

Bp Atanasije and Fr Justin on ROCOR-MP

The following is translation of comments made by Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic), retired Bishop of Zahumlje and Herzegovina and a close spiritual son of Archimandrite Justin (Popovich), during a question and answer period at the Sretinsky Theological Seminary in Moscow in 2001, in reply to a question concerning his opinion of the prospects of reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) and the Moscow Patriarchate (MP):

I have said for a long, long time that the Russian Church Abroad must unite with the Russian Orthodox Church, and I even influenced Patriarch Pavle to write about this, because the Serbian Church has an immediate connection to this question, and we have a sort of responsibility to the Russian Church Abroad, to the Karlovtsy, because they were with us [in Serbia]. They received their autonomy within the Serbian Church, similarly to during the time of Justinian II, when the Syrians and Arabs invaded Cyprus, and the Cypriots needed to flee to Asia Minor. They were given a region near Dardanelles, at the Sea of Marmara, and they preserved their ecclesiastical autonomy there. That serves as an example, and the canons even allow this, but temporarily. The Serbian Church wrote that the Russian Church Abroad must return to its Russian Church. Their reaction was mixed. But, in general, they must unite.

I heard a few days ago that Metropolitan Vitaly left, who was irreconcilable not only in relation to the Russian Church, but in other regards as well. Now there is Vladyka Laurus, who is moderate and intelligent, and younger. Union will likely take place. The Moscow Patriarchate did a good thing in never condemning them.

When there was a Serbian schism in America, Fr Justin (Popovich) wept, begging Patriarch German to do everything he could to avoid schism. Schism is always difficult to overcome. That the Moscow Patriarch did not condemn them is a good thing. We are doing the same with our Macedonians: they were given autonomy, but they wanted to make themselves autocephalous. No one recognized them and now it seems that they will come back. This has not yet decisively happened, but may God grant that they return and be in a normal relationship, because now they are completely isolated. A great danger here is coming from the side of the Vatican, which is forever trying to spread their influence on them. The Serbian Church put this question before a trial, but did not complete the trial process, and did not defrock them, although there was good reason to.

But when union takes place one need not, as the Serbs say, hunt truth down to the end. There is a Latin expression: "Absolute truth is absolute falsehood." Driving truth to the end is not humane, it is not loving. There must in fact be *oikonomia* [condescension]. They have good priests, good order, and in America they have preserved the Divine Services precisely. So may God grant that there will be union. I've written and spoken about this for a long time.

Father Justin (Popovich) frequently spoke about the martyric Russian Church and about the Church Abroad: "I understand them, they did not want to cooperate with the Soviet power; but this was compelled, and one must understand them. The Martyric Church... it bears this." He advised the Church Abroad to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate

I advised those whom I know in ROCOR: "You need to unite." They are against Metropolitan Sergius. Alright, be against Sergius. But Sergius has already died, so now what? I have always been especially against their interference in the affairs of the Russian Church and their coming into conflict with it, accepting certain priests or certain parishioners. May God grant that He not punish them, inasmuch as it always happens that those who do harm to the Church, create dissension, lose God's grace. Even the blood of martyrdom can not heal schism in the Church, as St Cyprian and others have said. St Irenaeus and St Ignatius said that one must keep unity as the apple of one's eyes: with the bishops, with the priests, with the clergy, the people.