

The left and right schisms from the Moscow patriarchate

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The left and the right schisms from the Moscow Patriarchate

The left schism is the Schism of the Renovators, treated in a work by Bishop Sergij¹. A leader of the Renovators, A.J. Vvedenskij, spoke about the “tragedy of Christianity” and considered the Russian Patriarchal Church to be dying, but history turned the Renovators to be the “tragedy of Iscariots”.

As the history of the Renovators is well known I shall only shortly report the events on which the author is writing and concentrate on his evaluations.

Vvedenskij maintained that the re-establishment of the patriarchate in 1917 was a political act. The author’s evaluation is this: The Orthodox people were accustomed to the state’s protection of the church and could not accept the sharp change of this situation. Therefore they put their hope in the patriarch who against his will became the bulwark of all who were dissatisfied with the new reforms of the Soviet power.

The re-establishment of the patriarchate caused a great religious development, now church life received full evolution and perfection. The Soviet government took up a hostile attitude towards the church. And church people met the decree of January 23, 1918, “On the separation of the church from the state” in a hostile way. Nothing could have been better for the church than receiving the fullest freedom and independence from the state. But the decree called forth a diametrically opposite action. Patriarch Tichon proclaimed anathema on the Soviet power and called the believers to fight the decree. Later on Patriarch Tichon repented this fault and satisfactorily explained how it was a logical consequence of the situation at that time. The anathema was met with a storm of sympathy from the believers and with religious demonstrations with preaching, especially organized by Metropolitan Venjamin in Petrograd. These demonstrations caused rigorous steps from the Soviet government which looked upon the Church as a fire-place of counter-revolution. Some bishops continued to be tsaristic minded and expected at least a restauration as the Provisional Government.

¹ Bishop Sergij: *The Schism of the Renovators* (Astrahan-Moskva, 1953–1959), typewritten ms. of 769 pp.

A positive trait from this time was the growing eucharistic movement. Deep Christian moral principles were awakened. The intelligentsia who in former days stood outside the church consciously came nearer to its spiritual life. This was perhaps influenced by the civil war, economic difficulties and the changes in the society.

The Renovators declared their political loyalty towards the Soviet power, not thinking on the interests of the church, but only wanting to govern the church. They used the famine in the country in order to come to power. The capitalist countries did not help actively hoping that the Soviet power should break down. The Patriarch sent a message asking the believers to help the suffering people, but without much effect. The bishops in the famine districts called on the believers to deliver all the church values. "In these circumstances" the Soviet government issued a decree on the delivering of church values which in many places called forth an ideological church reaction. Reactionary elements in the church mobilized backward people in order to create incidents in Moscow, Leningrad, Tula, Smolensk, Orel, Astrahan... As a result of these incidents some bishops and many priests and active laymen were accused and sentenced. In certain places there was an open enmity between church and state.

Patriarch Tichon then made a second mistake prohibiting (February 22, 1922) the believers to deliver church values to the state. This fateful step led to his arrest and to the Renovators taking over the church power.

Vvedenskij asserts that Patriarch Tichon during his arrest transferred the church government to the Renovators until Metropolitan Agafangel arrived. The author calls this a treachery and a lie. Also one of the Renovators, Professor Titlinov, denied it and asserted that they took over this power "in a revolutionary and uncanonical way".

Patriarch Tichon writes in a letter to the Serbian patriarch (November 14, 1923) that he had not (May 18, 1922) given his power to the Renovators and was not able to do it as this power only belonged to bishops and could not be given to priests. The Renovators removed Metropolitan Venjamin of Leningrad from his office as he had prohibited Vvedenskij to serve in the churches.

Bishop Aleksij (Simanskij), the future patriarch, saw that the believers sometimes went over to political antigovernmental actions which might still more complicate the position of the Church. In a message to the believers he permitted Vvedenskij on certain conditions to serve in the churches in the diocese of Petrograd. It was more than

daring to change Metropolitan Venjamin's decision without debating the case with him even if he was in prison. This act hurted the Church and gave the Renovators the possibility of being rehabilitated in their destructive work and it confused both priests and laymen. Nevertheless it can be regarded as a patriotic act. Bishop Aleksij gave up on June 24 (1922) as he found it impossible to govern the diocese of Petrograd.

The Renovators using force or lies soon seized the whole Russian Orthodox Church. While many parish priests and sometimes even the bishops changed their orientation rather easily, it was difficult to lead the common laymen on an unknown dangerous way. Just this circumstance became an insuperable obstacle for the final victory of the Renovators. The believing masses met the ideas of the Renovators with open enmity through their whole history.

Metropolitan Agafangel was put under church judgement because he would not submit to the Renovators. Metropolitan Venjamin of Petrograd was condemned by the Soviet tribunal and Patriarch Tichon was to be accused. The author sees behind this the decisions of the Higher Church Government (the Renovators). Most of the processes dealt with the refusal of priests and laymen to deliver the church values.

In August 1922 the All-Russian Conference of the Renovators permitted married priests to become bishops, widowed priests to enter into a new marriage and monks to marry without loosing their clerical rank.

On October 23, 1922, Metropolitan Sergij, the future patriarch, who for a shorter period had been a member of the movement of the Renovators became convinced of their complete contempt of church canons, especially by introducing married bishops, and he left the movement. The majority of the priests did not accept this reform, but tolerated it, sometimes for fear.

The believing people saw in the Renovators changing of church order an attack on their faith. The churches of the renewing priests became therefore absolutely empty and these priests asked the state officials to give them other churches belonging to the patriarchal orientation. The priests then entered the new church and the believers left it and did not return to it. And the church was closed and taken over by the state "as superfluous". The believers knew that they lost such a church irrevocable, but even the terrible price of such offerings did not suspend these church people from their high comprehension of their

devotion to holy Orthodoxy. With tears and pain they always left their own church, but they did not join the Renovators who often were helped by the police. The Renovators ought to be judged by the impartial judgement of history for all the churches which have been lost on account of them. They accused the Orthodox priests and bishops of anti-Soviet activity.

In April/May 1923 their Local Council took place in Moscow. The author calls it a false council as it was not summoned by the patriarch according to the canons of the church. Before the beginning of the debate each delegate had to express his meaning about depriving Patriarch Tichon of his dignity as patriarch and monk. A resolution on this point was carried – against the church canons that an accused bishop shall be invited to defend himself before such a council. The Orthodox people considered this judgement of the Council to be a terrible insult of their Orthodox consciousness.

In June, 1923, the Supreme Court gave Patriarch Tichon his freedom – to the enormous joy of the Orthodox people. The Renovators by their judgement had much raised his authority. June 28 Tichon published a message in which he acknowledged that he was guilty in crimes against the Soviet power. July 1 he sent an appeal to the Orthodox bishops, priests and believers: He repents his anti-Soviet actions by opposing the decree on church values and the peace negotiations in Brest. The Church wants to stand outside politics, not being a white nor a red church.

For the first time the leader of the Patriarchal Church expressed his sincere loyalty to the Soviet power and his high patriotism. The Renovators had now no more this monopoly. Many of their bishops and priests expressed their public repentance before the Patriarch. The government allowed only the Renovators to send letters to the Churches abroad and therefore they succeeded in having their church government acknowledged by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as canonical, he had asked Patriarch Tichon to leave his office to secure peace in the church.

Patriarch Tichon died on April 7, 1925, and at the same date published his so-called Testament: The Soviet power is according to the will of God the leader of the Russian State and has given the Orthodox Church the possibility to conduct its religious work in agreement with the demands of its faith. He had made no compromises concerning faith.

October 1, 1925, the so-called Third Local Council met in Moscow.

Vvedenskij accused Tichon of fighting against the Soviet power until his death. The Renovators continuously decreased in numbers and from the beginning of 1941 almost disappeared. Vvedenskij died in July 1946 without having repented. The judgement of the author on his personal character is very severe. The Renovators had some merits being the first to bless the social revolution and condemning capitalism, but they did not redeem their sin of destroying the Church.

The so-called *right schisms* are treated in a thesis for the degree of master of theology by Archimandrit Ioann (Snyčev)². These hierarchical separations were mainly directed against the church policy of Metropolitan Sergij (Stragorodskij). The author has found much material in the archives of Metropolitan Manuil of Kujbyšev.

As the history of these schisms is not so well known as the history of the Renovators I shall report the events on which the author is writing more in detail.

The Local Council of 1917/18 accepted a resolution (January 23, 1918), which empowered the Patriarch to appoint several candidates for the post of Locum Tenens in case of his absence. On December 25, 1924 (January 7, 1925) Patriarch Tichon wrote an order by which the patriarchal rights were to descend to 1) Metropolitan Kirill, 2) Metropolitan Agafangel, 3) Metropolitan Peter.

After the death of Tichon on April 7, 1925, Metropolitan Peter became Locum Tenens as Kirill and Agafangel were prevented. Peter was confirmed in this position by 37 bishops attending the burial of Tichon³. On December 6, 1925, Peter transferred the rights and duties of the Locum Tenens to 1) Metropolitan Sergij, 2) Metropolitan Mihail, 3) Archbishop Josif of Rostov. As Peter was arrested Sergij became Suffragan Locum Tenens.

The Grigorienskij schism. Archbishop Grigorij (Jackovskij) of Ekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk) did not really recognize the re-establishment of the patriarchal government and wanted to establish a synodal administration. December 9/22, 1925 ten bishops, assembled in Moscow, formed the Provisional Higher Church Council with Grigorij as presi-

² Archimandrit Ioann (Snyčev): *The Church Schisms of the Twenties and Thirties in the 20th Century* (Kujbyšev, 1966), typewritten ms. of 314 pp. The author is now bishop of Kujbyšev.

³ Joh. Chrysostomus: *Kirchengeschichte Russlands der neuesten Zeit*, II, S.28, writes: 58 Bischöfe.

dent. The author states that Grigorij acted uncanonically by acting without the sanction of the first bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church (Peter, Sergij) and in this way against the regulations of the Local Council of 1917/18 establishing the patriarchate. January 2, 1926, Grigorij's Council was recognized by the Soviet government. Sergij was prohibited to leave Nizegorod monastery, but supported by 24 Russian bishops he deprived the Grigorian bishops of their dioceses and prohibited their services.

The Grigorian council on January 29, 1926, turned to Metropolitan Peter asking him to transfer the church government to this council what Peter did, changing the council into a "kollegium". Sergij then with the permission of the government⁴ wrote a letter to Peter informing him that he had deprived Grigorij of his diocese. Peter then confirmed Sergij in his rights as Locum Tenens.

On April 5/18, 1926, Metropolitan Agafangel of Jaroslavl after an "absence" of four years returned to his diocese and informed the Patriarchal Church that he took over the church government. June 3, 1926, a Grigorian congress turned to Agafangel to get his acknowledgement. In the meantime Agafangel has transferred his authority to Sergij. June 9, 1926, Metropolitan Peter confirmed the prohibition Sergij had laid upon Archbishop Grigorij. Grigorij then decided to visit Peter in order to persuade him to re-establish his church council, but Sergij now published Peter's resolution of June 9. Now many Grigorian priests returned to Sergij "with repentance".

In June 1927 Archbishop Ilarion (Troitskij) was transported from his banishment at the Solovetsk Islands to Moscow, Grigorij asked him to become president of his church council, but Ilarion refused. Somewhat later Grigorij ceased to be president, he died 1932. The schism was liquidated in 1943.

The author admits that Sergij was not recognized in his position as Locum Tenens at once as Peter was at the burial of Tichon, but he stresses that Sergij's position was canonical as there was no possibility of convening the Local Council.

The Jaroslavskij schism. This schism is closely connected with the name of Metropolitan Agafangel of Jaroslavl. At his return in April 1926 he took over the church government according to Tichon's testa-

⁴ Chrysostomus writes much more about the Soviet government than this thesis and uses mainly sources published outside the Soviet Union, rather often in Jordanville. He is a very impartial writer.

mentary order of December 25, 1924 and because he was the first ordained among the Russian bishops. The author adds that the Local Council of 1917/18 had not decided that the first ordained bishop should become Locum Tenens, but only that he should convene the Higher Church Council which had to elect the Locum Tenens.

Agafangel considered Peter to have lost his rights and to act uncanonically by handing over the rights of the Locum Tenens to a "kollegium" (as the kollegium of Peter the Great). Sergij in a letter informed Peter, who on April 9/22, 1926, answered that he remained Locum Tenens and Sergij Suffragan Locum Tenens. On May 3/16, 1926, Sergij through a letter informed Agafangel that the place as Locum Tenens was only free when Peter gave it up or was deprived of it through a church judgement. May 11/24 Sergij gave Agafangel over to the judgement of 24 bishops being in Moscow at that time. They judged: Agafangel's claim to take over Peter's position as Locum Tenens is unlawful and criminal, Sergij acts completely correct handing him over to the judgement of the Orthodox bishops. May 9/22, 1926, Peter in a letter asked Agafangel to take over the rights as Locum Tenens. On June 8 (new style) Agafangel definitively decided to give up his claim. The author finds 1) that Sergij was right thinking that Peter lived so remote from church affairs that he could not give his power to any other person and 2) that Agafangel recognized Sergij's position only in order to save the peace within the Church.

Agafangel began, however, again after Sergij's declaration of July 16/29, 1927, on his loyalty to the Soviet power. The Jaroslav group of bishops considered this declaration to be a change of Orthodoxy and to submit the divine principle of the church to the earthly principle. Sergij considered Agafangel's action to be dangerous to the church. Three of the bishops were deprived of their dioceses, but not Agafangel. Sergij sent twice representatives to negotiate with Agafangel. These conversations led at last Agafangel to complete reconciliation with Sergij.

The Josiflianskij schism. The main reason of this schism is the establishment of the Soviet power and Metropolitan Sergij's church policy. Many of the clergy thought that Orthodoxy could only be preserved by the monarchy while the Soviet power on account of its materialistic ideology could not defend the Orthodox Church, a legalization from an antireligious power might endanger the true faith. Sergij found that the Church from the State must have acknowledgement and freedom

to exist according to its canons. He preferred a purely legal union with an atheistic state to the sufferings of the church.

The majority of the members of the Patriarchal Church were not ready for such a step. The arrested Metropolitan Peter considered it to be necessary. The deported Solovetsk bishops acknowledged on September 14, 1927, that Sergij followed the line of Tichon, but rejected that Sergij subordinated the Church to the civil authorities in such a categorical way. But they didn't want to separate themselves from Sergij.

Josif became bishop of Rostov in 1921 and Metropolitan of Leningrad in 1926 and was very well received by the believers as a strong defender of Orthodoxy. Sergij and his Holy Synod (recognized by the government May 18, 1927) on September 12, 1927, transferred Josif to be Metropolitan of Odessa where Sergij found him more needed. Some bishops, priests and believers from Leningrad protested against the transferring of bishops without the agreement of the believers of the diocese concerned. Josif signed on January 24, 1928, his act of separation from Sergij acknowledging himself as metropolitan of Leningrad. The author stresses that Sergij according to the church canons had the full right to appoint and transfer bishops.

The author concludes: Sergij had to organize his temporary Patriarchal Holy Synod (in May 1927) as for the time being it was impossible to convene the Local Russian Council which had the right to organize such a holy synod.

Now the majority of the Orthodox priests and bishops decided to remain loyal to Sergij as they were against a new separation of the Orthodox Church. Several bishops of Leningrad diocese did the same. From 1929 the number of Josif's adherents constantly decreased. In 1929 Josif retired from his office and the schism ceased to exist in 1930. The Josiflianskij schism was more dangerous to Orthodoxy because the adherents of Josif pretended to defend true Orthodoxy.

Two points called forth an opposition to Sergij: the transfer of church government from one person to another by testament and not by election and his establishing of peaceful relations between Church and State.

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