



# SEEK FIRST THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

*an INTERVIEW with:*  
*Metropolitan Nahum of Strumica*

*translation: m. Efrosinija*

1. Your Eminence, on an occasion You have stated that "all until there are national-chauvinists in the SOC, there are no conditions to continue the negotiations", and the reason for Your reaction is the repeated intensification of the negative pressure on the MOC, at which the Serbian Church is using all its connections in Orthodoxy to blacken us. Do You as an Episcopo of the MOC who has behind him a large flock and responsibility for its spiritual life and salvation still believe there should be a third side involved in the dispute?

It is necessary to continue the dialogue between the MOC and the SOC, not for the good of the MOC, but for the well-being of Orthodoxy. However, we need to provide conditions for this. The most primary condition, in conformity with the ecclesiastical method of solving problems, is repentance, that is, forgiving and asking forgiveness.



I think that after all that has happened we should let certain period pass during which the state of affairs should settle. Meanwhile each side must refrain from any activity that leads to stirring the passions up again. Perhaps it is better to wait for the election of a new Patriarch in Serbia to pass as well, because by this we will avoid the manifestation of extreme negotiators on the Serbian side who would prove among themselves who is a greater protector of the Serbian national interests in the struggle for the patriarchal throne, to the detriment of the dialogue. This is the experience so far. By all appearances we should also wait for the outcome of the developments in Montenegro, since the resolution of the Montenegrin issue in the heads of the bearers of the idea for Greater Serbia who are participants in the Assembly of the SOC is essentially connected with the resolution of the Macedonian issue. There could be created rather good conditions to solve the church dispute with the SOC provided the current dispute over the name of our state with the Republic of Greece were solved, for which the odds are we should also wait for a while.



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In the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archdiocese the envisaged consecrations of the new Bishops are near completion, and there are few more strategically important, yet vacant Episcopal sees that should be occupied. After the MOC has also consolidated its lines, then in a more powerful line-up and from new positions we could meet and continue the talks, and this most probably under the patronage of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Through his letters and statements, Patriarch Aleksey II has already appeared as an authority who disagrees with the current state of affairs and solutions and who calls the two Churches to return at the dialogue table. The Russian Patriarch and Church will not miss the opportunity with the resolution of such a key problem, as is this one between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church, to take over the leading position in the Orthodox Church *de facto*, particularly because they are not passionate - unlike both the Greeks and the Serbs - about the pastoral and historical fact of the existence of the Macedonian nation. It is not good in this case that the SOC has so far by all means avoided the mediation of the Rus-



sian Patriarch. The Constantinopolitan Patriarch and some Bishops around him despite their good will and intention to help could be hard put to it in the current circumstances. Hence, there is a necessity for a third authoritative party as a witness and assistant in the dialogue, especially because the arguments are on our side. It will be bad if we show ourselves

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incapable, and so the Lord interferes directly into the resolution of the problem. The Lord will certainly find some solution, only most probably it will not be pleasant to anyone. History has shown us that only under the yoke of oppression imposed by people of other faith do we recognize each other as brothers. Only, this is a solution for the insensible. There is a solution for the sensible, yet about this in its time.

2. Perhaps it is understandable to the Orthodox faithful that other Orthodox Bishops think they are warranted in judging what is just and what not in our case, however, it is completely incomprehensible that Vatican spoke out in defense of the schismatics, siding with them. What danger to the whole Orthodox Christian community lurks behind all this?

All of us who live in the so-called Western Balkans must realize that we are susceptible to and live the closed space effect. That space is formed by the various religious, national, language, communication, economic, cultural, territorial, visa, and other barriers which interpose between us and Europe, between us and the world. Sometimes owing to this we may feel as if we lived in a kind of an experimental space; a space where the main experiments are performed by means of the mass-media.

All this is an excellent base for the Serbian propaganda machine to spread uncontrolled the kind of information it wants to through our media. Unfortunately this is done with the help of some of our media people upon whom it is incumbent to control the reliability of these pieces of information, who nonetheless let everything served by Belgrade pass uncontrolled here in our midst due to their frustrations they are not aware of, or on purpose. Thus for instance, the Serbian propaganda machine has found two uninformed people from Brussels (note: not from London or Paris) to state something about the alleged insufficient respect of the religious rights and freedom in R. Macedonia, and has carried this through its media - and certainly, afterwards through ours as well, as if through its own - and this all with the aim to create the impression that the European Union is officially sending a message to us and in this way to press our State. On the other hand, nearly none of our statements has been carried through the Serbian media into the Serbian public.

It is the same with Vatican. There, too, some of the Serbian Bishops have used their connections and affiliations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vatican and got certain courtesy statement in favor of Vraniškovski which they afterwards spread here through the media as if it were serious. Nevertheless, that is not the way things are at all. Vatican is much too well informed to afford the luxury of it and tarnish its reputation getting seriously involved in the unfair play of some individuals in the Assembly of the SOC.

Still we must also bear in mind that in all these or at similar future reactions there may possibly be a great deal of politics as well. Therefore, as a Church we, too, need to be more active in representing the truth about the MOC before the other Churches, and also in the part of what is called 'public relations'.



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3. When it comes to the notion '*schismatic*', in Macedonia it is always linked with one name... The name as a name and the person as a person are important, yet crucial meaning in all this has the definition of the Ohrid Archdiocese. If we go back to the roots, the church history, what does it mean?

I have already pointed out that the essential ecclesiastical name of the Macedonian Orthodox Church is Ohrid Archdiocese. In conformity with the historical facts and the Constitution of our Church, at the Clergy and Laity Assembly of the year 1958, in Ohrid, the Archdiocese of Ohrid was restored as the MOC, and the Head of the MOC was given the title Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia; the SOC confirmed this with its synodal decision in 1959, and what is more important, it confirmed this with the Liturgy at which the Serbian Patriarch German concelebrating with Archbishop Dositheus of Ohrid and Macedonia along with Episcopo Nicanor of Bačka, on 19-07-1959 in Skopje consecrated the newly elected episcopo Clement of Prespa and Bitola. This original and essential ecclesiastical name of our Church, at the meetings with the other sisterly

Orthodox Churches, so far has never been called into question, although not everyone takes this lightly.

The Ohrid Archdiocese, as a Church from this area, is founded on a yet older Church from the sixth century, and this is the Church Justiniana Prima, at the time the third by honor among the Churches, after Rome and Constantinople. It is a church continuity that everyone may envy. Some of the Ohrid archbishops even signed as archbishops of Justiniana Prima.

The neighboring nations in the course of the centuries have established their own centers of state and church power, tearing off, canonically or uncanonically (as for instance the SOC), territories which had been under the church jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archdiocese. It is exactly this that proves they had not known the Ohrid See as their own church center, but they know well even now that it, with the Ohrid University, is their spiritual and cultural center - from here all up to Russia - and the source of their ecclesiastical, not to say even state identity.

The genuine dignity of the Ohrid Archdiocese and its great historical role consist in this. Divine Providence has preserved the Ohrid church center as an axis around which will take place all the important events connected with the temporary and eternal survival, well-being, and identity of the Macedonian Orthodox people. If God is for us, who can be against us?! We, therefore, cannot and will not let anyone appropriate the name Ohrid Archdiocese and the title Archbishop of Ohrid.

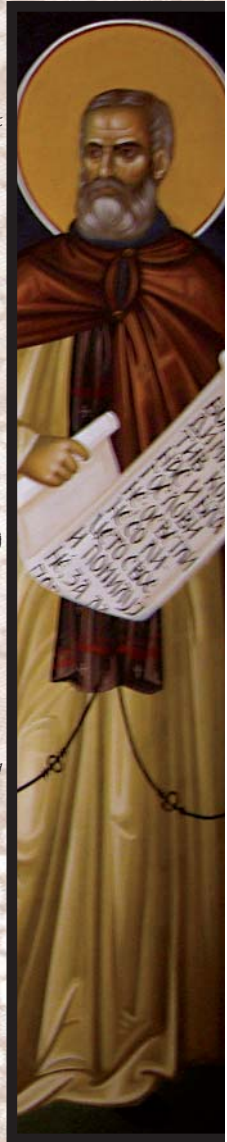


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4. According to all we have seen, does it seem to You that in the last few years "on the back" of the MOC there is a "silent war" going on against Orthodoxy in the region and farther, i.e. that the current dispute is used for accomplishing someone's geostrategic political and religious interests?

I would sooner say that we the Orthodox are to be blamed for all bad happening to us and that "on the back" of the MOC are merely revealed the illness and paralysis of Orthodoxy, that is, the utterly reduced and failed mission and the much pail witness to Christ that we the Orthodox give to the world. The illness is called *ethnophyletism*. In simple words, it is when national interests, those that go beyond the pastoral dimensions and are transformed

into expansionistic and hegemonistic ones, are put before the interests of the Church and before the union with God, for eventually they who do so, being left without the grace of the Holy Spirit, to lose both



the Church and the nation; and we forget that the Lord said: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and all else shall be added to you* (Matt. 6:33). We can observe the illness of Orthodoxy in three occurrences:

a) First and most conspicuous occurrence is the organization of the Churches in the diaspora which is not in conformity with the sacred Canons. In accordance with the holy Canons of the Church in one town there should be only one Episcopos who heads the Church of all Orthodox Christians that live in it (Canon 8 of the I Ecum. Council, etc.). However, since Orthodox Churches in the diaspora are organized by the principle of ethnic affiliation, they appoint for each ethnic community its own Episcopos. Hence, it happens one city to have as many as over ten Orthodox Episcopos, which is not in conformity with the sacred Canons of the Church, and also with Orthodox dogmatics in the part of Christology and ecclesiology. Among else, it is an ominous sign as well - that is, a sign that among the local Orthodox Churches there still last the exhausting inside-church and ethnic fights for church and ethnic



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domination, which at the same time is also a real indication that we have temporarily given up the mission of the Church outwards, among them who have not yet been reached by the saving grace of God that dwells in it. Therefore, we do not see Orthodox faith in the diaspora, except incidentally, to spread outside the Orthodox immigrant communities and their church and club premises. Certainly, owing to absence of spiritual life we also lose our own Orthodox believers, especially the young who do not even speak their mother tongue anymore - the language which the Churches, for their part, for the sake of preserving the national, use in their worship. The Macedonian Orthodox Church is the least responsible for this, since it has only fitted the last in the already existing scheme that the other Churches had established until now with no room left for another pastoral choice, and therefore the MOC is beyond the judgment of any other Church as regards this issue.

b) Second occurrence is the failed mission of the Churches that spread their jurisdiction beyond their ethnic borders. A characteristic and to us closest example of this is the SOC. Following the end of World War I, its canonical jurisdiction was extended from Macedonia to Slovenia. Still, as we have said, since the SOC as most of the Orthodox Churches suffers from ethnophyletism, its, we would say merely national mission in that area, was left, naturally, devoid of the grace of the Holy Spirit and is a model of a total failure. It means that all those who feel as Serbs traditionally participate in its life, and all those who are members of another nationality, due to the attempt to be forcefully attracted and Serbianized, turned away from the Orthodox Church. For nearly a hundred years ruling in that area the SOC literally cannot boast it had baptized into Orthodoxy at least one Slovenian, at least one Croat, at least one Bosnian, at least one Albanian, at least one Hungarian. Yet, it has managed to estrange from itself around 60% - 70% Montenegrins who because of this are organizing their separate Church, and it can also boast with the demonic idea it allegedly separated three million Macedonians from the community with the other Orthodox Churches. It is an evil intention

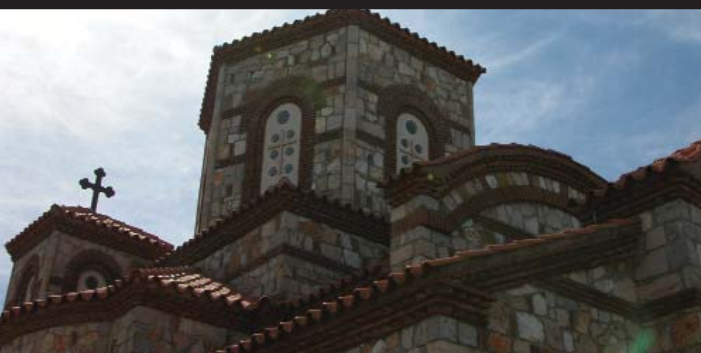


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that first of all ruins *them* spiritually, not a real spiritual and church state of affairs.

c) Third occurrence is the failed mission of the Churches inside their ethnic borders. Since ethnophyletism estranges clergy from the grace of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be Christ's witness, that is, it is not capable to pass the road of purification, illumination, and deification, nor to lead others along it. Therefore we have many traditional Christians who are that just by some inertia, and a few such who truly walk the narrow road, bearing humbly and with thanksgiving the cross of Christ. Indicators of this state of affairs are our empty churches. Statistics is disastrous and harsh. Out of the hundred percent of Orthodox population that lives in a given Orthodox country barely 0.5% attend the Sunday worship. This happens for example in Macedonia as well, which, to be fair, stacks up somehow well against the other Orthodox countries; here out of 1,600,000 Orthodox people only 8,000 believers attend the Sunday services. In Serbia the percentage of attendance at the Sunday services is even lower. On the major feasts, as are Pascha or Theophany, this figure reaches only from 10% to 15%. Now, how many are they among these 0.5% who regularly attend the Sunday worship that regularly confess and communicate and live under the guidance of a spiritual father, that is another question. If we check this as well, then we will face crushing facts and figures. So, despite such an alarming state of affairs in all of us, to great wonder and shame Orthodox Churches still occupy themselves with their struggle for ascendancy. Therefore, the words of an ordinary man, a taxi driver from Belgrade hit the right note: "What are these Bishops of ours doing in Macedonia anyway? If they really wanted to work, they have enough to do here as well!" It simply makes us cry out: "*The taxi driver for an Bishop, and some Bishops - for taxi drivers!*" These are the genuine problems the Orthodox Church is facing in the present, which should be brought to light and solved, rather than be continuously, consciously or not, deepened. Such a state of affairs is a sign that the local episcopal Churches are led by Bishops who have not yet been purified from their passions, and their inner susceptibility to passions, particularly to





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the passion of ethnophyletism and to the high opinion of themselves, reflects as an internal inter church struggle for power.

We do not see a visible physical persecution against the Orthodox Church in the present, which, for its part, corresponds with the inner spiritual maturity, especially with the gift of the mind-and-heart prayer in the persecuted. It would have been a testament to its maturity in this historical moment and our consolation.

Why had the Synod for years tolerated the willfulness of the deposed Jovan, there were no measures taken even when a cleric of the MOC indicted him for his evident criminal deeds, nor had you reacted while he had persistently violated the MOC Constitution. Do You not think that the blame for the parallel church happening to us in the present may be put on the inactivity of the Synod, too?

The Holy Synod of the MOC tolerates a great deal of it, starting from itself and then further on. I will not explain this in details, still the following is essential: not a single evil thought a man has accepted in his heart, not a single evil word a man has spoken, not a single evil deed a man is doing will escape punishment unless he repents for this. This is a spiritual law. That is, if a man does not repent for the evil he has done, this will inevitably appear as an obstacle in his life in one way or another: either as illness, or as some other misfortune, or as any kind of a failure which follows him in his life. It is incumbent upon every Orthodox Christian not to respond with evil to evil, but - with good, with prayer, with love. Only in this manner do we give the one who sinned a time for repentance and salvation, while we guard our soul from the consequences of the evil. Christ is the sole judge. No one can escape His judgment; nor will anyone's doing evil be endlessly tolerated. To this judgment, from the moment of sinning, are liable all those whom a human tribunal has not yet sentenced. The Synod's decisions are passed within the frames of the above said. Sometimes sanctions are also applied against certain impermissible conduct as provided in the Canons, yet again in the spirit of love, with a pedagogical objective.

5. Recently we have witnessed the last of the many pressures on the MOC by which now the acquittal of Vraniškovski is being lobbied for. Is Vraniškovski making a new religious community or destroying the MOC? Also: why is he not tried for *embezzlement of the believers' money*, which is a criminal offence obvious to all, but is rather sentenced for the criminal offence of *spreading national and religious hatred*, which is harder to prove before the West?

The attack against these three components - the clergy and laity, the name of the Church and the title of its Head, and also the Church property - of which consists and through which is marked and recognized every religious community, irrefutably speaks that the chief goal of Vraniškovski is annihilation of the MOC, not formation of a new religious community. The following pieces of evidence speak of this:

The encroachment upon the property that the MOC sustained from Vraniškovski and his followers is the first indisputable evidence. Among the other, let us mention only the well known event of trespass in the Bitola church of Saint Demetrius with the attempt to perform a religious



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rite and the physical clash he provoked inside it. For this offence, along with the done detention, he was sentenced to one year in jail or two years on probation. A part of the totaling two years and six months imprisonment he is serving at the moment is the one year he was given for his trespass into the church in Bitola. After Vraniškovski and his own ones have seen that trespass upon others' property is a very unpopular and chargeable criminal offence and have realized they do not have so many supporters as to take over even one shrine, they abandoned this way of acting in practice, yet not completely: in its decision to grant autonomy to its exarchate, the SOC mentions certain properties of its in R. Macedonia - although it has no such - which it leaves as a legacy to its exarchists...

The second indisputable evidence is the impermissible way in which Vraniškovski is trying to register his religious community, that is, the registration application in which he appropriates the original, historical and essential ecclesiastical name of the MOC, and this is the name 'Ohrid Archdiocese'. Of this further on speaks also the fact that he is falsely representing himself in the public with the title 'Archbishop of Ohrid', a part of the title borne by the Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This is the sole and legitimate reason due to which he was not granted the permission to register that religious community; there is no other. That is all we needed if after the liberation in 1944 we had waited for the SOC and Vraniškovski all until the year 2005 to restore our Ohrid Archdiocese! We'd better not existed...

And the final indisputable evidence is the media attack he carried out against the personal and clerical integrity of the Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church - and this in a very undignified and vulgar way - as well as the attack against the integrity of the Church with the denial of its Holy Sacraments along with the affront to the religious and national feelings of the people in the Republic of Macedonia. Apart from his personal media appearance, this attack was also made through the religious calendars, church periodicals, and the official website of the Serbian exarchate, which is an additional aggravating circumstance. All this has been recorded and documented. The goal of this psychological terror is all the greater breakaway of laity and clergy from the MOC and their integration into the new parallel religious community.

An irrefutable and obvious fact to everyone is that he is making the attempt to annihilate the MOC for the purposes and with the assistance of a foreign state and Church, i.e. with the help of the nationalistic forces of reaction, advocates of the idea for Greater Serbia, which act through certain structures of the Serbian state and with the help of the same forces present in the Assembly of the SOC.

All this has become clear to everyone, particularly after official representatives of the Serbian



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Government had pressed the Macedonian Government to release Vraniškovski, who is a citizen of R. Macedonia.

With no interference into the work of the independent judiciary, the overall picture of the developments speaks that his actions are not in the least naive, that it is not a matter of a legal case in which Vraniškovski is sentenced to imprisonment because of a verbal misdemeanor and that with this verdict his religious rights and freedom have been infringed on, but that the Court has rightly judged and that his actions have all the characteristics of a criminal offence of fanning religious and

national hatred and discord. We would even say that they have characteristics of other actions, too, which can be recognized as incriminated in 'Chapter 28' of the Criminal Law of R. Macedonia which covers criminal offences against the state. Therefore, if after all someone should try to release him, showing his case as a wrong decision of the Court, let

that one know he/she will only allow the evil continue its course and possibly take up yet larger space. If, however, the SOC and Vraniškovski give up the way they have taken to solve the church dispute with the MOC, then I will be the first to sign the petition for his pardon and the first to lend a hand for conciliation with the SOC. Once before I

have stressed that only truth is an unshakable foundation of repentance (forgiveness), which, for its part, is the sole key to resolve the interchurch disagreements. It is not in concord with common sense someone to pronounce R. Macedonia a country where religious rights and freedom are infringed on. On the contrary, the Macedonian nation is most probably the only one in Europe to which today, in the 21st century, are not recognized both its religious and national rights and freedom.

As about why Vraniškovski is not yet sentenced for embezzlement that according to the findings of the commission for internal control of the Synod he had committed in all the three dioceses where he had ministered as an episcopate of the MOC, you will have to ask the competent judge who has conducted the correspondent proceedings ever since the year 2002. What the internal control at the Synod of the MOC found out was also documented and sent to the SOC, through the Serbian Patriarch Paul. Why have they also remained silent and taken no actions, ask them.

6. May 17, 2002, is connected with the signing of the so-called 'Niš document', which can be found on the website of the SOC. With it, in fact, the MOC was allocated autonomy and deletion of the notion 'Macedonian'. What was going on then?

On the subject "MOC - SOC" I have published until now over 170 pages of written text: some of them in my book *A School of Hesychasm*, some in our daily press, and some on the website of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. And I wonder seeing that some journalists of ours who from time to time even write about the Church, "advocates" of research journalism, have not read them yet.



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Will they properly understand, though, after having read, that is another thing. At an occasion earlier I have explained that all who in the future will claim that this breakaway happening today in the Macedonian Orthodox Church is a consequence of the "Niš agreement", should know that consciously or not they will be a cat's paw of the Serbian propaganda in the Republic of Macedonia. Because this is also one of the theses spread from Belgrade and from the team of Vraniškovski that were accepted here in our midst without examination and thinking. With only two facts it is quite simply explained why this thesis is not true: the first fact is that neither did Patriarch Paul invoke certain 'Niš agreement' in his letter of the year 2002 by which he calls the Episcopacy, clergy, and the laity in the Republic of Macedonia into canonical and liturgical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church, nor did the former Metropolitan of Povardarie accepting this call explain that he was doing it on the basis of the agreed in Niš. The documents exist; everyone can check this. The idea sprang to their minds afterwards, as a good pretext before the other Churches and with the aim to fool some naive believers of the MOC. And second fact that what they are doing is not at all based on the Niš working document is the following: in the official correspondence between the Serbian exarchists and the Serbian Patriarchate nowhere is the name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church' mentioned as a recipient or a sender of the letter, as provided in 'article 14' of the working document in Niš. And how could it be mentioned, when they all together - both the Belgrade Patriarchate and the grotesque exarchate - have an unseen pastoral failure: they do not recognize the existence of a Macedonian nation!?

And finally, this question is unavoidable: do You not think that for the inappropriate moves of the church leadership of the MOC, for the passivity and bad personnel policy, much easily You continuously shift the blame on the journalists?

You see, it takes much carefulness and knowledge when writing about the Church. It is said: when you speak about a church person or about church affairs - careful! Either what you claim will be true, i.e. the coal will be cooled down and you will dirty your hands - that is your soul, or you will carry unconfirmed information and thus catch live coals in your hand and burn yourselves a lot - that is, harm your soul. In both cases, you must admit, it is rather inconvenient. It is the best to carry information from a reliable source without much commenting, and this if it is a matter of information that builds up, not such that destroys. Whereas it is much evil to criticize at a bad time, particularly when you have no idea about the



essence of the matter. In any case, journalists are the least responsible for what has happened. The responsibility lies only in the two Synods of the Churches, especially in the one in Belgrade, that stretches out its predatory arms (its pervert nonsense) beyond its borders.

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The Niš working document is just a guise for the breakaway that occurred afterwards in the MOC, and the genuine reason, which is the overall impression on all of us who know the course of the events, is that Vraniškovski made this affiliation with the SOC with the aim to maintain his high church position. An indicator of this is the critical time he chose for this move of his: he made the affiliation in the moments when the internal control of the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the MOC had already started revealing his illegal financial work.

What is important about the working document of Niš is the fact that any final agreement with the

SOC is adopted or rejected only by the HSH of the MOC, just as the Assembly of the SOC confirms or rejects the negotiating achievements of its commission. Therefore, our signatures are irrelevant in this case. Otherwise, why was it necessary the Assembly of the SOC to be convoked in order to declare for or against the Niš working document if we decided on this or were authorized at the level of commissions; or, why was it necessary to convoke a session for the HSH of the MOC to give its judgment on the working document of Niš. It is clear that without the approval of the two Synods and without the signatures of the two Heads no agreement can be accepted and valid and only with ill intention may be called agreement. Thus, neither did Patriarch Paul and the former Metropolitan of Povardarie invoke certain 'Niš agreement' at the formation of the Serbian exarchate in Macedonia, nor is the Serbian exarchate implementing such an agreement, nor does such an agreement exist. There is a draft-agreement as a working draft on the basis of which the stand-points of the two commissions still need to be reconciled.

In Niš we signed mainly because of the concordance of the ecclesiological, liturgical, and canonical

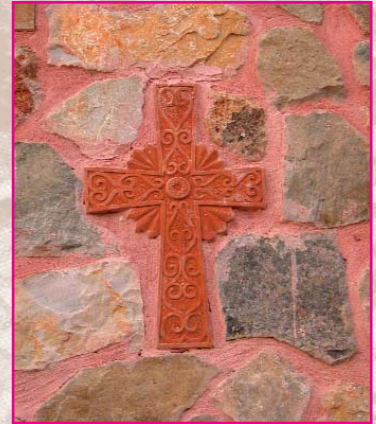
matters between us. On a purely theological level we reached an agreement with the SOC much more favorable than for instance the Bulgarian and Greek Churches have with the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. These two Churches are bound to go to Constantinople for the Holy Myrrh (with which Holy Baptism is performed) and are given it there, by which under question is put their very autocephaly, and we procured for the Holy Myrrh to be prepared in Skopje, too. It was the fifth working



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document between the two delegations, although the first that was signed; it should not have been the last, though.

As a commission, we were aware ourselves that we could not defend this document before the Holy Synod of the MOC, nor did we want to, since after we had nearly finalized the church content of our agreement without any bigger disagreements, immediately we were at cross purposes and clashed with the Serbian commission when it came to the political dimension and content of the agreement. We knew we could not explain the Serbian side not accepting the pastorally and ecclesiastically well-founded term 'independence' instead of the politically burdened terms 'autonomy' and 'autocephaly', and we knew that we could not explain the pastoral absurd, i.e. the name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church' not existing in the whole agreement, nor did we want to. Therefore right at the working meeting in Niš, and this is recorded somewhere in the minutes, both theirs and ours, we clearly pointed out to the Serbian delegates and warned them that without the term 'independence' and without the name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church' there is no agreement with them nor could such an agreement pass in the Holy Synod of Hierarchs of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. That is exactly what happened. Right at the first session of our Synod after Niš, the working document was unanimously and with no discussion rejected as pastorally not completely formed, with the hope for a pastorally better solution after the continuation of the talks.



What matters is that with the non-acceptance of our constitutional name - Macedonian Orthodox Church - and with the non-acceptance of the independent status in the Niš working document on the part of the SOC, and following the 'Vraniškovski' scenario which they organized in despair, clearly to everyone manifested itself the purely political dimension of the problem between our Churches.

7. The Synod of the MOC has started renewing its lines, that is, with the consecration of the three new Bishops the Church has answered the enemy it is life-giving, powerful and has the energy to weather all the crises. How much does this direction create possibilities for stabilization of the position of the MOC, and also for opening a communication channel with the other Churches, who until now have heard from the SOC about so-called various "black tarnishes" in our Synod?

We have already seen that the problems among the Churches are due to ethnophyletism and captivity by the passions, which we have located exactly in those who should lead the flock. Therefore, it is necessary among us to be multiplied the kind of shepherds that from their spiritual beginnings and with their entire personal development have built themselves in and grown in the bosom of the Church, purified, illumined, and deified by Divine grace in it, who according to their graceful spiritual growth will respond to the pastoral vocation and will bear the corresponding rank.



## SEEK FIRST THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

Thus, we need Shepherds who will renew Orthodox spiritual life and will enkindle the flames of faith, who in practice and by personal example will actualize the Holy Tradition, who will take care of the unity and primacy by honor among the Churches, who will preserve the dignity (ecclesial fullness) of the local episcopal Church, and also the pastoral authority and credibility of the Local Church. Briefly, we need holy men. The appearance of such Bishops will by all means make easier the communication and communion of the Churches in Christ and will contribute to the resolution of the problems. This applies to all Churches, especially those whose authority pretensions stretch beyond their canonical borders and which having a plank in their eye, are trying to remove the speck from their brothers' eye by an utterly inadequate and rough instrument - a parallel hierarchy.

In addition, no one is without a sin, except for the Lord. However, the effect and the consequences of the sin in a way remain within the concrete person, provided the one falls, yet rises up again; sins, yet repents in the Lord. He who knows what repentance is, believes also in the repentance of the others and in its power. He who knows not what repentance is, believes not in the repentance of others either. An unrepented sin alone is a real potential and foundation for a yet greater sin and we should all beware of this. Therefore there are sins committed which inevitably spill over and go beyond a person and cause a great evil. Such is for instance the sin against the unity of the Church and when one consciously and deliberately does things that deepen the church discords. For such a sin it is said that not even martyr's blood can wash it. Whereas for them who will bring peace it is said: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God* (Matt. 5:9). Let everyone choose his own way...

8. Why are the new Bishops not involved in the work of the MOC Synod? We know that canonically this issue is questionable; still it is a matter of important and historical moments for our Church and for the Macedonian state.

The new Bishops are involved in the work of the Synod. Certainly, from an ecclesiological viewpoint their participation in the Synod is questionable, yet from the perspective of the problems we are in, and also because of their introduction into the work of the Synod, I would say their participation is indispensable. Moreover, their participation is necessary for the unity of the Synod, too, because it is different when we share together good and bad, it is different when we bear the cross together as well.

9. In the process of renewal of monasteries, that is, monasticism, and of active life in the Church under a spiritual guidance, the MOC has lately laid truly authentic foundations, in which You have a significant share. There were bad moments when You were called to account for certain states in the monasticism. In this process You persisted, do You still find inspiration in it?



an INTERVIEW with:  
Metropolitan Nahum of Strumica

Firstly, the renewal of monasticism is a God's work, not man's, and a very good sign for R. Macedonia; whereas whom will God choose as an instrument for that renewal, it does not matter.

Renewal of monasticism in terms of number of monasteries and people is one thing, and renewal in terms of quality of Orthodox spiritual life yet another. Only the second is truly necessary and is the main reason for unceasing inspiration for me personally as well as for those whom I spiritually guide.

The objective is mind-and-heart prayer. A monk without this prayer is no monk. Such a monk by his outward appearance only differs from laymen. Not having the mind-and-heart prayer in a monk is a sign that his heart is captured by passions, especially the passion of high opinion of himself, and his mind is not illumined. An intellectual or experienced mind is one thing, yet another is an 'illumined' mind. Without the mind-and-heart prayer there is no illumination of the mind. Monastics may well function without this gift until they are under the blessing of obedi-



ence to a spiritual father, particularly such one who is a bearer of the gift of the mind-and-heart prayer, still, not outside this blessing.

A task of the spiritual father who has the gift of the mind-and-heart prayer is to leave heirs bearers of the same gift. This certainly does not depend solely on him but also on the struggle of his disciples and particularly on the gift of God. If he does not accomplish this, he has done nothing. After his death the monasticism that was under his spiritual guidance will go on living by some inertia, until it comes to a standstill again. The monasteries, for their part, will wait once again for a bearer of the gift of the mind-and-heart prayer to appear in order for them to be revived. Yet the Lord will keep us from such evil! The Lord looks after His Church and guards it.

