

*M e t r o p o l i t a n
N a h u m o f S t r u m i c a*

O N T H E L A S T E V E N I N G S

What is the tactics of activity of the former Metropolitan of Povardarie from what we can observe in the events connected with him in the past two years? Let us all recall: he always at first causes some incident, and after the state organs in charge (not the Church) react in conformity with the valid Law and pass sentence upon this conduct of his, then he and his few followers, throughout the world, and particularly among the sister Orthodox Churches, misinform and show themselves martyrs of the faith, at the same time blackening the Episcopacy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

It is one thing the executive and the judicial organs to persecute and judge someone with no reason, and yet another to persecute and judge the one because of trespass, or because of public insult on religious basis or because of some other criminal offence. In the Republic of Macedonia there are several religious communities, yet none of them usurps the property of another and none of them in its religious calendars and its public organs, or in its printed and electronic media, insults the highest representatives of some other religious community. If this happens, then the executive and judicial organs, normally, will intervene. Sometimes in the line of official duty, sometimes at the demand of the one who suffered loss, depending on the offence. We have all seen how the Bulgarian state protected the property and integrity of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

It is also known that no Episcopo can perform divine offices in other diocese without a permission by the diocesan. None of the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church even can officiate in the Bitola cathedral without a permission of Metropolitan Peter, let alone the former Metropolitan of Povardarie, who, what is more, is deposed by the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

This strict church rule is not unknown to him. On the contrary, since it is very well known to him, we are left no other choice but to bring a conclusion that he has been doing it deliberately and consciously. Therefore we say that the former Metropolitan of Povardarie consciously caused an incident in the church of God in Bitola, not wanting to leave after he had nicely been asked to. Certainly, afterward followed an intervention of the police, and also by the court in charge he was given a suspended sentence. As about what he says and writes, together with his followers, against the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the written and electronic media, what can we say? Itself it firstly speaks about him, but in the part of the text further on we will analyse briefly this moment, too, as rather interesting and indicative.

That these are all vain attempts of a desperate man who wants to call the attention of the Orthodox public to himself and to cover the cruel for him fact that he is a pastor without a flock, it is already clear to all.

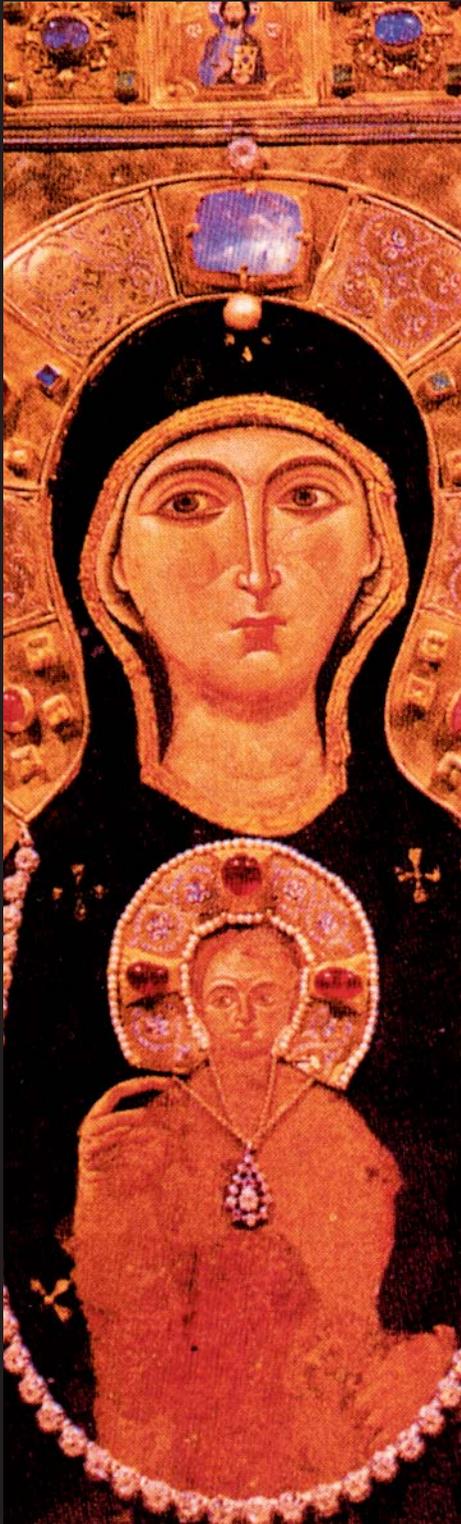
Thus, the newest information we have about his last provocation is that he is instituting legal proceedings against all the hierarchs of the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church not having the necessary permission for this by the Holy Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church. According to the character of his steps so far, becomes apparent that it is a matter of an attempt to make with this the Bishops of the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church they to take such step against the Serbian hierarchs participants in this court. Such move would allow him to go on representing the Macedonian Orthodox Church as a schismatic organisation, led by pastors who do not want canonical and eucharistic unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church nor with the other sister Orthodox Churches – and by this to work out a permission by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church to initiate legal proceedings against all the hierarchs of the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This certainly would lead to a further mutual discord and distancing of the Episcopacies of the two local Churches. All this is very detrimental to happen in the moment when we are the closest to a mutual agreement, after the coordination of all our theological standpoints in the Nis draft.

“□ We know that God does not allow a temptation greater than our strength. This means that on the various levels of the spiritual growth to us happen correspondent temptations, yet not for the sake of our fall (although this possibility is always very real), but always for the sake of our repentance and spiritual perfection. At the first level, when our heart is still captured by the passions, the demon attacks from inside, because of the free access, yet only with the intensity of giving rise to thoughts, feelings, and desires. At this level we are still part of the world. At the second level, when our heart is sufficiently purified from the passions, the demon cannot attack us from inside, that is, because of our heart's purity such kind of an attack is not sufficient to bring about a fall and therefore then the attack happens through people who are captives to passions, and are instigated by the demon.

At this level we are no longer part of the world. 'If you were of the world, the world would love its own' (it would not attack you). 'Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you' (John 15:19). The attack through people is more real and always powerful enough to awaken and stir up the part of the passions that has not been completely transformed and to create conditions for our fall. The visible attack through people, although in the beginning it is directed toward stirring up all the passions within us that have not been completely transformed, in the end, having not been successful, always boils down to public enmity and hatred. This is a compulsory stage through which must pass every struggler in the mind-and-heart prayer, who, responding with love to all enmity, becomes worthy of the gift of passage from 'illumination' to 'deification'. If God through His Providence did not dose temptations in such way, no one would see either perfection or salvation. Therefore, let all who experience public enmity and hatred, and have no mind-and-heart prayer, ask themselves where they have spiritually mistaken, that is, have made a wrong estimation of a given situation, rather than count themselves martyrs, so that the last delusion is not worse than the first."

And for once more we would like to negate their already shameless claims that they are being persecuted: □no one is preventing them from their gatherings in the few private apartments and villas. Certainly, by the valid Law the police are obliged to intervene, yet they are not doing that. Neither is the Church asking this from the police, because, had it asked, the police would have had to intervene or else they would have been accused of not acting according to the Law. Nor is any other state organ of the executive and judicial authorities asking that from the police. Hence, despite the clear regulations, there is a certain conscious tolerance on the part of the state organs of the Republic of Macedonia and on the part of the Church in relation with their illegal (from the aspect of the Law in effect) gatherings, and this in order to settle things down. They feel and know this themselves as well and therefore they freely gather, so we hear that even on their web site the presentation from these gatherings of theirs can be seen. Thus, provided the police wanted to persecute them, the services in charge could use afterwards as well the pieces of information and the photographs from the web site itself, but this is not happening.

So, one part of the tactics of the former Metropolitan of Povardarie, and of his supporters, for drawing attention to them is provoking incidents and acting martyrs, and the other is - we will name it a public sharp denouncement and criticism of the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. What is indicative, not denouncement and criticism of some Bishop individually but of all, generally. Is not there at least one among them good? Is not there anyone who exerts himself for the unity of the Churches? This destructive conduct of theirs by itself is a sufficient challenge for analysis, without us entering into the fact that their criticism most often in its content is a bare-faced lie and slander, what is more, directed toward their spiritual fathers from whom they have received both their monastic and priestly rank.



It is clear to all of us that the aim of their conduct of such kind is to tear off all the more members of God's people from the Episcopos of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and to attract the same toward them. This is clear. But why are they doing this in such a violent, unspiritual way, rather than in the only right way, the one shown to us by the Godman? The Godman Christ saves man not through giving orders from the heavens and through demonstration of power, as some autocrat and judge, but quite the opposite, Christ made Himself known to us through loving identification, assuming our fallen human condition (except for sin) making it His own and in this way conquered evil, sin, and death. Why, we are asking again, do they not follow the example of the Godman Christ, Who is the only and irreplaceable criterion of our struggle, particularly of the monastic?

The answer to this question we will get in the brief analysis of their spiritual profile as people. All of them are people who in their few-year spiritual life have changed three or four dioceses and five or six monasteries. Now then, in the first diocese and in the first monastery and with the first spiritual father it is human to accept they had certain just reason to leave. But what have they lacked in the other ones? The Holy Fathers have not said in vain: 'the one who is not good at one place, usually, is not good anywhere!' As my Elder says, the spiritual order for beginners imposes, in case we leave our spiritual father, and we have not yet acquired God's gift of the mind-and-heart prayer (as they have not acquired it), we should compulsorily look for another spiritual father, who will guide us spiritually until the moment of the purification of the heart and the manifestation of the Divine grace in it, until the moment of the revelation of the place of the heart and God's gift of the mind-and-heart prayer beginning its course.

Then we are free. There is no other way. However, the people from our analysis imbued, consciously or not, with an anti-hesychastic spirit, looked for monasteries in which they themselves would be spiritual fathers and looked for Bishops who would listen to them, not places and spiritual fathers before whom they would be obedient. And normally, they have not found this. And this is why they have changed so many dioceses and so many monasteries for eventually, administratively, to change a Church as well. Will they stop here? Will this be the end as well. Our people says: a tree which is transplanted several times does not bear fruit. Here is why these people do not have that inner assuredness and cannot draw anyone with their personal fruits, but instead use slander and lies, judging and condemnation. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22). Have you seen? □Against such there is no law. According to the tradition of the Holy Fathers all these gifts flow into God's perfect gift of the mind-and-heart prayer.

When it comes to the mind-and-heart prayer, according to my Elder's teaching, it is interesting to know the following: all that refers to dogmas, canons, liturgical and ascetical-hesychastic life of our faith and Church is written and can be read and learnt, all, including even the theoretical part about the mind-and-heart prayer. But although our theologians today show readiness to talk, to teach, and to write about everything, quite rare are the fathers, today and throughout the centuries, who talk, write, and teach about the mind-and-heart prayer. In particular none of those who do not know it from experience dares teaching orally or in writing about it if he knows there is a man nearby who knows it from practice and who lives with it and because of it.

Here it is why we have never heard from the spiritual fathers of the Serbian exarchate any homily on the mind-and-heart prayer. Here it is why we have never read by them anything about the mind-and-heart prayer. Here it is why none of their spiritual children has ever or anywhere heard or read by them any homily on the mind-and-heart prayer. As they are proceeding, no one will ever hear or read. Here it is why they are using denouncement and criticism of the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, as a way of dismembering spiritual children from their fathers and as their way of attracting supporters for themselves. Here it is why in this way, not with the fruits of the Spirit, they are trying to draw the attention and the sympathies of the other local Orthodox Churches to them. Therefore always when thus publicly they slander and insult in the most vulgar way, characteristic only for them lately, it is good for them and their spiritual maturation to be suited before the civil court in charge, in order to leave this way as the means to gain followers, and to choose instead the true way of inner perfection and acquisition of the fruits of the Spirit. We believe that in every civilized society they would come across similar reception and reaction on the part of the authorities, since they through the legal system protect the values of the civil society in the adequate way.

What part of the population is such tactics and propaganda aiming at? If they are aiming at those faithful children of the Macedonian Orthodox Church who with awareness, under the spiritual guidance of their spiritual fathers, struggle in the Orthodox spiritual life, here they have missed. Hardly a few tens of their spiritual children stayed with them, and the others, much greater in number – with the spiritual fathers of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. If they are aiming at the nominal Christians, those who out of custom and tradition go to church on the greater feasts – they have missed here as well. Because such believers are not interested in the content of their pro-Serbian propaganda, and they



themselves no longer have the monasteries in which they were previously trying to catch the same. If their propaganda is aiming at those who do not believe, then they can only confuse yet more and divert from the faith. If, however, their propaganda is aiming at the local sister Orthodox Churches, here they have partly some success, which to a great extent depends on the political circumstances and interests. Nonetheless, according to the well known saying, no one can lie many people for a long time. The cruel for them fact that they have pastorally missed the Macedonian people they will not be able to hide for much longer not even before those whom they managed to mislead.

Let us recall once again briefly what is the essence of the dispute between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. This to become clearer to us, it is the simplest to refer to our previous analyses and to the conclusions we have made on the basis of our direct membership in the Commission of the Macedonian Orthodox Church for talks with the Serbian Orthodox Church:

"Once again, for a numberless time let us repeat: There remained only two problematic issues, for the Serbian Commission. The one was whether the already coordinated content of the Nis draft regarding the status of our Church should be formulated with the term 'independence' or with 'autonomy'. All the delegates in the Serbian Commission agreed on the term 'independence', apart from one, and the vote of that one won, because it seems that the others did not want to show themselves underminers of the Serbian national interests in the eyes of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and by this also to be left out of the race for the patriarchal throne. It could not be explained otherwise how the vote of only one member of the Commission could prevail, since he is not even the president of the Commission. Yet, we are certain that this term will in the end be accepted, and that now the Serbian episcopos would not give in and hold it as a card for trading. Certainly, they forget that we have nothing to trade with. The other problematic issue for some Serbian Episcopos is the name, 'Macedonian Orthodox Church'.

One should be an utter madman not to get it clear why this issue is disputable. Because, the name of our Church is not a dogmatic question and as such cannot appear as a disputable issue between the two Churches. The constitutional name of our Church for the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church is a pastoral question. What kind of a question it is for the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, particularly when we know that it is neither a dogmatic nor a pastoral question for them – let them themselves answer us!? We, as a Commission, already at the working meeting itself (this is recorded somewhere in the minutes, both ours and theirs) warned them that without the term 'independence' and without the name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church' there would be no agreement with them nor could such agreement pass in the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. We were certain that this working document, too, as a number of them before, as pastorally not well formed, would be returned by the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to be reworked again. These warnings of ours were confirmed by the stormily reactions of the public in the Republic of Macedonia and from that moment on these two questions, politically disputable and touchy for some Serbian Bishops, have become also a current pastoral question for the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

This reaction of the public instead of contributing some Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church to understand

our pastoral position and in general the pastoral situation in the Republic of Macedonia, provoked yet another extreme move on their part, and this is the attempt to form a parallel church hierarchy in the Republic of Macedonia. Yet, it is good, I will repeat once again, that we have signed the Nis draft, because now before all the Orthodox Churches some Serbian Bishops are accusing us of cowardice and are showing our pastoral care for the devout people as fear of this people and are saying that it is the reason why we have called back our signatures. And the poor them do not notice that by this themselves they bear witness that here there is a new pastoral situation created, which they in their pastoral carelessness for our Church have overlooked. Had we not signed it, they would have accused us of being spiritually unprepared and theologically illiterate to lead this people, which is much worse. Still, due to our signatures now have come into light their key problems, and those are: the problem of formulating the status of our Church, which is a smaller and a formal problem, and the second one, which is their main problem, the name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church'.

One more thing, the thing that both Commissions have signed this working document is yet another obligation for the two Churches to continue the talks where they have stopped, when there are favourable conditions created for that. Now then what kind of problem do the name and the status of our Church, as the only open issues, represent for some individuals in the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Lord knows!?

THE GODMAN CHRIST SAVES MAN NOT THROUGH GIVING ORDERS FROM THE HEAVENS AND THROUGH DEMONSTRATION OF POWER, AS SOME AUTOCRAT AND JUDGE, BUT QUITE THE OPPOSITE, CHRIST MADE HIMSELF KNOWN TO US THROUGH LOVING IDENTIFICATION, ASSUMING OUR FALLEN HUMAN CONDITION (EXCEPT FOR SIN) MAKING IT HIS OWN AND IN THIS WAY CONQUERED EVIL, SIN, AND DEATH.

We will harm our souls thinking in that direction. Particularly when it is known that we are not asking for a tomos of autocephaly from Belgrade, but we are regulating our mutual relations!?

Such is the current pastoral situation in the Republic of Macedonia and we do not make an idol of it. If something changes we will also adapt our pastoral activity – so that we can lead the people toward the only important, Christ.”

And what in essence is the dispute between the spiritual fathers of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the spiritual fathers of the Serbian exarchate? The spiritual fathers of the Macedonian Orthodox Church are struggling according to their inner spiritual growth and hierarchical progress, and also from their episcopal positions, when time is ripe, to make possible for the entire Macedonian Orthodox Church (the whole Macedonian Orthodox people and all the Orthodox Christians who live on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia and are under the canonical jurisdiction of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – restored Ohrid Archdiocese) worthily to enter into canonical and liturgical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and with the other local sister Orthodox Churches. The spiritual fathers of the Serbian exarchate, let us say, have the same aim, yet they have missed the



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way, the method. They have discarded Christ’s divine-human method of resolving problems from inside, through inner spiritual perfection and in concord with this hierarchical progress in the clergy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, in obedience, and have chosen the way of their thoughts. With no mind-and-heart prayer and spiritual illumination they arbitrarily called themselves to resolve the key church question between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

They have chosen the 'wide road' and personally brought themselves into canonical and liturgical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church, not being followed at this by their flock. With this act of theirs the arbitrary pastors have caused a small and meaningless split in the Macedonian Orthodox Church. If this split gets further on a support by the Serbian Orthodox Church, it can come to pass it to grow into a bit greater one, and if the pastoral conditions do not change, it will be all. This is the aim of the demon, divisions and splits. Not to solve the problem, that is, to heal the division between the Orthodox brethren, but to remain like that. Why would the Serbian Orthodox Church support such an extreme, destructive, and desperate option, moved by a Jesuit spirit, comprised of people for whom 'the end justifies the means'?

Why would the Serbian Orthodox Church not support those Bishops who want together with their reasonable flock to enter into canonical and liturgical unity with it and with the other local Orthodox Churches? Why, which is more right, the Serbian and the other Orthodox Churches with their wisdom and care do not use the overall current situation for the healing of the disturbed unity, bringing under control the ones, and stimulating the others? He who is wise will know how to do that. The wise Solomon recognised the true mother in the one who wanted to save her child's life (for her bowels yearned upon her son), not in the one who asked the child to be cut in two (1Kgs 3:16-27).

May the Lord give repentance, illumination, and wisdom to our pastors which way to choose. We believe that despite the thing that we publicly and openly criticise each other love will not cool down, that this mutual missing is yet a greater reason for love and yearning for a real meeting, that none of us will hear the fearsome voice: "Cain, where is Abel your brother?" and also: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries unto Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:9-10).

WHEN OUR HEART IS SUFFICIENTLY PURIFIED FROM THE PASSIONS, THE DEMON CANNOT ATTACK US FROM INSIDE, THAT IS, BECAUSE OF OUR HEART'S PURITY SUCH KIND OF AN ATTACK IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO BRING ABOUT A FALL AND THEREFORE THEN THE ATTACK HAPPENS THROUGH PEOPLE WHO ARE CAPTIVES TO PASSIONS, AND ARE INSTIGATED BY THE DEMON.