It seems, dear Father, that the idea you express corresponds more to the Roman Catholic vision of the Church. How many times in history had a patriarch fallen into heresy (and that of Constantinople was not outdone)? Who saved the Church? Christ, by the voice of the saints and the Councils. At this time, and only then, was the Church able to proclaim with one voice: "The Holy Spirit and we have judged..."

This leads us to have a reflection on the future of the canonical organization of Orthodoxy in the present situation, and not according to the realities of a world very different than that of today (there is a fifteen-century gap). It seems obvious that the Patriarchate of Constantinople is trying desperately to "take over the leadership" to regain its prestige of yesteryear, while the current conditions do not allow it to do it anymore. It clings to its status of "first among equals" clumsily and inadequately to the realities of today. This causes the disapproval of its peers and entails a lot of collateral suffering. Its attempts of unification become dividing factors. Everywhere, it wants to act as a master and everywhere it accumulates disputes. More seriously, it introduces a new ecclesiology that is regrettably close to the Roman Catholic vision in making and unmaking Autocephalous Churches as it pleases, by openly breaking the holy canons which stipulate that no bishop may interfere in the territory of the church of an other bishop and perform an ecclesial act without the consent of the local bishop.

The uncanonical intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine, allegedly to reduce the schism, provoked two others: the schismatic group split up from within and the Moscow Patriarchate could not recognize either the intervention of Constantinople on its territory or the rehabilitation of a metropolitan removed from his ecclesiastical rights and reduced to the secular state by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church.

In fact, let me question the allegation: "Constantinople remains ecclesiastically the most just."

Since the 1990s, the demographic situation of the Orthodox Churches in the West has evolved considerably. The dream of the proclamation of a local Church has moved away because the Orthodox from the Orthodox countries have become the majority and they are the ones who bring and support the tradition of their country of origin. The French converts to Orthodoxy are supported and nourished by the tradition of these diasporas. Our old emigration is no longer bringing fruits. It does not found monasteries, it no longer finds priests, let alone bishops. More than that, it is divided and sick, it threatens to disintegrate.

Our faithful originating from heterodoxy, on the contrary, need the tradition and roots of a living and authentic Orthodoxy, and not the intellectual and liturgical innovations of the Paris School (in fact, most of the time far away from it).

Not only the new converts to Orthodoxy, but also the orthodox by

origin, long removed from their Mother Churches, need roots. And, believe me, Father, I am not talking about Russia, but about any Orthodox country whose living faith bears spiritual fruit.

Rather than thinking of reforms, why do not leaders of youth movements organize pilgrimages to the Orthodox countries so that young people, stunned by the turmoil of our western world, would find spiritual nourishment and appeasement of the soul there?

Such initiatives can also be carried out here to rediscover the rare existing skites and monasteries in the West. Nourished by these experiences, our parishes would be enlivened, and this would certainly generate vocations for the service of the Church.

Do you think it is the school of Paris that will allow them to become entrenched and recharge their batteries? Can Congresses on socio-ecclesial themes such as "The Role of Women in the Church," "The Council of the Baptized," "The Ordination of Deaconesses" quench thirst? Why deprive young people of drinking at the source of the Church and to soak up the ever so nourishing atmosphere of the monasteries as authentic inner experiences?

You affirm: "[...] the sources of the Archdiocese are elsewhere, [...] our sources, it is the renewal created by the School of Paris," by the creative theologians of the Institute Saint-Serge in constant dialogue with the world. Our sources are the Church of Immigration [sic], free of any temptation of money [...]." Our archbishops of blessed memory would be filled with sadness on hearing this. How can you say such things?

Our sources are not those of "the School of Paris," but those of our holy theophoric fathers! You advance ideological allegations without ecclesial content. The Orthodox Church is much more than that. Notwithstanding, Tradition is embodied in a living culture. Emigration is not a source in itself, except that it keeps in its flesh the Tradition of the Church and, as far as we are concerned, it is the Russian Church wherefrom our emigration originated: I mean its typikon, its liturgy, its icons, its sacred chant, the veneration of its saints and martyrs, its monks, its "fools-in-Christ"... And, through it all, the Russian Church testifies to its sacred bond with the pleroma of Orthodoxy.

You probably think that the "supporters of tradition" withdraw into themselves, but it is the opposite: thanks to Tradition, they keep the link with the whole Church. As for the "innovators," they risk losing this connection and isolating themselves from the whole of Orthodoxy.

What you propose cuts us off from the Church because it invents a

new, disembodied "Orthodoxy," an Orthodoxy without a Church, emptied of its content.

You seek—not only yourself but your brothers in spirit—to free yourself from all this, to build an "Orthodoxy" deprived of its roots, of its tradition, to your taste, comfortable, in a form of Eastern Protestantism. In a nutshell, you are designing a "church" in accordance with your ideals, but far from its true spirit. And this feeling of "power" over the Church seems to give you "rights," so that if your position is not listened to, then you will preach disobedience, rebellion, the violation of canonical rules (which here disturb you, there arrange you) and, if necessary, you will still prefer the disappearance of the diocese.

No, I fear that "the Russian solution" is for you "a major mistake" not for the reasons you invoke, but in that it contravenes the pursuit of your ideological line.

You prefer to submit to a «vicariate» which, upon the death of our Archbishop, would dissolve immediately into the Greek metropolis. The Moscow Patriarchate receives us as an independent Archdiocese, respecting our statutes and traditions, and willing to give us bishops for the continuation of our ecclesial identity.

Furthermore, you say that "there are many who are not of Russian origin in our parishes." Our Archbishop is not Russian either, yet he loves the Russian Church. Is it a spiritual deviation to love the Church that has engendered our historic diocese, to love its saints, its liturgy, its spirituality? Or is it still the School of Paris that should be loved to the exclusion of all the rest? Do you not see the spiritual amputation, the inevitable desiccation that such an approach engenders?

Finally, I come to your conception of obedience. You affirm: "At his baptism, the Christian does not make a vow of obedience, but he promises to follow Christ in all freedom."

Obedience to Christ and his commandments is a commitment of every Christian taken at his baptism. "In all freedom" does not mean that he does what he wants, but that he accepts with good heart and without pressure this submission to the will of God.

You add: "To not be in agreement with one's bishop is not a mark of distrust, but, on the contrary, a mark of fidelity to what one thinks, in a conciliar spirit." But the holy Hieromartyr Ignatius of Antioch affirms: "Let us therefore be careful not to oppose the bishop in order to remain submitted to God."

And again: "Obedience to the bishop is obedience to Christ, and any decision taken in the Church outside the bishop makes us a synagogue of Satan."

Basically, what you say is summed up in declaring: "I obey the bishop only as far as I agree with him." This is convenient, but contradicts the teaching of the Church. True obedience is the one that crucifies our own will, the one that is painful in so far as it contradicts our selfish "ego," our arbitrary judgment, that of the old man. Doing what you want is easier, but does not deserve any crown. The holy fathers teach that it is in obedience that our faith in the Church is revealed. I would say more, freedom in Christ—which is true freedom—is obtained only in obedience. That is why it is the prerequisite for all spiritual progress, as the Fathers teach us.

You say: "Obedience to the bishop must not be at the invaluable price of the loss of the unique spirit of our archdiocese," and I still read in St. Ignatius the Theophorus: "Children of light and truth, flee from quarrels and erroneous doctrines. Like sheep, follow your shepherd wherever he goes. For often, under benign glances, wolves seduce the children of God, then remove them. But if you make a block, they will not be able to slip among you."

Not wishing to sadden my fathers and brothers, and conceiving no pleasure in vain polemics, I feel it as a sacred duty to restore the truth where it seems to me to be altered, for it is on healthy ground and on straight paths that an objective and wise reflection is made possible in the face of the historical crisis we are going through.

In conclusion, I will quote this admirable text written on the sidelines of the Orthodox Synaxary by the Hieromonk Macarius of the Simonos-Petra Athonite Monastery:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the Holy City (the Church): New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, from God's house, and I heard a voice proclaim, "This is the dwelling of God with men "(Rev. 21, 1-3). This vision of St. John, which closes the books of the divine revelations, opens on the life of the Church, which stands on the right of the Lamb, adorned, like sons of gold and silver, with the whole beauty of its services and ceremonies, of its sacred architecture, of its icons, incense, lightings, songs, readings, blessings and processions, all this set which constitutes the frame of the manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven among us.

To live in the Church means to enter with all the saints into a dance chorus which unites the earth to Heaven, and gives us an experience of the glory of God, deprived of all subjectivism, on the condition, however, of having assimilated the rules governing this sacred dance, and to have learned the grammar of this polyphonic language of the liturgy, by which we can glorify the Holy Trinity in a just way (ortho-doxia), and by means of which God comes to reveal himself to us.

The hymns, prayers, songs and movements of the liturgical office, the succession of feasts and their combination during the year, all this is choreographically regulated by the typikon, that "eye of the Church" which far to be a collection of legal and drying rules, is in fact the condensed experience of the millennial experience of the Church. It is it that guarantees us the authenticity and the objectivity of the transmission of this experience of the holy Fathers. It is the lived Tradition, and the foundation of the orthodox spiritual life."

Protodeacon Alexandre Kedroff

Paris, July 23, 2019