

## AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

You have heard in my sermons in recent weeks about the need for us to live consistent with our Orthodox Christian values, even when it may not be personally convenient for us. The Church also experiences times when its members are called upon to act truthfully, in a manner consistent with Christ's message. Sadly, the events of this past year have shown how some can forget the spirit of His message.

I have been informed by parishioners that a mailing has been received among them concerning the matter of uniting our Romanian Orthodox Episcopate (ROEA) with the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americas (ROAA). Curiously, I did not receive the mailing, nor have I asked anyone to show me a copy. I know it includes lies and misinformation against the proposal put forth by the Joint Dialogue Commission, indeed, against any such unity. It was probably composed by the so-called "Guardians of the Vatra," many of whom haven't so much as seen the Vatra in years. I know their arguments, and I know the axes some of them have to grind against either the Romanian Patriarch(ate) or the ROAA. Some of their arguments are purely political, while others are personal matters that were better left in Romania when they came here.

After the fall of communism in 1989, Archbishop Nathaniel initiated the formation of a "Joint Dialogue Commission" (JDC) (five members from each diocese) to discuss the possibility of reuniting the Episcopate of Bishop Polycarp after more than five decades of bitter fighting, lawsuits, name-calling, character assassinations, all while competing for the hearts and souls of the Romanian Orthodox immigrants to America.

Each side believes it was right in its initial actions: we stood up for our rights in accordance with the Constitution and By-laws of the ROEA, rejecting in 1947 our association with the Church of Romania, and demanding that our Bishop Polycarp (under house arrest) be returned to us by the communist-controlled Patriarchate. The ROAA (formed by a handful of priests and laymen at about that time) insisted upon the importance of maintaining a canonical standing with our Mother Church and the rest of the Orthodox world.

In other words, "we" chose to face the communist challenge to the point of standing alone for a decade, while "they" preferred canonicity over independence. (In the Orthodox Church there is no such thing as an "independent" church – we knew that as well as they did, but we chose to face even the criticism of the whole Church rather than give in to communist influence.)

But in 1992, when the JDC was formed, we were dealing with a whole new generation, and we began to see that today our two groups have more similarities than differences: we have Romanian priests and parishes – they have Romanian priests and parishes; we have American priests and parishes, so do they; we are missionizing to Americans as well as to Romanians, so are they; we have the same publications that they have, the same problems of operation and administration, **and we all wish that those decades of separation never happened!**

So, for 17 years we slowly proceeded to deal not only with the past and its hurts, but also with the many facets of a proposal for unity. There were many proposals over the years, and many arguments and rejections from both sides. They would not enter the OCA whose autocephaly is rejected by every Orthodox jurisdiction in North America, and we would not unite under the Church of Romania, believing that all of the Mother Churches should relinquish their authority here and allow for an American Orthodox Church. His Eminence has written often in SOLIA and lectured on this subject.

Our side of the JDC, together with His Eminence went to Bucharest in February 2008, to meet with representatives of the Patriarchate for the specific purpose of discussing our past and seeking an apology from them for their treatment of Bishop Polycarp and Archbishop Valerian (both of thrice-blessed memory). We did not go there to strike a "secret deal" with anyone, as we have been accused. But, we came home with all that we asked for and more!

His Beatitude, the young Patriarch Daniel also met with us, and expressed his own understanding of the problems of the American Church. He agreed that the many jurisdictions in America should eventually unite into one, and was even willing to offer us an original plan to put Bishop Policarp's diocese back together, with the least amount of contact with the Romanian Church.

So, now we have a proposal, combining the fruit of our years of effort with His Beatitude's own generous offer. That proposal was presented and accepted by the ROAA Congress last July. Our own Congress discussed it and passed a motion stating that **the combined "Proposal to Establish a Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate of North America presents an acceptable basis to continue the work of the JDC towards a final proposal to be presented to the Romanian Orthodox Church."**

As vaguely as that motion was worded, it nevertheless gave us encouragement to continue our work. In fact, the mood among most of the delegates was a positive one and we left there in good spirits.

But from the very next day, attempts have been made to discredit the Romanian Church, the ROAA and the JDC members. As I said at the beginning of this article, I know who the people are, as well as their motives, some dishonorable.

I am encouraged by the understanding and positive attitudes expressed by our parishioners. I am also saddened by the lies being disseminated from outside the parish, causing some to wonder.

I also wonder. I wonder what kind of so-called "Orthodox Christians" would continue this war against fellow Orthodox Christians.

I see the so-called "Guardians of the Vatra" website, and knowing who is running it, I have to ask myself "Am I not also a guardian of the Vatra? Do I love this Episcopate less than someone who chose for decades to snub it and its Archbishop Valerian, only to now consider himself a "guardian" of the Vatra? Must we keep fighting the Cold War and thereby label ourselves forever?"

I pray for God's will to be done. We are His vessels; we are His servants. It really does depend on us.

- Father Romey Rosco  
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