

**Confession of Faith of the True-Orthodox Church**.

The Saving Nature of the Confession of the True Orthodox Faith

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:10). Following upon this – the Apostle’s expression of a divine truth about the necessity for salvation of an oral expression of the hope treasured in the hearts of believers – the Local Council of the True-Orthodox Church solemnly adopts the present Confession of Faith.

The faith, which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3), has not only been invariably preserved in the Christian Church as it traverses through this world, but has also been publically attested to. A true confession of faith is a criterion by which one can know the true Church. It is a sacred symbol, the means of grace-filled sanctification, the “place” of encounter between God and man. It binds together the true Christians living in all ages and in all parts of the universe, mystically leading them into the promised Kingdom of God.

A true confession of faith indicates the direction of the movement of the human mind – and, following it, of all human activity – on the path to union with God. A false confession, heresy, leads one away from this path, leading to a false end: mental idols, which plunge one into spiritual darkness.

A church organization is founded upon a correct confession, having apostolic succession in the episcopate. Where there is not a correct confession, there is no Christian faith, no Divine Mysteries, no grace-filled sanctification, no Christian Church itself. “God in all manner declared,” in the words of St. Maximus the Confessor, “that the Catholic Church maintains the true and saving confession in Him, calling Peter blessed for his confession of Him” (Letter to Anastasius). A right confession revealed to the Apostle Peter by the Heavenly Father made him the rock upon which the Lord builds His Church in its earthly history, invincible to the power of Hades (Matthew 16:16-18). Petrine succession is above all succession in his confession. By the confession of church organizations one can judge the extent to which their foundations are build on the immutable rock of revealed truth or on the sand of perverse and vain human opinion.

But succession in the right confession of faith consists not simply of a formal repetition of the letters of ancient dogmas, but in the living, ecclesial witness in the Holy Spirit to the unchanging and coherent truth in response to ever-newer heretical challenges. For the Church today, such are, above all, ecumenism, Sergianism, and name-fighting (onomatoclasm). As with all previous heretical delusions, they subvert the Christian faith itself, covertly denying its ultimate objective: our deification in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the true Church in our time is recognized not only by the confession of dogmas, in accordance with the witness of the Holy Fathers and Sacred Councils of antiquity, not only by their rejection as heresy, but also by the rejection of the newly-revealed heresies of ecumenism, Sergianism, and name-fighting.

We confess the truth and saving nature of the Orthodox faith alone, passed down to us by the Holy Spirit through the Prophets, Apostles, and Holy Fathers. By the saving faith, following the Apostles and Fathers, we understand not just the natural ability of the human soul, through the proper use of which man only approaches the mystery of salvation, but does not yet attain to it; and is not to be considered in isolation by hearing (Romans 10:17) – however correct, so long as knowledge of God remains theoretical, without experience, it only puffeth up (1 Corinthians 8:1). But the gift of God from above, which dwells in the pre-purified activity of the Christian life of the soul of man, does not distort the faith by the natural and undamaged preservation of the faith through hearing. Faith, naturally through natural repentance recognizes lies and adopts a true testimony to God – repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), thus affirming the right dogmatic faith through learning. Active adherence to dogmatic belief leads to the combination of our natural faith with the divine gift of vision (potentially, “in possibility,” contained in Baptism) – faith becomes grace-filled, trust translates into vision, They shall perish, but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment (Hebrews 1:11).

In accordance with the faith, transmitted from the Father through the Son of God in the Spirit by the Holy Church, and in it from the Apostles by succession through the Holy Fathers right up to our days, we accept everything that is in accordance with this faith, which has been accepted by the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: Holy Scripture, which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16), understanding them, following the Holy Fathers, to be not only the Biblical books of the Old and New Testament, but also the dogmatic and canonical decisions of the Universal and Holy Local Councils, as well as dogmatic and ascetic teaching, attested to by the agreement of the Holy Fathers expressed in their works. We reject and condemn everything that has been rejected and condemned by the Church: we anathematize all heresies condemned by the Holy Fathers, by the Universal and Sacred Local Councils; we reject the distortion of the canonical structure of the Church; and we condemn the vain customs and false traditions of men – everything contrary to true piety.

1. Faith in the one God, the Trinity

We confess the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one in essence and three in persons, One in Trinity and Triune in Unity, the Trinity one-in-essence and indivisible God, in Whom there is a trinity of persons (hypostases) that does not violate the unite of essence (nature), but a unity of essence that does not abolish the real distinction of persons.

We confess one God the Father, unbegotten, – “the source of the Godhead” and the one source of the hypostatic being of the Son and Spirit. We confess one God the Son, pre-eternally born of the Father, God the Word, by Whom also He made the worlds (Hebrews 1:2). We confess one God the Holy Spirit, Who pre-eternally proceeds from the Father, from the Father through the Son pre-eternally enlightening us, giving life to all that is created, sanctifying the faithful.

In accordance with the Holy Fathers and Sacred Councils (the Sixth Ecumenical Council and the Councils of Constantinople of June 1341, August 1341, 1347, 1351, and 1368), we confess the indivisible distinction in the one God of essence and energy. This distinction in God, as with distinctions in His Hypostasis, does not violate the exceeding simplicity of the divine mind, as the heretics falsely misconstrue. We confess the unknowability and inaccessibility of God’s essence, the common three Divine Persons, and the knowability and communicability of the Divine Energies, which are the movement of God’s essence, its uncreated radiance, pre-eternal glory and grace, and God Himself in His manifestations and origins that exceed human understanding.

Causal or existential, that is, by its very hypostatic existence, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father is distinguished from His pre-eternal shining forth from the Father through the Son by His Energies or from His pre-eternal resting in the Son. This distinction, the Holy Fathers attest in divinely-wise fashion, exposes the heresy of the filioque (the teaching about the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son), which from antiquity crept into the Church of Rome and caused it to fall away from the single saving faith. This heresy, which mixes the existential origin of the Holy Spirit from the Father as a single cause with His energetic shining forth from the Father through the Son and with His pre-eternal resting in the Son, thereby impiously denies the distinction in God of essence and energy, which means that it denies our deification, which is our salvation. Therefore the Holy Fathers and Holy Councils accordingly testified to the corruption of the heresy of the filioque and anathematized it, as the Eastern Patriarchs wrote in their Encyclical Letter of 1848: “All erroneous doctrine touching the Catholic truth of the Blessed Trinity and the origin of the divine Persons, and the subsistence of the Holy Spirit, is and is called heresy, and they who so hold are deemed heretics, according to the sentence of Saint Damasus, Pope of Rome, who says: ‘If any one rightly holds concerning the Father and the Son, yet holds not rightly of the Holy Spirit, he is an heretic’ (Cath. Conf. of Faith which Pope Damasus sent to Paulinus, Bishop of Thessalonica). Wherefore the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, following in the steps of the holy Fathers, both Eastern and Western, proclaimed of old to our progenitors and again teaches today synodically, that the said novel doctrine of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son is essentially heresy, and its maintainers, whoever they be, are heretics, according to the sentence of Pope Saint Damasus, and that the congregations of such are also heretical, and that all spiritual communion in worship of the orthodox sons of the Catholic Church with such is unlawful. Such is the force of the seventh Canon of the third Ecumenical Council.”

2. Faith in the God-Man, Jesus Christ

We confess one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, pre-eternal true God, Who for our salvation was incarnate in time and became true Man, one hypostasis (person) in two natures (essences) – divine and human – without confusion, invariably, indivisibly, and inseparably existing, with two natural wills and acting energies.

One conceived complex hypostasis of Jesus Christ, following the Holy Fathers, clearly professed not as relating to the connection of two hypostasis in one and not confusing two natures in one complex nature, but as the perception of complete and full human nature in the pre-eternal hypostasis of God the Word, Who made thereby the perceived human nature in all its natural properties His own.

We confess that the uniting of the Divinity and humanity in Christ according to hypostasis was performed for our uniting with the Divinity according to energy (grace), as the Holy Fathers in all ages consistently proclaim: God became man, so that man could become god; God was enhumanized, that man might be deified.

We believe and confess, that the Incarnation took place not according to the image of the passionate conception according to the lusts of the flesh and of the male seed, but according to the will of the Father and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God according to a supernatural borrowing from the immaculate Virgin May, who became true Theotokos, inspired by the flesh and wholly deified by it, the very same being enriched by divine attributes – omnipotent, all-blessed, omniscient… But wholly deified human nature is not abolished in His natural human qualities and therefore one and the same all-holy “flesh was mortal itself and life-giving due to the hypostatic union with [God] the Word” (St. John of Damascus, Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith 3:18), Who during His earthly life, according to the Economy of our salvation, freely showed both that Divine power and the natural weakness of humanity, suffering in body, while remaining impassive in Divinity. The action (energy) of the divine and human natures in the hypostasis of the incarnate God the Word, Jesus Christ, are inseparable, allowing the Holy Fathers to call them new divine-human actions. Following the divinely-wise Holy Fathers, we distinguish two assimilations in the Lord Jesus Christ: natural (essential) and relative (private): according to the natural assimilation, the Lord truly became man and really underwent everything peculiar to human nature, including suffering and death; according to the relative assimilation, He had compassion on us for things to which He Himself was not subject, bearing in Himself our sinful curse without being under oath; our sinful ignorance while being omniscient; and our abandonment by God, without being for a moment abandoned by the Divinity.

We confess that the Divine Word remained always and invariably inseparable from His soul and body, even in the agony before death, in death itself, and in the separation of soul and body, when His deified soul went to Hades, while His deified flesh lay in the grave.

We reject the impious opinion of the Nestorians that the Lord’s humanity was really separated from His Divinity during His sufferings on the Cross or at some moment of His dispensation.

We believe and confess that the actions of both His wills – divine and human – was inseparable, that is, that His human will always and invariably followed His Divine will, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8). The God-Man Jesus Christ did the very same for our salvation: by His seedless conception he destroyed the passionate pleasure that gives rise to sin; by His undefiled and painless birth, He destroyed the torment that necessarily follows the pleasure of sin; by His voluntary endurance of the blameless passion he put an end to the slavery to corruption; by the immutability of His human will, He set right our wavering will; by His dispassionate passions He put an end to the passionate beginnings in our fallen flesh; by the Cross he put an end to our curse (separation from God); by His life-giving death, He put an end to our death; by His descent into Hades, He put an end at and to Hades. By completing all the ages of human life, He sanctified by His divine presence every age; by living through the whole natural condition of our human nature, He wholly renewed it, making it, in the words of St. Athanasius the Great, acceptable to God, capable of grace for receiving the uncreated Divine Light, which once shown on the Mount of Thabor.

We believe and confess that, having accomplished the economy of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ truly resurrected the very same Virgin Mary, putting away from her corruption and mortality and revealing her to be imperishable and immortal. Having resurrected Himself, He became the first-fruits of our common resurrection, for by the power of the unity of human nature, the resurrection of a part of it is, in the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa, the resurrection of the whole of it.

We confess that, having arisen, the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven in His body, so that, as He promised, He might prepare a place for us in the mansions of the Father (John 14:2) and could send us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to become a constant testimony to the truth of Christ’s Church (cf. John 15:26-27). Having raised His humanity to the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ has shown our human nature to be equal to the divine, both in soul and in body.

3. Faith in the Church

We confess One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:23).

We understand the Apostolic naming of the Church as the Body of Christ, following the Holy Fathers, in the true and essential sense, and not in a conditional or metaphorical sense: the pre-eternal resting of the Holy Spirit in the Son became at the Incarnation His full resting in the human nature assumed by the Son, and through him, the full resting in the community of the faithful: the Church. The Hypostasis of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of Divine Energy anoints the Body of Christ, the Church, and every one of the faithful members of the Church can partake of this Divine Energy to the extent of his capacity.

We confess that Divine Energy (the uncreated grace of God) is given to true Christians in the Holy Mysteries, the “means of deification” (St. Dionysius), as well as through Holy Scripture, the true confession of faith, the invocation of the names of God, prayer, Christian virtue, sacred symbols, and material sacred objects: Christ’s Cross, holy icons, holy relics…

By the grace-filled action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the faithful partake, by the gifts of Pentecost, of divine life and our deification is poured out upon us, which is different both from the natural gifts given to man at creation, and from supernatural grace-filled gifts of the Holy Spirit (reason, revelation, miracles, healings, etc.) outside the Church. We confess, following the Holy Spirit, that God is everywhere present by His Grace, but not everywhere in the same way: in all creation as its Creator, Almighty, and Providence; in all intelligent creatures – angels and man – as Judge; in all faithful members of the Church – the Body of Christ – as Savior, granting multiple gifts leading to eternal life.

We reject and condemn any kind of occult opinions, teachings, and practices, as having nothing to do with Christianity and as resulting from the exposure of the fallen human mind to demonic lies: spiritualism, magic, astrology, extra sensory perception (ESP), UFO-ology, parapsychology, all kinds of mantic (oracle) teachings and practices of the so-called Theosophy and anthroposophy… We reject and condemn any occult teaching and practice that has arisen on the basis of the Kabbalah, Sufism, Yoga, Tantra, and other Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, Judaic, Taoist, and other non-Christian religious and occult magical teachings and practices. In particular, we reject and condemn the wicked pagan opinions and doctrines that distinguish a dual, composite human nature, in which, in addition to the natural forces of the soul and body, there are so-called subtle energy “body,” “field,” “center,” and “channels,” and offering exposure to them through so called energy work, using meditation, breathing exercises, etc.

We worship one God, and we honor His true friends (cf. John 15:15) and the ministers and stewards of His grace (cf. 1 Peter 4:10): the Most Holy Mother of God, the Holy Angels, the Prophets, Apostles, and all Saints, who have been glorified by God and testified to by the Church.

We venerate the manifold names of God, and among them especially the all-holy name of Jesus Christ, which is above every name, a name before which every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth (Philippians 2:9); a name whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12. Along with the Holy Fathers, we confess that the “teaching of God’s power in the name of Jesus has the full dignity of a foundational dogma” (St. Ignatius of the Caucasus, “Homily on the Jesus Prayer”), and the rejection of this doctrine is an impious heresy. Therefore we reject and anathematize name-fighting, which tramples upon and blasphemes this holy dogma, supposing that the name of God is a simple human thought, conventional alphabetical characters, or a random collection of sounds. We testify that the name-fighting heresy is an outgrowth of the heresy of Nestorianism, the heresy of iconoclasm, and the heresy of Barlaam and Akindynos, which rose up against the Orthodox doctrine of the uncreated Energies of God, as taught by St. Gregory Palamas, and wickedly teaching that the Energy is not God, but created by God.

When the spiritual conduct of the bishops of the Orthodox Church fell into decline, and all that was left, according to the words of St. Ignatius of the Caucasus, was a “weak, dark, inconsistent, incorrect understanding according to letters that killed the spiritual life in Christian society and destroyed Christianity, which is a practice and not a letter,” and the teaching about the Energies of God was forgotten, so that only a few ascetic strugglers of faith preserved it, there arose by diabolical instigation a blasphemy against the all-holy name of God. The Church authorities of Constantinople and Russia, yielding to the thoughtless influence of heretics – as has happened in the history of the Church many times – falsely condemned the Orthodox teaching on the names of God and subjected its faithful followers to lawless interdictions and persecution. The hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople at that time were mostly future ecumenical heretics, actively or passively accepting the program of ecumenical reforms set out in the Circular Epistle of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of 1920, and in 1923 they carried out the first of its points: the transition to the New Calendar in order to celebrate church holidays alongside western heretics. And the Epistle against name-glorifying accepted in 1913 by the Russian Synod was signed by the future apostate from the true faith and destroyer of the Russian Church, Sergius (Stagorodsky), impiously teaching that God’s Energy is not God, and that the name of God is a conventional sign, rather than grace and divine power, as the Holy Fathers in all ages have consistently taught.

We distinguish the name of God as the uncreated self-revelation of God – both as Divine Energy and created sacred symbol, noetic or material – in which God abides in His name-energy. God, as the Church through the mouths of the Saints salvifically preaches, is unknowable to the created power of the human mind, but can be seen only by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. St. Gregory Palamas, Against Akindynos 4:19); God is known and named not by means of human created thoughts, but by His uncreated Energies (Ibid, 1:3:6). Therefore it is highly impious to think that someone gives names to God in the same way that Adam gave names to the animals (Genesis 2:20). It is not man who by his creaturely power comprehends God and gives Him names, but God Who reveals through grace to man His pre-eternal names (cf. Exodus 3:14). In this sense we speak of the names of God as divine uncreated Energies. But being received by the purified mind of the Holy Prophets, these name-energies are “clothed” in created human thought, being uttered by created sounds or written in created letters. In this sense, we speak of the names of God as sacred symbols and verbal icons that are created images of uncreated name-energies.

We do not revere the name of God as the divine essence, for God’s essence is unknowable and nameless, and we wholly condemn those who teach such wickedness. We do not deify the variable sounds or letters with which the name of God is expressed in various human languages, as the name-fighters slander the Orthodox, resembling the iconoclasts in this slander, falsely accusing the Orthodox venerators of icons as deifiers of boards and paints. But we revere the verbal names of God that, we believe, are sanctified by the presence in them of the uncreated name-energies.

We confess the unity and uniqueness of the Church of Christ, which exists inseparably in the heavens and on earth. The boundaries of the Church are the conceptual boundaries of the true faith, of True Orthodoxy: the Body of Christ is present in its salvific gifts only in faithful communities headed by bishops who possess apostolic succession received by the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands going back to the Apostles.

As true bishops and bearers of Apostolic grace, we do not honor all so-called bishops who participate in the external (formal) succession of ordinations, for even apostates have this; but those who rightly divide the word of truth, that is, who along with the succession of ordination have continuity in the Apostolic faith by preserving the salvific dogmas and complying with the sacred canons.

Along with the Holy Fathers, we testify that bishops who err in the faith itself and wrongly teach heretical doctrines fall away from the Church, the Body of Christ, carrying away with them the communities that they head. That is why the Holy Church has conciliary declared that a bishop who openly teaches a heresy recognized by the Holy Fathers or the Sacred Councils loses the succession of apostolic grace and turns into a false-bishop, from whom the ecclesial community should separate even before ecclesiastical trial over him (cf. Canon 15 of the First-Second Council), as the Apostle commands: A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (Titus 3:10-11). Those who preserve ecclesial communion with a heretical bishop who publically – in word and deed – teaches any heresy – through accepting the false Mysteries performed by him, joining in prayer with him, commemorating his name liturgically, or accepting their false blessings – themselves become complicit in his evil-doing and fall away from the portion of the saved.

We condemn and anathematize the impious pan-heresy of ecumenism in all its forms and branches and, in particular, the so-called theory of partial communion, first fabricated by the Latins (cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism 1. 3), and subsequently adopted by the false Orthodox (cf. Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate, “Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church Toward the Other Christian Confessions 1:15-17). This refined version of ecumenism teaches that the confession of heresy does not tear one away from the Church of Christ, but only partially impairs a grace-filled life and ecclesial nature. Therefore heretical communities, apparently separated from the Orthodox Church, supposedly retain with it, to one degree or another, an invisible grace-filled unity (“partial communion”), remaining parts, even if flawed, of the one Body of Christ and thus retaining ecclesial Mysteries – all or only some, depending upon “the degree to which the faith and order of the Church, as well as the norms of Christian spiritual life, are preserved.” By their false teaching about the degrees of preservation of a grace-filled life and ecclesial nature in heretical communities, the heretic-ecumenists justify the various rites of reception (through Baptism, through Chrismation, through Repentance), which have existed from ancient times in the Church of Christ, as the criterion for applying and explaining this novelty, unknown to Tradition, of “degree of preservation of grace.” However, explaining this criterion, they immediately contradict themselves, declaring: “By establishing various rites of reception, however, the Orthodox Church does not assess the extent to which grace-filled life has either been preserved intact or distorted in a non-Orthodox confession, considering this to be a mystery of God’s providence and judgment” (Ibid, 1.17). – It turns out that the criterion chosen by them is itself somehow unknown and secret to them themselves.

We bear witness that, contrary to this reprobate and muddled interpretation of the heretic-ecumenists, that the Church of God has rendered its judgment about heretical communities through the mouths of the Holy Fathers and Sacred Councils: 1) all heresy is subject to anathema and complete excommunication (Canon 1 of the Second Ecumenical Council), completely excluding “a certain incomplete communion”; 2) in heresy and schism there is a complete interruption of the succession of God’s salvific grace; bishops and clergy who have fallen into heresy and schism are expelled by the Holy Spirit from their sacred orders (1st Canonical Epistle of St. Basil the Great); 3) heretics and all that maintain ecclesial communion with them, including entire communities, are rent from the Church by God’s judgment (even if this judgment is not witnessed to by the earthly judgment of ecclesial authorities) due to the very heresy and spiritual darkness, which is incompatible with the Light of divine grace flowing from the Body of Christ. Thus, in heresy there is no grace sanctifying to eternal life, there are no Mysteries, and the Baptism administered by heretics (as with all the other so-called Mysteries of heretics), has only an ostensible form, while in reality not in the least resembling piety (St. Athanasius the Great. Against the Arians 2:42). Therefore, following the Universal Teacher, we repeat: “Let no one deceive you by the gathering of heretics, because their Baptism is not enlightenment; they receive Baptism in body, but the soul is not enlightened” (On the words: “In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1), 2).

We also bear witness that the various rites of reception established by the Church do not correspond to the heretically fabricated “degrees of preservation of faith and grace-filled life” in heretical communities, for faith and grace-filled life are whole and integral: they are preserved wholly and integrally in the Body of Christ or are completely left without it; but, by economia, when a former heretic converts to the true faith, he is received into the Church not according to the full strictness of the canons (acribeia) – through Baptism – but “for the common edification” (cf. First Canonical Epistle of St. Basil the Great) through Chrismation or through Repentance. The admissibility of admission into the Church by economia is limited to an external preservation of the offices and rites of the Mysteries, an element of which is, in particular, the formal succession of ordinations from the Apostles. According to the interpretation of Zonaras of the 7th Canon of the Second Ecumenical Council, “these heretics are not re-Baptized, because as regards Holy Baptism they do not differ from us, but Baptize just as do the Orthodox.” Outside the Church, in heresy or schism, the external preservation of the offices and rites of the Mysteries, including the formal succession of ordination, remains a formality: only an external sign or symbol that is bereft of that which is symbolized. But upon joining the Church, this relationship is restored: the symbol becomes efficacious.

While judging heresy as spiritual darkness, incompatible with the light of divine grace, and of heretical communities as false churches having fallen away from the Body of Christ, we do not judge the posthumous and eternal fate of heretics: Them that are without God judgeth (1 Corinthians 5:13), Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

But the heretic-ecumenists, for the sake of the politics of this world, reject the foregoing salvific, apostolic, and patristic teaching by referring to heretics and heretical communities – thereby preventing their conversion to grace and truth – as scattered parts of the one body of the Church (cf. the Circular Epistle of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of 1920); by arbitrarily lifting anathemas (complete separation from ecclesial communion) that were imposed by both the Holy Fathers and the Sacred Councils (thereby falling under these anathemas themselves!); by recognizing the Mysteries performed in heretical communities, including the Eucharist, as true Divine Mysteries; by trampling on the canons of the Church by entering into liturgical and prayerful communion with heretics; and by preparing for full ecclesial communion with them, not through their abandonment of heresy and its anathematization, but rather through gradual rapprochement, wrongly interpreting as actualized Christ’s commandment for unity (by which they impiously dissect and oppose the unity of Christ and the truth of Christ).

We testify that, due to the confession by hierarchs of the Churches of so-called world Orthodoxy of the pan-heresy of ecumenism that the faithful children of God have departed from them and thereby condemned them. But they have condemned “not bishops, but false-bishops and false-teachers, and they have not sundered the unity of the Church by a schism, but have endeavored to protect the Church from schisms and divisions” (Canon 15 of the First-Second Council) For the separation from ecclesial communion with heretics commanded by the Apostles and Holy Fathers and enjoined by the holy canons represents separation not from the Church, but from the false Church: Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins (Revelation 18:4). By separating from heretics, no matter how numerous and organized they might be, the Church of Christ consistently maintains its unity and completeness, which are the unity and completeness of the Body of Christ, and not of an earthly, human organization. To avoid confusion in people’s minds between the True Orthodox Church and ecumenical false-churches that also, falsely, call themselves “Orthodox,” the faithful children of God – both in Greece and in Russia, and then in the rest of the world – began to call themselves “True Orthodox Christians,” and to call the Church “True Orthodox.”

We condemn and anathematize the heresy of Cyprianism that has hitherto gripped the True Orthodox Church, the fabrication of Cyprian Koutsoumbas, former Metropolitan of Oropos and Fili, who impiously taught that heresy is not spiritual death, as the Holy Fathers unanimously determined, but only a spiritual illness to which both individual Christians and entire local Churches can be subject. Being infected with heresy, these churches, according to Cyprian’s idle opinion, nonetheless remain parts, although ailing ones, of the one Church of Christ. The right to final judgment of them is supposedly left to a council, which can only tear away the hopelessly ill member from the healthy body, which becomes the last mark by which a part of the Church infected by heresy can finally lose salvific grace.

We testify that the aforesaid heresy of Cyprianism not only brings blasphemy upon the Body of Christ, which is supposedly susceptible to spiritual illness – God forbid! – but also upon the Holy Spirit, Whose abiding in ecclesial communities is put into slavish dependence upon the decisions of a council.

We, in accordance with the Tradition of the Church, confess that true Church Councils are only witnesses of the activity of the Holy Spirit, humbly following His will, and not predetermining it by its decisions.

We confess that the Church is the manifestation on earth of Christ’s Kingdom, which is not of this world (John 18:36), the eschatological community that traverses through the desert of earthly history into the promised land and has no continuing city, but we seek one to come (Hebrews 13:14). The Holy Catholic Church is not bound to any earthly government by indissoluble bonds and does not identify itself with any single social-political structure, but extends itself among various governments and peoples, remaining as it were above them as the one people of God that constitute the one Body of Christ, Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all (Colossians 3:11). Therefore we testify that in the Church of Christ there cannot be confrontation and division along state, national, socio-political, cultural, or any other earthly lines, but we condemn the arising of such divisions as sinful.

We condemn and anathematize the heresy of Sergianism, which impiously imagines that the Church of Christ does not have the power to preserve itself on earth without the support of an earthly kingdom and without legal existence therein, and therefore teaches that church life must be constructed after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Colossians 2:8), Who hath not where to lay His head (Matthew 8:20), and to subordinate church organization – in its external affairs and inner structure – to earthly authorities, even those that are openly atheist, theomachist, and proclaim as their goal the destruction of Christianity.

This heresy, of old imperceptibly implanted by the devil in the minds of the weak in faith and piety, was erected as a comprehensive principle by the apostate Sergius Stragorodsky, who usurped the administration of the Russian Church, establishing an arbitrary synod and blaspheming the Confessors of faith as political offenders, together with the atheists subjecting them to persecution and unlawful interdictions: suspension from serving, ejection from office, and excommunication from the Church (thereby excommunicating and expelling himself!). “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church!” Rejecting the testimony of the New Martyrs in Christ, and forbidding their veneration, Sergius and the false-hierarchy created by him rejected the Church itself, the Body of Christ, being ashamed of Christ Himself, Who said: For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:24-26).

The heresy of Sergianism, according to the witness of the New Martyrs, distorts, perverts, and denies the following provisions of the dogma of the Church: 1) the confession of the holiness of the Church, that is, faith in the full sanctifying presence therein as the earthly community of the All-Holy Spirit, whereby the Church is the source of salvation and sanctification for each of the faithful; 2) the confession of the freedom of the Church as an inherent divine gift, through the effective knowledge of the truth (cf. John 8:36), freeing the faithful from slavery to this world, which lies in evil (cf. 1 John 5:19), and introducing the children of God into freedom in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17); 3) the confession of the unity of the Church as the grace-filled unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3), as members of a highly diversified unity under the single head of Christ, From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16); 4) the confession of the catholicity of the Church as the overall presence in the ecclesial body of the Holy Spirit, inseparably divided and teaching each of the faithful grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7) on the manifold ecclesial ministries: And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13); 5) the confession of the apostolicity of the Church as an immutable gift of the glad tidings and edification of Christ, transmitted by the Holy Spirit from the Apostles through the Holy Fathers until the present day, expressed in right dogma and in accordance with the dogmas of canonical actions.

Sergius and his followers opposed the holiness and freedom of the Church by the impious opinion that the Church is supposedly saved in the world by hypocritical submission and service to earthly powers, even if they are theomachist, by evading the confessional and martyric witness in persecution, false witness on the confessors of faith, and the glorification and liturgical commemoration of theomachist persecutors – evilly and falsely calling this entire apostasy, which converted an ecclesial organization into the Babylonian harlot sitting upon the scarlet beast (cf. Revelation 17:3-6) a wise church policy. Sergius and his followers replaced the grace-filled unity of the Church with administrative unity, based on the slavish subordination of ecclesial authority, falsely calling this obedience. Catholicity became corporate solidarity, defending their own worldly interests under the guise of service to God. Apostolicity became the continuity of administrative authority, Apostolic glad tidings became the proliferation, with the help of the powers of this world, of their worldly influence, falsely passed of as a means of preaching Christian faith.

Therefore, along with the Holy New Martyrs, we testify that the Orthodox cannot share the lot or portion of the Sergianist false-church (cf. Letter of the Hieromartyr Cyrill of Kazan to Hieromonk Leonid from March 8/23, 1937), for all ecclesial communion with it – participation in Sergianist divine services and Mysteries, receiving blessings from Sergianist bishops and priests, joint prayers with Sergianists, etc. – makes one an accomplice in all their doctrinal and canonical deviations.

We confess the salvific Mysteries of the True Orthodox Church, scattered throughout the world, rejecting the false-mysteries of heretics. We forbid the faithful children of the True Orthodox Church to have any ecclesial communion with any heretics, recalling the Apostolic and Patristic witness, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that heretics are not just those who confess heresy, but all who do not separate from them in ecclesial communion. Therefore, “With all our strength, therefore, let us beware lest we receive communion from or grant it to heretics… lest we become partakers in their dishonor and condemnation. For [by Communion]… we are assuredly voluntarily united also with all those who partake with us. For this union is effected voluntarily and not against our inclination” (St. John of Damascus, Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, 4:13).

We believe and confess that following the end of this perishable world there will be the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, the general resurrection, and the Last and Dread Judgment, after which will come the eternal Kingdom of the future age – that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Emulating the desire of the All-Holy God, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), we desire the eternal salvation of all people without exception. But at the same time we recognize and confess that to come to an understanding of the truth and to attain to eternal salvation in God by the gift of deification can only be done voluntarily, through personal free choice, free acceptance of God, and love for Him. Therefore, along with the Universal Church, which has condemned with one mouth through the Holy Fathers and Sacred Councils the heresy of apocatastasis (universal restoration), we also condemn and reject it. This heresy, which teaches that all intelligent creation, including Satan, will be restored and saved by the all-good God by force of His predestination, thereby rejects the God-given gift of freedom, subjecting it to Divine omnipotence, and turns love for God into slavish need.

By the present Confession we solemnly testify to the True Orthodox faith we have adopted: the Apostolic and Patristic faith. We commit ourselves before our Lord Jesus Christ to keep it holy, not departing from it, neither distorting it, nor keeping silent in anything.

We call upon all those of like faith, but who through the devil’s artifices have been scattered, True Orthodox Churches, scattered throughout the world, to embark on the path of attaining the unity commanded us by the Lord. Being united in faith we, according to God’s commandments, are obliged to be united in a visible way: in our prayer, in our Mysteries, and in the Mystery of Mysteries, the Holy Eucharist. We sincerely witness: seek not your own, but only God’s! Do not think of submission to anyone, but seek fraternal unity in Christ with all like believing Churches. So be it!

Bishops’ Conference of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church

**Paschal Epistle**

of Bishop Gregory (Lourie) of Petrograd and Gdov,

Chairman of the Bishops’ Conference of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church

Christ is Risen!

Dear Orthodox Christians,

Dear everyone who is still only trying on True Orthodoxy,

Christ is Risen!

This night Christ conquers death. This night Christ conquers sin. This night Christ releases us from defilement. This night Christ saves us from the corruption and death of the body. This night Christ saves us from the corruption and death of the soul, the only cause of the corruption and death of the body.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death,” says the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:2), and we say this along with him. Therein lies the joy of our feast, therein lies its meaning. What we could never have achieved on our own has been accomplished.

Today we hear Christ saying: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Christ has already done everything; all that remains for those who wish is to come. Christ calls everyone, even those who are foolish and lack understanding: “Whoso is foolish, let him turn aside to me: and to them that want understanding she says, Come eat of my bread, and drink wine which I have mingled for you” (Proverbs 9:3-4). Therefore we have no doubt that we are among the invited. Therefore we rejoice. Therefore we have hope. Therefore we are confident.

But it could very well be that this does not seem to be the case. It could very well be that today we will rejoice, but today or tomorrow we will lose this joy and even simply forget about Christ. We will begin to live in a world where there is no Christ, but where there is work, food, sleep, family troubles, worldly pleasures, worldly fears, a vain desire to learn about things that do not concern us, and a laziness to learn about what we need in order to abide with God; trust in our strength and constant fear that this strength is not enough; finally, that which inevitably follows therefrom: sickness and death, and not only temporal death, but eternal death.

There is nothing in such a world that will not be sinful and fatal. Christ tells us about this world: “Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). This is that spiritual Babylon that each one of us voluntarily constructs for himself. For this, it is entirely unnecessary to commit any crimes or indulge in any gross vices. One can simply lead one’s own life. It is enough that this life be one’s own, without Christ and not in Christ.

Then we will be left without today’s feast day. Even eating tons of kulich and dyed eggs will not help us enter into this celebration. It is frightful to say, but even Communion at the festal Liturgy will not help. So what will help?

All that will help is consciousness of our weakness and inclination towards sin. Right now, while we are still praying, while we have still not forgotten about Christ, let us recall and sense the danger of such a falling away. We were constantly reminded of this during Great Lent, but let us constantly remind ourselves of the same during these festal days. Fasts and feasts support us from two opposite direction to move in one direction only: only towards Christ and only away from the spiritual Babylon.

“The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21). Feasts turn into occasions for the loss of the memory of God and become days of major spiritual disasters. For some, the fall begins with drunkenness and overeating, but for many it is simply a matter of immersion into daily life, while forgetting prayer and rarely participating in the Eucharist. Knowing this, the Church calls us to the contrary. It is necessary that everyone who has the physical ability should approach the Communion of the Holy Gifts during Bright Week, even before the onset of the following Sunday (thus teaches the Sixth Ecumenical Council). And then it is essential that we celebrate every Sunday as if it were the day of Christ’s Resurrection, as if it were the day of Pascha. If we begin to live in such a way, the feast of Pascha will never end for us – even when the set forty days of this feast pass by.

For this, we need to labor only a little; the primary work will not be in the external and visible forms of our life, but only in our inner attention and memory of God. We have already become convinced how many times of how good it is to live with the memory of God, and of how bad it is to live with that which takes its place, when this memory is lost. So let us wish ourselves good rather than bad. Now, on the feast day, we need labor only a little in order to remain with Christ and not exchange Him for the false joys of the worldly celebrations that will, after all, be quickly replaced by equally false worldly sorrows and anxieties. Not only the fast, but feasts call us to labor: but this labor is light, for Christ’s “burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

With the Prophet Abbakum, let us stand upon the watch of our mind and our soul, that we may watch and never lose Christ (Abbakum 2:1). Then, as is chanted in today’s hymns, we will stand with the Prophet, and the Prophet will stand with us:

Let the Prophet Abbakum, the proclaimer of divine things, keep the divine watch with us, and show forth the radiant Angel who with resounding voice hath declared: Today doth bring salvation to the world, for Christ is risen as omnipotent.

+Gregory, Bishop of Petrograd and Gdov

Saint Petersburg, the Lord’s Pascha, 2015.

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