

ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND ORTHODOXY

Wherein Lie the Loyalties of our Leaders?

by *Bishop Auxentios of Photiki*

IN A DISTINCTLY WESTERN piece of scholarship, a Hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America, a convert from the Latin Church, recently made a thinly veiled argument for the *developing primacy* of the Œcumenical Patriarchate. Indeed, Œcumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, trained in canon law at a Roman Catholic university, has also repeatedly referred to a certain “*primacy*” belonging to his ancient See. If, in the final analysis, the very notion of canon law itself—and especially as it is understood among contemporary Orthodox theologians—is essentially Western in origin, *its centrality in the argument for the establishment of a kind of “Eastern Pope” in Constantinople reveals the extent to which Roman Catholicism has influenced modernist Orthodox and how they view and understand the Church.*

While the Patriarch of Constantinople addresses the Pope of Rome as a brother of equal status and establishes that claim on the enduring model of the Orthodox episcopacy, of which he is but the *first among equals*, at the same time he conducts himself as though he were the repository of ultimate authority in the Church. His recent actions against and intimidation of the Patriarchate in Jerusalem, *the Mother Church of Christianity*, amply demonstrate this. This neo-papal trend under the administration of an Orthodox Patriarch with close ties to the Roman Catholic world is especially disturbing when one considers that *there is compelling evidence that the late Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, an official of the World Council of Churches, a leading figure in the Russian Orthodox Church, and a great lover of Roman Catholicism, was in fact a secret Roman Catholic bishop with Jesuit sympathies or ties.* In light of new revelations about Nikodim’s commission to convert the Russian nation, his death in the arms of Pope John-Paul I does not now seem so curious.

As ecumenical dialogues between the Orthodox and Roman Catholics take on unheard of dimensions—*the recognition by Orthodox of the validity of the sacraments of the Church of Rome, the Uniates, and the non-Chalcedonians*—, one cannot but wonder whether this betrayal of the Orthodox Church on untenable theological and ecclesiological grounds is not *closely linked to the Roman Catholic sympathies of many of our Orthodox leaders and the neo-papal model of Church administration that they have adopted from the Latin Church.* We traditionalist Ortho-

dox stand back in shock at the naïveté of our *Church's leaders, who have accepted ecumenical principles that violate the very foundations of our Church and who speak, incredibly enough, of a Christianity "beyond the borders of dogma"!* We stand incredulous before the spread of neopapism in a Church which has always considered Christ its only head. In a Church which defines itself by the rightness of its beliefs and dogmas, we are at a loss to understand how even sincere Orthodox theologians and Bishops can speak of Orthodoxy outside such rightness. *Only in the contrast between our love for Orthodoxy and the Orthodox ecumenists' love for something else—Roman Catholicism, in most cases—can we find any explanation for this perplexing situation.*

If our explanation seems overstated, let us quote some astounding words from a talk in 1991 by Father Boris Brobinsky, Dean of the St. Sergius Institute in Paris, at the Roman Catholic parish of St. André de l'Europe in Paris, France. (See this address in *Sobornost*, Vol. XV, No. 2 [1993], pp. 28ff.) Among his first statements is the following: *"My whole life has been marked, and is still marked, by deep links, both personal and ecclesiastical, with the Catholic Church.... I did my secondary schooling with the Jesuit fathers. They gave me a great deal and I owe them a great deal."* He later refers to the *"grace of God which abounds within"* the Roman Catholic Church and confesses that such post-Schism Latin saints as Francis of Assisi *"ought also to be our Saints"* and praises such *"righteous"* Roman Catholics as Mother Teresa, in contemporary times.

To Ukraine, to Russia, and to the Latinized Greek islands the Latins and Jesuits also bequeathed much: albeit *much* pain, *much* spiritual ruination, and *much* political oppression. Indeed, the loyalty of traditionalist Orthodox Christians in these lands is directed not at Rome and those who, like Francis of Assisi and Mother Theresa, place obeisance to the Papacy at the center of their Christianity; rather, their loyalty is directed at that Orthodoxy which is more precious than life, that Orthodoxy which the Athonite Fathers of years past vowed never to betray, and that Orthodoxy which commemorates an endless number of Saints from within its own bosom.

Father Boris admits, later on in his talk, that it was from Dom Odo Casel, Dom Lambert Beauduin, Louis Bouyer, and other liturgical scholars that he and others "discovered the theological status of the liturgy." And while he asserts that several very "westernized" Orthodox scholars (Father A. Schmemmann among them) influenced the deliberations of Vatican II, it was to these Latin scholars that he looked, as a student, for "living water, essential nourishment." For a traditionalist Orthodox Christian, just as the spiritual poetry of Fran-

cis of Assisi and the caring sacrifice of Mother Theresa may constitute inspiring tributes to the beauty of the human spirit, the liturgical scholarship of Casel and others of his intellectual bent can serve to focus one on the spirit of Christian worship. *But it is to the Orthodox Fathers themselves, sustained by the richness of the Divine Liturgy and its unifying quality, that we traditionalist Orthodox turn for the "living waters" of spiritual nourishment. Our spiritual thirst rises from within Orthodoxy, the very criterion of Christianity, and only therein can it be quenched.*

Father Boris Brobinskoy was the chief speaker at a conference which I attended with Bishop Chrysostomos in Sigtuna, Sweden, some years ago, when the latter was teaching at Uppsala University. We were treated with unprecedented rudeness by the participants—a number of whom began to make highly inappropriate remarks and to laugh when His Eminence was introduced as “an Old Calendarist Bishop.” In contrast to this vulgar behavior, Father Boris very cordially greeted Bishop Chrysostomos, whom he had earlier met at Oxford, and welcomed us. *I say this to emphasize that Father Boris is indeed a gentleman and a sincere, dedicated clergyman.* Like his confession that he “loved Catholics” before he even “knew” them, *his personal motivations are not in question.* It is his lack of certain Orthodox sensitivities—a lack which he shares with many of the ecumenists in our Church—that concerns me. It is precisely the personal, however elevating, that we cannot confuse with our spiritual duties. Love in the spiritual life comes, I would respectfully counsel Father Boris, *first from knowledge, not vice versa*; indeed, even our love of God begins with knowledge, if not, in the famous words of St. Anthony the Great, with “fear.”

Were it not for his personal association with Roman Catholicism, Father Brobinskoy—who without doubt has a truly Orthodox heart and spirit—would cringe at his claim that we Orthodox do not deny “the unifying role of the see of Rome in the past—a role played for us today by the see of Constantinople.” Both classical papism and such neo-papism are the antithesis of true Orthodox ecclesiology. We must not let our personal debt to others—the acknowledgement of which, in Father Boris’ case, attests to his spiritual virtue—intervene in our critical commitment rightly to divide the word of truth. *There is a great danger today that the false spirit of ecumenism can draw on and distort our very virtues, making wholly upright Orthodox clergymen blind to the disloyalty that can unwittingly and unintentionally result from such a process.* Our reference to Father Boris is not *ad hominem*, but a warning that even *the most sober and gifted of our Orthodox leaders* must sedulously examine the object of their loyalties.