



ENCYCLICAL EPISTLE

*To the honourable clergy and the venerable monasticism in the
Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric*

Brother clergymen, monks and nuns,

Christ is the mystery which God intended to reveal to mankind even before the creation of the world. The philanthropic God waited for the time to come to send His beloved Son to receive the body of the created human nature so that he would, by uniting it with God's nature, deify it and thus save it.

God defined the firm unity with man even before he uttered "Let it be...". It is up to man to respond freely to God's love and to enter liturgical communion with His Creator. There is no other way to be in unity with God except through the liturgical communion with Him. This is why the responsibility of the clergymen is so great. They are the mediators of God's grace which is abundantly poured down on people. But, in order to be a link for the others to God, they themselves should be in communion with Him. They should be in unity with the Holy Trinity, naturally, through their episcope, just as, in fact, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church teaches.

Thus, unity is the meaning of life for the clergy as well as for every believer of the Orthodox Church. But the unity with God is at the same time unity with the entire Church spread out around the world. It is not possible to be in unity with God if we are not in unity with our orthodox Christian brothers and sisters from the ecumene.

The unity of the Ohrid Archbishopric, to which our humbleness is an Exarch at the present, with the remaining local Churches in the world is a fruit of your prayers, brother clergymen, monks and nuns. We doubt that there is a clergyman or a monk who does not want unity with the other Orthodox Churches. But we are aware of the fact that each of us is faced with the dilemma as to whether we are underrated and rightless in relation to the other Churches.

We find such caution justifiable and therefore we see it as necessary to respond to that dilemma. The greatest problem of the Orthodox Church nowadays is the ethnophiletism or in other words putting the national interests, which are often quite petty, before the interests of the Church. It is most probable that we are not an isolated case. Almost all orthodox Churches suffer from the same syndrome. However, unlike them, who lose far less from that sort of ethnophiletistic behaviour, the greater part of the Macedonian people loses a great deal. They are recognized churches and in mutual communion, while the MOC has been treated as a schismatic organization since 1967. We may find thousands of excuses, saying that other people hate us, but it is a fact that, even after those excuses, the majority of Macedonians remain in a schism, not only with the Orthodox Church in the ecumene but with the very body of Christ, for the Church and the body of Christ are one and the same.

We know that at this moment, it is very difficult for you to decide to serve the only Orthodox Church in Macedonia recognised by the other Orthodox Churches. We are aware that almost each of you is reckoning that if they could have been so uncivilized with a bishop, then how much easier it would be for them to deal with you, the clergymen or the monks. You are my family, but you have another family to care for. That is why when you were forced to sign that you agree to put yourselves in the service of the HSB of the MOC, we advised most of you to do that, knowing that not all of you

are prepared for martyrdom. But still, we said that the procedure itself was not ecclesiastical, which means it was not in accordance with the teaching of the Church, it was uncanonical, even unconstitutional according to the Constitution of the MOC. The Orthodox Church is episcopal and there cannot be a Church without an episcopo. A local church, or an eparchy, as we call it, cannot be governed by a Synod of episcopos. There are no Orthodox Churches in the world that do this, except for the MOC. Immediately after the vacating of an Episcopal cathedra of a certain eparchy an administrator is appointed and he governs the eparchy until the nomination of a new episcopo, but never does a Synod administer the eparchy. Still, the bishops in Macedonia, as they have proven many times before, proved that everything is possible for them, that they can change the teaching of the Church, that they can abolish the canons and that the Constitution does not apply to them. They can decide to evict an episcopo from his cathedra without a trial or a sentence, in spite of its being contrary to the canons (Constantinople Council from year 861, rule 16) and the Constitution of the MOC (article 74). The only excuse for doing this would be their admission that they are illiterate. Perhaps it is not because of illiteracy that they changed our monastic name from John (Jovan) to Zoran, despite the fact that the monastic name is not altered even with the loss of a rank. But then it must be out of malice, and malice always ends in wrath, just as with the devil. And now, from the level of an episcopo's cathedra, they are spreading that malice, misleading the people to recognize us by our profane name, although we died for that name long ago.

People say "might makes right". What we were saying seven months ago we are saying now: it does not suit us to answer the barbarians with barbaric methods. The power of God's Word is within us and this is the power of justice and truth. We may have to suffer for a while, but we built our foundation on stone, and not on sand, as it was done in 1967. The Church in Macedonia has a future. It is now recognized by the assembly of Orthodox Churches and in a short while, after the ordination of two more bishops, it will be autocephalous. The name of the Church on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia is Ohrid Archbishopric, but even that could be altered after the possible agreement on the name of the state at the United Nations.

We consider our request as modest. We believe that even without our requiring it, your God-loving conscience is already doing it. We ask you to remember us in your prayers and to bear in mind that although you are clergymen or monks, your salvation and the salvation of your parishioners depend on the communion with the bishop. Neither does the presbyter have his own Liturgy, nor does the Liturgy belong to the Holy Synod. There is only one who offers in behalf of all and for all and that is the episcopo, while the clergymen do the same in the name of the episcopo. Even if several episcopos officiate together, only one of them offers the sacraments. We would ask you to excuse our humbleness if this sounds haughty but the fact is that the only episcopo recognized by the Orthodox Church from the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, the only one who makes offering, but also from whom God receives the offering in behalf of all and for all, are we, the Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid. Everything else will come when the time is right. The seed has been sown. Even if it happens, as the Gospel says, that some sow and others reap, we are certain of one thing, the harvest will be plentiful. The path we have traced after your prayers is leading to the Kingdom of God and it is changing the ecclesiastical history of Macedonia. A heavy burden will fall on the one who steps aside from this path for all other paths are aimless. In a recent interview, the Archbishop Stephen said that there were two theories on obtaining autocephaly. According to the first one, autonomy is given by the Constantinople Patriarchate and according to the second autocephaly is obtained by the Mother Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople that issues a tomos. The question is: which of these two theories does the schismatic MOC follow? It is most likely that it follows the road to Nowhere-land!

May the blessing of God and His mercy be with us all and enlighten us for the truth, which is light and enlightens all.

+John, Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje and Exarch of Ohrid