

❖ METROPOLIS OF OROPOS AND FILI

Clergy and Monasteries in England Place Themselves Under the Holy Synod in Resistance*

On 28 December 2006 (Old Style), following a letter to His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, the petition to join the Holy Synod in Resistance by the Very Reverend Archimandrite Alexis (Pobjoy) and the Brotherhood of the men's Monastery of the Holy Royal-Martyr Edward in Brookwood, England, was accepted.

Together with Father Alexis, the Synod also accepted all of those under his spiritual direction, *viz.* the Priest, Father Stephen Fretwell, Hierodeacon Savvas, the Russian Convent of the Annunciation of the *Theotokos*, in London, under Mother Vikentia, and the Mission of St. Boniface on the Isle of Wight.

Archimandrite Alexis arrived at the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Fili, the week after the Nativity, in order to receive the official document of his reception, as well as *Antimensia* and Holy *Myron*.



Father Alexis and those with him come from our former Sister Church of the Russian Church Abroad, which, as is well known, having completely abandoned its decades-long stance of Confession, has already officially resolved on uniting with the Patriarchate of Moscow this coming May.

The fact that Father Alexis has joined the Holy Synod in Resistance has caused quite a stir, which compelled him to circulate a “Statement” (dated 2/15 January 2007), which we publish verbatim for the clarification of this important step:

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IN WAYS that are beyond our understanding news that our Brotherhood has placed itself under the omophorion of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, Synod of Resistance, in Greece, has leaked out and diverse opinions have already been quite widely disseminated on the worldwide web. We, therefore, thought that we should make a short statement for the record.

In fact three former ROCA communities have joined the Synod of Resistance:

a) the Convent of the Annunciation in London, which was founded by St John of Shanghai in 1954, and until 1999 was under the spiritual guidance of the Ever-Memorable Abbess Elisabeth (Ampenoff);

b) Saint Edward Brotherhood founded in 1984 with the blessing of the Blessed and Ever-Memorable Metropolitan Philaret of New York and Eastern America, then First Hierarch of the ROCA;

c) the nascent Mission of St Boniface at Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

The reasons for our leaving the Church Abroad were summarised in a letter which I wrote on 13th December (n.s.) last year, namely:

“In all conscience, members of the Brotherhood do not feel that we can accept the present rapprochement. The question of Sergianism does not seem to have been adequately addressed, and the Moscow Patriarchate’s involvement in ecumenism seems to be growing, although they have made some concessions on paper. More fundamentally, our acceptance of this mode of rapprochement requires us to accept that the Patriarchate is, and has been for decades, the Mother Church of Russia - this is not something that we have ever been taught. One may claim that the MP is the de facto Church in Russia, that she is established, even flourishing, - but, for a number of reasons, her canonical basis is not as firm as ROCA’s was until in the last few years she has decided to allow that to be questioned.”

Having thought and prayed about our dilemma and written to ruling ROCA hierarchs without receiving substantial replies, on our own initiative we opened a correspondence with Bishop Ambrose of Methoni of the Fili Synod. On 23rd December / 5th January, I wrote to Archbishop Mark, asking for letters of dismissal so that we might join the Synod in Resistance. His Eminence replied on 9th January that he could not issue such letters, saying: “I cannot grant such letters of dismissal by which I would agree to you placing yourself outside the Orthodox Church.” As the Synod in Resistance had for many years been a Sister Church of ROCA, and there was no

evidence that she had changed her confessional course, this response appeared to us to lack foundation and spiritual sobriety.

On 28th December / 10th January, Mother Vikentia and her sisterhood, Fr Stephen Fretwell and I were received by Metropolitan Cyprian into his



The Holy Monastery of St. Edward of England

spiritual and archpastoral care. I wrote to Archbishop Mark explaining why in all conscience we felt compelled to make this move:

“Thank you very much indeed for your letter December 2, 2006 / January 9, 2007 (sic). We appreciate that you did not feel able to give our communities a blessing to seek spiritual protection under the omophorion of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, but thank you for at least leaving the door open for us to leave, and not forbidding us to do so.

“Personally, I could not understand your objection, that by placing ourselves under the Synod in Resistance we would be placing ourselves outside the Church. One of the decisive factors in our joining Fili was that until recently they were a Sister Church of the Church Abroad, that in 1994, the Council of Bishops of ROCOR published minutes of a meeting held on 28th June / 11th July, in which they stated that the “Synod of Metropolitan Cyprian adheres wholly to the exact same ecclesiological and dogmatic principles as our Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia,” and you yourself praised the witness of the Synod in Resistance when you visited Brookwood, shortly after going to Fili in your efforts to sort out the troubles which ensued when the Prophet Elias Skete on Athos was snatched from us....

“Again I would like to thank you for your care in the past, and express our sorrow that in all conscience we feel unable to follow Your Grace and those with you into union with the present administration of the Moscow Patriarchate. We feel no sense of triumphalism over this move, but a sadness that

the Church which we have tried faithfully to serve for years has changed her course to one which we do not recognise.”

I hope this notice will help you understand our situation, and the reasons for our move. We have no desire to cajole anyone into following us if they consider our present course misguided, we have no wish to enter into polemical dispute with any one, but we hope and pray that, through our unworthy ministry, the Good Shepherd will continue to nourish and care for the flock entrusted to us and those that follow us.

In the love of Christ Jesus our Saviour and Benefactor,
the sinful monk and unworthy priest,
Archimandrite Alexis,

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- Archimandrite Alexis, who is of English descent, was born in England in 1946. After his higher education, he worked in various positions. He became Orthodox in London, in 1967, in the Russian Church Abroad. The following year, he became a Novice under Archbishop Nikodim of Richmond and Britain. In 1970, he moved to the U.S. to study at the Holy Trinity Monastery Seminary in Jordanville, New York. In 1971, he entered the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston, where he was tonsured a Monk in 1974. He was Ordained a Deacon, in 1975, and a Presbyter, in 1976, by the blessed Metropolitan Philaret, First Hierarch of the ROCA, and was elevated to the dignity of Archimandrite by the same venerable Metropolitan. He has been the Superior of the Brotherhood of St. Edward in England since 1982, and was at the head of the English-speaking communities of the ROCA in England. For many years now, he has been publishing the edifying monthly journal, *The Shepherd*. He is distinguished for his spiritual formation, his humble-mindedness, and his missionary zeal. May God consolidate him, and all of those under his spiritual guidance, in the Orthodox Witness and Life!



(*) Source: Ἐγὼς Κυπριανός, No. 336 (January-February 2007), pp. 5-7.