

FEAR OF GOD AND LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR: WITHOUT DELAY!

By Archbishop NATHANIEL (OCA)

A Reflection on the Need for Administrative Unity of the Orthodox Church in North America.

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In my opinion, there is no reason why there should not be, without delay, an administratively united Orthodox Church in North America. Orthodoxy in North America has a two-hundred-year-plus history. The number of faithful in North America of all jurisdictions is larger than the membership of some autonomous churches. There are seminaries, Monasteries, Institutions, and organizations reflecting the normal life of every Orthodox Church in the world. What is not yet in place is the unity of the hierarchy into one synod. Some patriarchates say, "It's not yet time!" They do not explain to us what this means, and because they do not explain, we wonder at their concern and motives for not blessing the local Church.

On the basis that the Church is a local witness to the Gospel, it is untenable that after two hundred years (or one hundred years outside Alaska), there is not a single synod of bishops for all Orthodox Christians in North America. In fact, the multiplicity of jurisdictional synods in North America, separate from the synods of the Mother Churches, is a strange phenomenon. A synod is one. How can it be divided and serve in two lands at the same time? What authority does a synod have in North America if it is ultimately governed by the synod of its Mother Church? How can various synods exist on the territory of an autocephalous Church? Is the issue that the Orthodox Church in America is not yet "recognized" by all the Orthodox churches? The Orthodox Church in America is recognized by the churches of Russia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, Czech Lands, Japan, and Kiev. This includes the vast majority of Orthodox Christians.

One can ask, Why do the Mother Churches want to have separate synods in North America--synods which are not canonically established and which have no authority, but are totally dependent on the Mother Church? I believe that in addition to concern for souls in faraway North America (and elsewhere around the globe), the Mother Churches experience political pressure from their governments to retain some ethnic tie with emigrants through the Church. This is big business: economic, social, and political. Every Church has established some form of church order in foreign lands where it finds Orthodox of its own ethnic origin, and every government has its own representatives in the same places to assist the immigrant not to forget the fatherland.

The Church in North America, for almost one hundred years, has suffered greatly because of political intervention in the life of the churches abroad, in North America, and the Church around the world. Now, there is a frenzy of nations lining up to be included into the European Union, among which are "Orthodox" nations. There is a definitely anti-American accent present in some nations and some Orthodox churches. Can the local entity not be, again, under stress if the Mother Church and the fatherland have policies which are at odds with those of North America? The Church does not live in a vacuum; she lives in definite societies in time and space. That the

Church must exist as a local church, self-ruling, for the salvation of her people in a given land, is paramount to her witness to the Gospel.

The founding fathers of the United States determined that no one