Time as Judge. Orthodox Churches of Russia and Constantinople in the 20th Century

The topic of relationships between the Mother Church and the Sister Church – the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople and Russia was very painful in the last century. An open discourse about it is initiated by the Rev. Dr Alexander Mazyrin, PhD/Church History, and Andrey Kostryukov, PhD/ Historical Sciences, in the collection 'From the History of Relationships between the Churches of Russia and Constantinople in the 20th Century'. The publication consists of two essays: 'Phanar and Renovationism against the Russian Orthodox Church' by Father Alexander Mazyrin and 'The Church Diaspora, and the Ecumenical See' by A. Kostryukov. The below article written by Sergey Firsov, PhD/Historical Sciences, published in the 'Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarkhii' (Is. 10, 2018) is devoted to this collection.

In fact, the overall title of Father Alexander's essay already speaks clearly that he regards the actions of the Church of Constantinople as aimed against the Russian Orthodox Church supposing that these actions are conscious and well considered. From the very beginning the author shows that the Phanariots were not embarrassed by the arbitrary actions of the schismatic 'Supreme Church Administration' in 1922 and 'along with the theomachist Bolsheviks and treasonous renovators, became another source of sorrow for the Russian Orthodox Church'. For Phanar, 'political interests' proved to be more important than canonical rules and the Orthodox church tradition. The author cites examples of how the Church of Constantinople (in the person of her supreme church authority) while expressing compassion for the Russian Church, sought to use the GRU-inspired church schism for her own political ends.

A noticeable role in the negative development of the Greek-Russian church relations was played by two representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch – two Greek archimandrites, un uncles and his nephew, Jacob and Basil (Dimopoulos). The former was a representative of Phanar in Russia since 1894 and lived in his residence in Moscow (Krapivensky Pereulok, 4). Up to his death in 1924, he was an official representative of Phanar in Russia. Since 1924 up to his death in 1934, the same duty was fulfilled by his nephew.

As Father Alexander shows, Archimandrite Jacob quite quickly figured out that the Renovationists enjoyed support from the Bolshevik authorities. He decided to use that opportunity to strengthen the influence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and his own, too, in his desire to obtain the return of the Moscow representation of Constantinople, which had been requisitioned by the government of 'workers and peasants'. 'Evidently', the author writes, 'they hinted to Dimopoulos Sr. that the return of the

representation should be worked off, and he set about to do it'. Already in summer 1922, the archimandrite showed up as an honorary member of the presidium of the Renovationist congress 'A Living Church', in which he sat in session together with the representative of the Patriarch of Antioch, Archimandrite Paul (Katapodis). The Greeks were not at all embarrassed by seeing married 'hierarchs' who filled the Renovators' 'episcopate'.

The fact that Jacob acted quite consciously can be understood from the general policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople headed since 1922 by Meletius IV (Metaxakis). This policy was aimed at Phanar's expansion on the global scale: in March 1922, the Patriarch issued a tomos on Constantinople's right to supervise and govern all the Orthodox parishes located outside the Local Orthodox Churches by organizing a Metropolis of Thyateira with the center in London and an Archdiocese of North and South America. A year later, the Patriarch interfered in Polish church affairs (Tomos of Autocephaly of the Polish Church was signed later, in November 1924), and created an 'Autonomous Autocephaly of Estonia' and an 'Orthodox Archdiocese of Finland'.

Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the weakening of the Russian Church was included in Constantinople's global plan of 'Hellenization' of Orthodoxy taking actually after the Roman Catholic papacy. Aware of it, one will not find it difficult either to explain the actions taken by Phanar's representative in Soviet Russia: the worst the matters stood with the Russian Church the greater was the propagation of the Renovationist schism, the more advantageous Constantinople's situation proved to be. In this connection, Archimandrite Jacob's logic becomes understandable (though not at all justified) as he, in his letter to Phanar, shamelessly alleged that most of the Russian faithful believed the Church of Constantinople to be 'the only anchor of salvation and Orthodox faith' (p. 41). Certainly, the archimandrite also took into account the important fact that the Bolsheviks favoured the Renovators and sought to discredit Patriarch Tikhon in all possible ways. The political component of the church problem was not a secret for the representative of Phanar.

The material presented in the book also show that Constantinople's policy towards the Renovators did not change under Meletius IV's successors, too, right up till Photius II (Maniatis). Already under Gregory VII (Zervoudakis) called the head of the Renovationist Synod, Eudocim (Meshchersky), as not only 'metropolitan' but also 'beloved brother and con-celebrant'. It was also planned to invite Renovationists to an 'Ecumenical Council' so broadly and loudly proclaimed by the same Ecumenical Patriarchs seeking to use it for asserting their own importance. The authors of the book pay attention to the noise produced by the Renovationists about 'the longed-for' event.

All this can be quite easily explained: Phanar was interested in the Renovationists insofar as they could help strengthen its positions. As Father Alexander Mazyrin rightly points out, "The Greeks had a reason to help the Renovationists, 'to direct the Church in accordance with the changed order of civic life' only if

this new ‘civic order’ in Russia could benefit them by influencing the Turkish government which was what the Bolsheviks were in no haste to do”. In the mid-1920s (and even later), the Patriarchs of Constantinople still had a hope that the Bolsheviks would make an influence on the Turkish authorities in behalf of Phanar. Their union with the Renovationists continued as well. In this connection, one cannot but feels astonished also by the fact that the representative of the Patriarch took part in the Renovationists’ Council’ in autumn 1925.

The more disorders experienced by Orthodoxy in Russia, the more active was Constantinople’s representatives who kept Phanar informed about Russian church affairs. Significantly, Patriarch Basil III in October 1925 sent a letter to the head of the Ukrainian Renovationists, chairman of ‘The Ukrainian Bishops’ Synod’, Kir-Pimen (Pegov), giving his blessing to ‘the hierarchy and flock’. Archimandrite Basil served as a ‘transfer member’ and translator of all these messages, who, according to the apt word of Father Alexander Mazyrin, proved ‘creative’ in his representational functions as he sent his opuses not only to church bodies but also to VTsIK (All-Russian Central Executive Committee-*tr.*).

Overall, the portrait of Dimopoulos Jr pictured in the book is very colourful. He is presented as not only a cynical actor who impudently interfered (on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarch) in Russian church affairs, but also as a self-seeking person concerned for his personal welfare much more than for his ‘diplomatic duties’. With amazing activity he struggled for both ‘church peace’ and an individual bathroom, kitchen and reduced rent. In this struggle for personal well-being, he relied on the help and support of the Renovationist Synod, combining, if it can be said so, personal interests with the interests of an ambiguously understood ‘universal Orthodoxy’.

At the time when the idea of convening an Ecumenical Council was still supported by Phanar, Archimandrite Basil would console the Renovators (disturbed by the fact that Patriarch Basil II was ready to invite to the Council both ‘the diaspora Russians’ and ‘the Tikhonians’) using such phrases as ‘the sympathy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate will be on the side of the Moscow Holy Synod) (p. 133). Thanks to Archimandrite Basil the Renovationist leaders could persuade ‘ordinary schismatics’ that the principle criterion of being Orthodox lies in the union with Constantinople, and they, unlike ‘the Tikhonians’ did correspond to this criterion.

The author I believe is quite right maintaining that by the end of 1926 Archimandrite Basil was close to finally identifying Renovationism with the Orthodox Russian Church and ignoring the patriarchal Church. However, it was not only the archimandrite’s ideas. ‘For the Phanar officialdom (issues of *Orthodoxia* – C. F.) the true Church in Russia was as if non-existent’, Father Alexander Mazyrin writes, ‘they wish only those there with whom the Soviet power was pleased’ (p. 150). This is exactly where the problem lay: those who were not recognized by the Bolsheviks did not exist for the Phanar leaders either.

The situation partly changed only after Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) received in summer 1927 the official legalization of the patriarchal Church. Deep down however, this change was quite ambiguous. It is shown in the book that for Patriarch Basil III, both the Renovationist Synod and the Moscow Patriarchate were ‘equally honorable’ representing no more than two ‘parts’ or ‘orientations imbued with the same spirit’. Since the end of 1927, Phanar sought to build relations with ‘the both orientations’ on parity basis. No agreement was in principle possible to reach between these ‘sides’, and appeals ‘to unite’ were impossible for the patriarchal Church in Russia since such ‘unification’ would have placed the structure headed by Metropolitan Sergius outside the Church. The Phanariots either did not understand it or just pretended not to understand. Hence, they ‘joined the ranks of enemies of the Orthodox Church in Russia following the godless ones and Renovators while lavishing words of love for her’.

This conclusion of Father Alexander Mazyrin, for all its harshness, should be recognized as fundamentally right just as his statement that the activity of the Phanar representative, Archimandrite Basil, in the 1920s brought apparent evil to the Russian Church. It is quite another matter that in the situation of a new (Soviet) realit, far from all the Orthodox people could quickly and correctly sort out the situation being attracted by the social demagogy of new ‘zealots of faith’; not all the ‘simpletons’ (and not only ‘simpletons) could immediately determine their position amidst the artful designs of church policy. It should be taken into account however that the Phanariots were not ‘naive souls’, and Archimandrite Basis even was an honorary member of the presidium of the Renovationist Synod and later also accepted a ‘hierarchal’ award – a brilliant cross for his klobuk, and this notwithstanding the fact that the married episcopate and second marriage of the clergy, which was a norm in the Renovationist ‘Church’, was not recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople!

At least up till the Constantinople Synod’s decision on second marriage was published in September 2018.

Phanar was never against the participation of its official representative in the work of Renovationist structures and assemblies. In 1928, Archimandrite Basil attended ‘The 3d Local Sacred Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church’, and during his visit to Leningrad in the beginning of 1929 solemnly announced that he was aware of the desire of ‘the Orthodox Church’, that is the Renovators, to achieve peace and unity and that the opponents of this ‘peace’ were ‘splitters’ who sow trouble. He said they would have to give an account for it to the Ecumenical Council. It is clear who was meant by ‘splitters’. The pro-Renovationist position of Phanar, as is shown in the book, remained unchangeable and the name of its Moscow representative was perceived in Russian Orthodox circles as a contemptuous nickname.

However, the immediate future showed that historical reputation was not much of a concern for the

representative of the Patriarch of Constantinople, just as were possible accusations of communication with organizers of the Russian church schism to threaten the primate of the Ecumenical See himself whose policy can be rightly described as expansionist. While maintaining relations with the Moscow Patriarchate, Phanar not only continued its contacts with the Renovationist Synod but also, as Father Alexander Mazyrin rightly points out, provoked a new conflict by admitting to its jurisdiction (in 1931) the Russian parishes in Western Europe, which were headed by Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgiyevsky). Father Alexander Mazyrin writes that the Eulogians' action was assessed at that time by many as betrayal: provoked by the Bolsheviks, the conflict with the Moscow Patriarchate could justify their temporary self-governance but not a move to a jurisdiction that supported the Renovationists.

The late 1930s was a time of total destruction of all the church structures by Stalin's power, including those of 'Tikhonians' and Renovationists. However, the relationships between the Moscow Patriarchate and Constantinople did not change for the better. As Father Alexander Mazyrin notes, the situation began to change as late as during the World War II; all the unpleasant things in relations with Eastern Patriarchs were 'forgotten' at that time, and 'history began to be written as if 'from scratch'. The Ecumenical Patriarch Benjamin (Psomas) welcomed the election of Sergius (Stragorodsky) as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and no longer made any recommendations concerning unification with the Renovationists (as was the case in 1927). The USSR leaders lost their interest in the Renovationists; Stalin gave the go-ahead to the dismantling of the remains of their religious organization.

What was in the upshot then? According to Father Alexander Mazyrin, "the 20th century lesson so hard for the Church left its mark. 'The Great Mother Church of Constantinople', in a situation of great disaster of the Russian Church, behaved not quite 'motherly'".

The same thought is pursued by another author of the book, Andrey Kostryukov. He shows how and why the attitude of representatives of the Russian church diaspora (primarily that of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) to the Ecumenical See changed. The author rightly 'derives' the history of the ROCOR from the Supreme Church Administration organized in southern Russia in 1919, asserting that initially the SCA on the whole trusted the Church of Constantinople: 'habitually' Russian emigres' attitude to Phanar was deeply respectful.

What followed under Patriarch Meletius was not only 'disparagement' of the Russian Church but also open claims of Constantinople to global jurisdiction. These claims emerged when the Orthodox Russian Church found herself in the situation of a hostage of the theomachist policy of the Bolsheviks. As a result, Russian hierarchs abroad had to react to both the church developments within the Soviet Russia and the response to them by Phanar. And the response was quite unambiguous. The Renovationist schism was taken extremely painfully by Russian hierarchs abroad.

Already in 1922, the diaspora SCA declared the Renovationist leaders graceless (it stated though that they should be judged by Patriarch Tikhon and his Holy Synod). The cooperation of schism leaders with the Bolsheviks was perceived by 'those abroad' as Judas's sin. In summer 1922, the Joint Presence of the Diaspora Synod and the ROCOR Church Council stated that they considered the members of this schism anathematized. At the same time, Kostryukov believes that 'in the Diaspora Synod they considered that good relations with Phanar made it possible to make it avert the recognition of the Renovationists'. It turned out that diaspora archpastors sincerely hoped that they would be able to make Phanariots change their mind and embark on the path of a 'sober view' of the schism in the Russian Church. The decision to anathematize the Rennovators, author believes, was made not without the influence of the so-called charter of Patriarch Tikhon issued on December 6, 1922, the authenticity of which has not been re-affirmed to this day. In this charter, the Renovationist administration was anathematized while the Russian situation was described as 'a year of the triumph of Satan and the reign of the Antichrist'.

Kostryukov is convinced that it is in this context that we should consider the participation of the diaspora hierarchs Anastasius (Gribanovsky) and Alexander (Nemolovsky) in the so-called All-Orthodox Congress convened by Patriarch in May-June 1923. This 'revolutionary' congress was not met with sympathy among 'Russians abroad' (by the way, Archbishop Anastasios left it after four sessions), and the Bishops' Council of the Russian Church Abroad rejected the decisions made at it in the same year).

All these activities happened to take place under Patriarch Meletius. Only after all that happened, A. Kostryukov writes, the ROCOR representatives came to judge the aggressive actions of the See of Constantinople at their merit. Soon Phanar again gave occasion for a negative assessment: 'in summer 1924, Patriarch Gregory [VII] stopped communication with Patriarch Tikhon and came in contact with the false synod of 'Metropolitan' Eudocimus (Meshchersky)'.

Thus it became completely clear that Phanar sought to solve its own geopolitical problems regardless of the ROCOR'S attitude to the Russian schismatics. However, the anti-Renovationist statements of the ROCOR ultimately led the Eastern Patriarchs (except that of Constantinople, of course) to deny recognition to the Renovationist religious organization as a lawful Church. The statements made by politically engaged opponents of Patriarch Tikhon alleging that he was deprived of the see by Phanar with the consent of the rest first hierarchs of the Orthodox East were disavowed.

The further the clearer it became that the ROCOR, too, could not trust the Patriarchate of Constantinople depended as it was on the secular authorities. 'In extending it power, Phanar actually imposed on the ROCOR subjection to the communist regime', Kostryukov maintains. In addition, the

fraternal communication between the ROCOR and Constantinople could not be prevented by the already mentioned modernism: imposition of a new calendar and the attempts resumed in the 1930s to convene an Ecumenical Council.

Phanar's action brought about a schism in the Russian church emigration. Characteristically, in 1938, representatives of the Exarchate of Western Europe ('Eulogians') were not invited to the Second All-Diaspora Council. The situation, as A. Kostryukov shows, was not made easier in the first post-war years either, when Stalin tried to use the Moscow Patriarchate for the ends of his own foreign policy. The problem was that for most 'Eulogians' the question who to choose 'Moscow Patriarchate or Constantinople?' meant 'are we for the Soviet regime or against it?' And the Moscow Patriarchate became rather quickly seen as a servant and ally of the godless state.

Despite the formal move of the Exarchate of Western Europe parishes under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, this decision, due to above mentioned reasons (just as a number of others) proved to be unlivable. During the following 18 years, the Exarchate, remaining a part of the Church of Constantinople, according to A. Kostryukov, 'enjoyed tranquility'.

The situation changed in the mid-1960s in connection with Phanar's plight and enhanced international activity of the Moscow Patriarchate. The exarchate, which had to be abandoned by Constantinople, refused to submit to Moscow and declared its independence – thus appeared an Archdiocese of France and Western Europe of the Russian diaspora in Western Europe as well. The independence lasted for over five years and after Phanar managed to consolidate its position (shaken during the Greek-Turkish conflict because of Cyprus in 1965) the former Exarchate came under its jurisdiction again. Among the reasons for it was also the Moscow Patriarchate granting autocephalous status to the Orthodox Church in America in 1970.

Despite the existing mutual claims, the relations between the Churches did not broke off till the mid-1960s. The situation radically changed after Phanar's fresh 'modernist' statements. Then, in the 1960s, the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (Spyrou) stated that the Church was divided like the robe of Christ, and in December 1965, he performed an act unprecedented in Orthodox history – a mutual (together with Pope Paul VI of Rome) lifting of the 1054 anathemas. The new policy of Patriarch Athenagoras was strongly opposed by the head of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky). Concurrently, the ROCOR representatives began establishing close relations with representatives of the so-called Greek 'Old Calendarists'. As a result, the ROCOR's relations with Local Orthodox Churches actually ceased: since the 1970s 'the Church Abroad publications no longer carried reports about concelebration with representatives any Churches'.

Thus ended the contacts of Russian church emigres and their descendants, united in the Church

Abroad, with Constantinople. Respect and hopes for Phanar's support that Russian emigres pinned on it in the early 1920s were replaced by distrust, disdain and later alienation. There are no grounds for blaming the Church Abroad for it, Andrey Kostryukov believes. 'Phanar had to try hard to lose the trust of the Russian emigration – to move to a policy of captating the communist power, to actually recognize the Renovationist schism, to begin intrigues against Patriarch Tikhon and Russia refugee hierarchs. Constantinople's claims to the diaspora did not improve relations with the Russian Church Abroad either. All this could not but repelled the most part of the Russian diaspora from the See of Constantinople'. According to the historian, the Church Abroad not only lost her ally in opposing the persecutors but also acquired a rival in the person of Phanar.

Sergey Lvovich Firsov (b. 1967), PhD, professor at St. Petersburg Theological Academy and St. Petersburg Herzen Pedagogical University, a member of the All-Church Dissertation Council and the United Dissertation Council on Theology (D. 999.073.04).

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