



ARCHEVECHE des EGLISES ORTHODOXES  
RUSSES  
EN EUROPE OCCIDENTALE

АРХИЕПИСКОПИЯ ПРАВОСЛАВНЫХ  
РУССКИХ  
ЦЕРКВЕЙ В ЗАПАДНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ

**L'Archevêque**

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*Paris, September 14, 2019*

**Beloved in Christ Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,**

Since the decision of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople of 27 November 2018 repealing the tomos signed in 1999, which granted our Archdiocese canonical link with the Ecumenical Throne, I have never ceased to protect our communities of "canonical subjection" (Act of 12 January 2019) which removed purely and simply the Archdiocese as created by the Metropolitan Euloge of blessed memory.

This decision has shaken our Archdiocese, which lived peacefully from nearly 90 years under the omophorion of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, where I myself grew up and celebrated until today.

For the past ten months, we have been looking together for a future for our Archdiocese, and a very clear mandate was given to us by the Extraordinary General Assembly of February 23, where 93% of delegates chose not to dissolve our Archdiocese.

We worked tirelessly, but after the EGA of September 7th, which left us in a state of shock with regard to the violence and the destructive mood of some of us. I humbly think that we have to admit: we went astray.

I looked again at our statutes. These statutes organize the life of our Archdiocese and protect us. However, it must be said here, that they are not the foundation of the Archdiocese. The purpose of our Archdiocese is the exercise and coordination of worship in accordance with Orthodox Greco-Russian rite in respect of the holy canons of the Orthodox Church and the specific rules of the Russian tradition, in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Moscow 1917-1918.

Our statutes organize and thus make possible our pastoral activity. They rule the essential and organic problems of the functioning of our clergy, its composition, its resources, the election of bishops, its assemblies, its organs of control, and its eventual dissolution. However, they do not regulate pastoral care, and they remind us that the sacramental link between the Archbishop and the Archdiocese is intrinsic.

Dear Fathers, beloved Brothers and Sisters,

We cannot bring a legal answer to a pastoral question. We cannot "twist", or rather deflect our statutes that are silent on the question of whether a general meeting can decide on a canonical attachment. If the assembly can change the statutes, it cannot settle the pastoral question of canonical attachment. In sister churches, it is the bishop who alone decides such a question. In our Archdiocese the conciliarity that guides us. However, I must remember here, it bestows to your Archbishop the heavy responsibility of deciding as a last resort. Is it not the Archbishop who, in our statutes, confirms all decisions, and who definitively settles all the disputes, whether these appear within the Council of the Archdiocese, or in our general assemblies? This is so because the Archbishop exercises and is the guarantor of the pastoral ministry.

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

this moment of decision has come, and I presently have all the necessary elements for this choice. I am going conciliarly explain it to you.

First of all about who we are:

Our Archdiocese was not created by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and I believe that this is fundamental in the current situation. It was created under the auspices of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1924 as « Union Directrice Diocésaine des Associations Orthodoxes Russes en Europe Occidentale » wanted by the Metropolitan Euloge of blessed memory, in respect of the holy canons of the Orthodox Church, following the Russian ecclesial tradition, and in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Moscow 1917-1918.

In 1930, an ukase was issued against the activities of Metropolitan Euloge because he prayed for the persecuted Russian church and thus became "doubtful". His activity has been then considered as "a crusade against the Soviet state". He was accused of "putting himself at the head of a confabulation and having caused a schism ". On January 28, 1931, the Diocesan Council emphasized the political and not ecclesiastical character of this ukase.

Due to this tension, Metropolitan Euloge asked the Ecumenical Patriarchate to place his "metropolitan province" under his omophorion on January 17 1931. On this occasion, he received a synodal letter granting him the temporary status of « Exarchate of Russian parishes in Western Europe ». This welcome within the Ecumenical Patriarchate was then subject to statutory changes which were endorsed by the General Assembly of the « Union Directrice Diocésaine des Associations Orthodoxes Russes en Europe Occidentale ». I believe this precedent has all its importance.

I will add that Metropolitan Euloge said on this occasion:

"In entering this path, it is obvious that we are not separating from our Mother the Russian church ... We make the commitment, when time comes to submit to our free tribunal of the future all our acts (...). In addition, we continue to remain in

communion of faith of prayer and love with the patriarchate of Moscow " (Irinikon, 8, 1931, 365). It is this text that allowed me to draw the strength of resisting the violence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and approach the idea that a return to the Moscow Patriarchate after the pure and simple dismantling by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in November 2018 would undoubtedly be the canonical way most respectful of our Founding Fathers.

Our Archdiocese lived like this until 1965, when the Patriarch Athenagoras on the pretext that it was «provisional» abolished its status. The Archdiocese spent a period of canonical latency from 1965 to 1971, when its status was restored by the "patriarchal letter of January 22, 1971".

Archbishop Serge of blessed memory made it his duty to negotiate a new Tomos. The latter, granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1999, no longer mentions the "provisional" character, which at the time reassured the clergy and the flock, and finally gave everyone a sense of canonical stability within the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

This brutally ended by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople of November 27, 2018, repealing the 1999 Tomos and the "Act of Canonical Submission" to the patriarchal metropolises of January 12, 2019. These decisions have irrevocably led us to seek a path that would put an end to the dangerous peregrinations imposed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. They made us take our future in hand and entrust me, as previously to Metropolitan Euloge with the heavy responsibility of guiding you.

Dear Fathers, when I returned from Constantinople in November, I consulted you conciliarly, and on December 15, 2018, you expressed the wish to remain united in the adversity that had just struck our archdiocese again.

I convened with the Council of the Archdiocese an EGA on February 23 concerning the dissolution of our Union Directrice in order to choose to carry out the "Act of Canonical Submission" of January 12 2019. This assembly, by an overwhelming majority of 93%, refused this dissolution, and you, dear Fathers, asked me in particular to look for a canonical solution since we have recorded the rupture by refusing the requirement of the Holy Synod.

With the Council of the Archdiocese, and at the price of important financial sacrifices, we met the Russian Church outside Russia, which did not respond to our expectation for autonomy, the OCA, which has ruled out any possibility of canonical link with us. We entered into a dialogue with Metropolitan Joseph and the church of Romania, which, too, did not respond positively to our request. I wish to insist on this point because at our last meeting, it was argued that the Church of Romania would always be a solution for our Archdiocese as a whole. This is incorrect. Metropolitan Joseph has made it very clear to us that he would not have the possibility of canonically welcoming our Archdiocese, but only the churches and parishes that would wish it, separately. In a second step, these parishes where appropriate, could be grouped according to outlines to be defined. This implies the death of our Archdiocese. We received a clear mandate to preserve it. Until the day before our last General

Assembly, I stayed in this dialogue with Metropolitan Joseph. But there is no way to preserve our Archdiocese in the Church of Romania. This way is definitively closed. Concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a delegation from the Council of the Archdiocese went twice to the Patriarchate of Constantinople to try to get a review of our situation. This delegation was told that the Patriarch and I could raise the issue to try to find a solution. I met Patriarch Bartholomew on August 17th. But he did not mention any other solution than the one decided on January 12 2019, namely the dismantling of the archdiocese. This was once again confirmed, just before our last general meeting. Once again, our mandate is that of preserving the Archdiocese.

Finally, following a first contact with the Moscow Patriarchate, which was showing a keen interest in the situation, a joint commission worked on a draft of canonical attachment to the Moscow Patriarchate establishing a special autonomy statute guaranteeing our specificity, our way of operating, and ensuring a future, thanks to the possibility of quickly electing new auxiliary bishops. The "Request for Attachment Project" developed jointly with the Moscow Patriarchate, which was presented before the Extraordinary General Assembly of September 7, 2019, allows the preservation of our Archdiocese by guaranteeing and even by extending its autonomy. This is the only project that allows us to remain who we are.

Fathers, beloved Brothers and Sisters,

We have explored all the ways and I have to remind you that we are not in a particularly favourable environment, where we would have plenty of time for reflection, since attempts of destabilization, like the ukases of the past, have increased against us, with the sending of a canonical leave concerning me that I had never asked, and the appointment of a locum tenens that nobody had asked for, in conditions totally irregular. That is why Father Ashkov, who made a proposal for a revision of our statutes that I see as a necessity for the future, has considered that the time of this overhaul was not - for now - given.

Being aware of these pressures and tensions, I convened the EGA of September 7th. I did not "play" the emergency. There was, and there is urgency. I convened this Extraordinary General Assembly as the continuation of the February meeting because at the end of the assembly we had started discussing on our future, and I promised you to continue that discussion. Certainly, after the vote ( I will not repeat here that it cannot have a statutory value because the decision of change of canonical obedience falls within the pastoral), there was a lack of fifteen votes for a two-thirds majority agreeing with the proposed solution. However, it must be said that among those who spoke vehemently last Saturday against the project of attachment, there were clerics who had asked me and sometimes even got a canonical leave and who had not left in order to be there or to vote.

Even then, more than 58% of the voting delegates asked their Archbishop to leave the Ecumenical Patriarchate and join the Moscow Patriarchate. Moreover, among the 41% who voted against this project of attachment, we should honestly ask ourselves how many actually wanted to stay in the Ecumenical Patriarchate. How many have been diverted by a desired outcome that was not one? Since this assembly, I am challenged

every day, by our clerics, our pastors and our flock, so that I should settle this pastoral question. It's my responsibility now to decide, because my pastors in their very great majority ask me not only to leave the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but to join the Moscow Patriarchate under the conditions we have negotiated.

We cannot continue to commemorate the Patriarch with whom, at the latest on September 7, the majority of our Archdiocese broke the canonical bond. This situation is simply untenable, and I promised you that we would not attempt any adventure of ecclesial autonomy because it is not canonical. Unlike 1965, we cannot go on as we are, as the canonical link with the Ecumenical Patriarchate is broken since the voices of our members, those of our communities, to which I must give my full attention, tell me that we must seek another canonical link that has been designated. Those who tell us that we can stay as we are, deliberately ignore that voice, which is the voice of conciliarity.

It is my duty to find a way of peace, and our assembly obliges me.

Therefore, in the absence of an Episcopal Committee so far, but after consultation with the deans and many priests, as ex officio president of our archdiocese, I decided today to put myself, as well as our Archdiocese, under the canonical obedience proposed by the Moscow Patriarchate to meet the needs of the communities that compose our Archdiocese.

I will commemorate His Holiness Patriarch Cyril of Moscow this Sunday, and I invite all clerics to continue to commemorate me.

I know and understand the historical reluctance of some. I am thinking in particular of many of our dear fathers, brothers and sisters in the United Kingdom. The wounds are deep. They are also among our communities in the south of France because of legal disputes. Legal disputes that I have worked from the beginning to put to an end. Nevertheless, the time has come not to forget, but to move forward.

I promised you not to give up. I keep my promise and humbly ask you to carry me in your prayers, and I ask forgiveness to those who will be hurt by the decision that I take, in my soul and conscience, as guarantor of the pastoral ministry.

*+Archbishop John*

† JOHN, Archbishop Head  
of the Diocesan Director Union of Russian Orthodox Associations  
in Western Europe