

**Pre-Conciliar Epistle
from the First Hierarchy
of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia
Metropolitan Vitaly
To all the Most Reverend Bishops, the clergy of all degrees,
and pious laypeople**

By the mercy of God our Church has already lived for eighty years beyond the borders of Russia, with our episcopate, clergy and laypeople being dispersed throughout the whole world. Our dioceses with their churches and parishioners exist in every country of the free world. Proper ecclesiastical order reigns everywhere, manifested in the regular prayerful life of our Divine Services. That most lawful Patriarch of Russia, Tikhon, who was lawfully and freely elected to this highest office in the hierarchy of Russia, blessed all of us who left the borders of our fatherland and gave a directive (No. 362) on the basis of which a new Church administration was established outside Russia. Patriarch Tikhon himself, for his disobedience to the Communist Party at that time, was condemned to die a martyr's death. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky became the first leader of the Church Outside Russia. He was succeeded by Metropolitan Anastassy and then by Metropolitan Philaret, and now I, Metropolitan Vitaly, despite my unworthiness, am the fourth Metropolitan. Thus the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia possesses a canonical Apostolic succession or, to put it more simply, the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit, flowing throughout the centuries from Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and the Holy Apostles, to our own hierarchy; and this will continue until this world ends with the dread Second Coming of the Great Judge, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to live this short earthly life of ours correctly and righteously, we must be in the True Church of Christ. Here and here alone are imparted to all of us the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Sacraments – Baptism, Chrismation, Repentance, and Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of our very Saviour, Jesus Christ. And to the true Church of Christ it was promised by her Saviour Himself that she would be invincible and indestructible to the very last day of the existence of the earth and of the whole human race.

We must ourselves understand, and also declare for all to hear, that since 1927, when Metropolitan Sergius signed his lamentable “declaration,” and up to the present day, our Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia has not had and does not have any communion in prayer with the Moscow Patriarchate, which is nothing other than the uncanonical creation of the former Soviet regime. By the same token we do not have spiritual communion with a single other autocephalous Orthodox Church which lives its spiritual and liturgical life according to the new calendar. What liturgical communion can we have, when we are still fasting, but they are celebrating the Nativity of Christ by the new calendar? According to our calendar we are praying to one saint, while the new calendarists in their way are praying to a completely different saint. In other words, any kind of communion has been destroyed, both in prayer and also even in the sacraments.

And so I, as First Hierarch, am calling upon all of you to remain forever faithful to our Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and not to be confused by those appeals which we are all hearing more and more often that we should unite and concelebrate with others in the name of a loudly proclaimed “brotherly love.” Where is our “brotherly love” when we are living, in that which is most important to us – our Divine Services – according to different calendars, and living a different spiritual life? Let us ponder the meaning of that most important phrase “Divine Service,” which is to say, “serving God” and then we will understand that in fact we are serving God Himself in different ways.

Throughout the eighty years of the existence of our Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia we have not made one step into any dubious spiritual byways. No doubtful “teachings” or errors have come from our Church and our “Credo” – “I believe in One God ... ” – which is sung at each Divine Liturgy remains our unsullied faith, by which we live, and through which we dare to hope to share in the “life of the age to come.” Amen.

Metropolitan Vitaly

1/14 August, 2000