



Serbian True Orthodox Church

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Formal Request from the Clergy of the Serbian True Orthodox Church to the Synod of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece for a Clarification of the Relationship Between Our Two Churches

We, the undersigned clergy of the Serbian True Orthodox Church (STOC), formally request from the Synod of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece (GOC) a precise and clear statement, in writing, of their understanding of the relationship between our two Churches, so that we can come to an agreement about our future co-existence and cooperation, in accordance with the Canons and the centuries-old tradition of the Orthodox Church.

It is well known that the Serbian Church was, from the beginning of the 13th century, an autocephalous Archdiocese, and later rose to the rank of a Patriarchate. Not one of the Orthodox Churches ever contested its status, with the lone exception of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which, for the first time in the reign of Patriarch Jeremias I in the first half of the 16th century, and again in 1766 in the reign of Patriarch Samuel, tried to submit the Serbian Patriarchate to itself during the difficult times of the Turkish yoke.

The canonicity of the Serbian Church was deeply shaken after the Second World War and Communist subversion, so that in the 1960's it finally fell into the

pan-heresy of Ecumenism.

In 1995-1996, a group of monks and believers, members of the Serbian Church widowed - that is, deprived of an Orthodox episcopacy - as a result of the heresy of Ecumenism, sought help from the Greek Genuine Orthodox Church and *temporary* shelter under the Greek hierarchical omophorion. The GOC kindly responded and gave us basic help for the needs of the organization of the life of the Serbian Church as regards the consecration of clergy, and the provision of antimensia and holy chrism, as well as material help. From the very beginning, however, it was stated often and mutually understood by everyone involved, that the consecration and enthronement of a Serbian bishop for the Serbian True Orthodox Church was necessary for the organization of a normal church life and for any possibility for our Church to attain the trust and respect of the Serbian people at large, so as not to be seen as an isolated and foreign "mission" disconnected from the historical and actual Serbian Orthodox Church. The Synod of the GOC, however, has to this day never dealt with this question, always putting it aside and neglecting it, so that now for over a decade and a half the STOC has been under the reign of a Greek exarch.

We are certain that there is no justification for leaving the Serbian Church in the state of widowhood for such a long period, especially in light of the fact that the local administration of the community of the STOC - the Main Governing Council - has been open, clear, and insistent about this matter from the very beginning.

The temporary governance of the Greek exarch, that is, the administrator has gone on indefinitely, making the impression on many people that the widowed Serbian Church is simply to be subsumed into the Greek Church, permanently owned and dominated by her. This years-long administration of the Greek exarch has caused much harm to the Serbian Church in many ways. The effectiveness of the mission of True Orthodoxy to the Serbs has been reduced to a minimum, as the general impression one gets in Serbia is that breaking off communion with the ecumenistic "official" Serbian Church and entering the True Church necessarily entails *leaving the Serbian Church*, which, for the overwhelming majority of thinking anti-ecumenist Serbs, is and will remain unthinkable.

Due to the stagnation in the growth and mission of the STOC caused by this destructive policy, with no solution in sight to the problem, a hopeless indifference has emerged in many. Everyone is withdrawing into his parish or monastery and is living independently, without any interest in united endeavors for the sake of the higher interests of the entire Serbian Church. The policy of inaction on the part of the Synod of the GOC is, in Serbia, destroying the most fundamental mission of the Church, to save souls.

To summarize: Our intention from the beginning was always to receive necessary but *temporary* help in the crisis of the widowhood of the Serbian

Church. Temporary help has been transformed, if not by design than at least by inertia, into an apparently permanent irregular situation to which no solution has been offered and to which no boundaries have been set, a situation directly contrary to the mission of the Church to save souls. It is urgent that a definite plan be conceived, committed to, and begun *now* to give the STOC its own episcopacy and its own Church organization.

This urgency is exacerbated by the present activities of Bishop Artemije, who has recently created a schism in the Belgrade Patriarchate. Bishop Artemije is a well-known anti-ecumenist and heir of the traditionalist line in the ranks of the official Serbian Church. At this very moment, on the territory of Serbia, he is founding his new conservative and anti-ecumenist church structure, but not on the principles of True Orthodoxy, which is very dangerous. Almost all anti-ecumenists in Serbia have already joined him or are waiting to see what course he will take. Many suppose that this course will be the path of Metropolitan Cyprian Koutsoumbas and his "resistance ecclesiology."

Therefore, at this very moment, we have on the one hand a well-known anti-ecumenist who is obviously a bishop of the Serbian Church and not some other national Church, while on the other hand there is our tiny group of True Orthodox clergy who are formally enrolled on the lists of the Greek Church and who commemorate a Greek bishop, *by all appearances thus demonstrating that they are in fact agents of a foreign Church unlawfully functioning on the canonical territory of the Serbian Orthodox Church*. Precisely in response to this situation, some of our faithful have already left us and joined Bishop Artemije.

In light of all this, it is not only time but past time for the Holy Synod of the GOC to take urgent and decisive action to enable and to confirm the independent organization of the STOC under a Serbian bishop.

Most Reverend Masters, it is your duty in conscience and in honesty to recall that when your widowed Greek Church was in the same situation, you asked for help from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR). You asked for – and received! – *one thing only*: the ordination of Greek bishops for the Greek Church. By not one action, by not even one symbolic gesture, did the Russian Church ever make a single encroachment on your autocephaly, nor did they interfere in your inner life, organization, disagreements, and decisions, nor did they manipulate your consciences and divide you in order to dominate you .

We recognize the fact that because of our small numbers, we are not in the same *practical* situation as the Greek GOC of 1961, but we are in *precisely the same canonical situation*. In order for you to be honest, you must recognize and act upon this reality. If there were simply the will on your part to recognize and act upon this canonical reality, and we had our own Serbian bishop and governed our own affairs, our numbers would grow quite rapidly, the number of clergy and monastics would grow as well, and there would, in a short time, be enough suitable candidates for the episcopate to create a small but perfectly canonical

and perfectly functioning synod, remaining in communion with your holy Church. Is this what you want for us? Or do you prefer to keep us small, divided, and dependent upon yourselves? Be honest. What are your intentions?

The critical, life-or-death urgency of our situation demands that we request from you, Most Reverend Masters, a timely and clear answer to this question, and a statement on your part that you will cooperate in a concrete plan for the independent functioning of the STOC, with a clear time-line. We know that you cannot answer this question immediately, but we reasonably and firmly ask that you give us a formal answer in writing by the Feast of Pentecost, 30 May OS of this year.

We formally request an answer in writing to these questions from the Holy Synod of the GOC:

1. Does the Synod of the GOC of Greece recognize that it has no canonical right to govern the Serbian Church?

2. Is it the intention of the Synod of the GOC to enable the Serbian True Orthodox Church to have its own episcopate and to govern its own affairs without interference from the hierarchy of the Greek Church?

3. If the answer to both of the foregoing questions is Yes, will the Synod of the GOC of Greece take concrete and swift action, beginning soon after Pentecost of this year, to confirm the authority of the Main Governing Council of the STOC and, without delay, to work with the Main Governing Council to establish and execute a formalized plan with a stated time-line for the episcopal consecration of a Serbian clergyman and the independent governing of the STOC?

Most Reverend Masters, with gratitude for the benevolence shown us in the past and for your expected help in the future, we remain

The Clergy of the Serbian True Orthodox Church

Hieromonk Akakije
Hieromonk Nektarije
Priest Stephan

As well as the monastics and believers who firmly stand in this position.

The Afterfeast of Holy Theophany
January in the Year of Our Salvation 2011