

MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HAS no. 157
19 May, 2003
SKOPJE

TO THE HOLY ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS
OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO
BELGRADE

Your Holiness, Your Eminences, Your Reverences, Brothers in Christ our Resurrected Lord,

Christ has risen!

With reference to your act SB no. 46/rec.28 from 13 May 2003, in which you urge the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to enter canonical unity with a status of autonomy and by the name of Ohrid Archbishopric, We inform you that the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, at its extraordinary meeting held on 19 May 2003, made a Decision that under the given conditions, we cannot enter canonical and spiritual unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The reasons for this decision are the following:

1. Despite the long-lasting attempts, unfortunately, we have not seen in you a sincere, fraternal and good intention or willingness to overcome the problem between the two Churches which lasts for several decades. You have presented to the public the text from the "Draft-agreement from Nis", which represented a draft version between the Commissions of the two churches, and not waiting for our reply, you unilaterally undertook some steps towards the solution of the dispute through the appointment of your "exarch" in the Republic of Macedonia. What is more, your bishops, the representatives of the Assembly, their Eminences, the bishop of Backa kyr Irineos and the bishop of Branicevo kyr Ignatius, during their last visit (on May 15, 2003) were kindly invited to be our guests and have lunch with us, as is the custom and just as we used to be invited and accept a brotherly lunch with you, but, unlike us, they deceived us with the excuse that they urgently had to go back to the session of the Assembly in Belgrade, and instead of the session in Belgrade, they went to a lunch with the bishop John at the monastery "St. Panteleimon" – Nerezi, near Skopje.
2. The name of our Church is Macedonian Orthodox Church. It is named after the designation of our country – Republic of Macedonia just as other local orthodox churches are named after their states, designating the locality.
3. The Holy Synod of Bishops and the entirety of our holy Macedonian Orthodox Church as well as the state, Republic of Macedonia, finds the status of autonomy to be unacceptable and therefore, we propose acceptance of the autocephalous status of our holy Church. As a matter of fact, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church with Decision no. 6 from

1959 already accepted the expression “independence”, as well as the name “Macedonian Orthodox Church”, which was used during the past decades of mutual official communication of our two churches. Our request for autocephaly and a tomos of autocephaly is based on the centuries-long church tradition, the holy canons and the historical practice of the Orthodox Church. This means that our holy Church is an ancient church; in the past it has had its centuries-long autocephaly in the image of the Ohrid Archbishopric; the people in Macedonia have been orthodox for almost 2000 years; our request has been supported by the believing orthodox people, as well as by the state authorities of the Republic of Macedonia; in the past forty-five years, since the restoration of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the image of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, there has been a remarkable growth in the spiritual and liturgical life, as well as in the administrative organisation and management of the state Republic of Macedonia and of the diaspora as well.

4. We are going to prepare and send you a proposal for establishing church unity with the Serbian and the other local orthodox churches, which would serve as a guide until the final recognition by all the local orthodox churches and until the obtaining of the tomos for autocephaly.
5. As far as the issue of the suspended former Metropolitan of Povardarje John, you are well acquainted that he voluntarily and irretrievably abandoned the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and its organisation. Besides the above-mentioned, one should take into consideration his criminal misuses in the material and financial work of the eparchies which he administered (with which you have been acquainted through the Report of the Commission of the ABB of the MOC delivered with act ABB no.68 from 16 May 2003) as well as the current court process at the civil court in the Republic of Macedonia. All this is more than a serious problem for the solution of his status.

We hope that you will accept all this with good will and sincere brotherly wish for mutual understanding and evangelic love for overcoming this interchurch dispute. For only thus we will witness in Love, and only by love will men know that we are His – if we have love for each other. (John 13:35)

Your brother in Christ the Lord,

PRESIDENT
OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE
MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID AND MACEDONIA
STEPHEN