

## The Moscow pan-Orthodox conference

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On July 8, the pan-Orthodox conference was opened with a ceremony dedicated to the 500-year anniversary of Russian autocephaly. According to the CAROC reports, the event was attended by fifty-eight foreigners from eleven autocephalous churches.<sup>129</sup> Another group of participants represented the foreign exarchates and missions of the Moscow Patriarchate. This group included Archbishop Elevation of Prague and Czechoslovakia, Archbishop Makary from the United

States, Metropolitan Seraphim from France, Archbishop Sergii from Austria, Archimandrite Gavriil from the Russian church mission in China, Archimandrite Dionisii from the Netherlands, among others. The new Patriarch of All Armenians, Georg VI, was also there.<sup>130</sup> The guests were welcomed by Patriarch Alexii, who brought their attention to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a savior of Orthodoxy. He reminded them that it had become autocephalous in a moment when the purity of Orthodoxy in Constantinople had been damaged.<sup>131</sup> His address was followed by a divine liturgy in Moscow's Cathedral of the Epiphany (Figure 9.1).



Figure 9.1 The Moscow Cathedral of the Epiphany in Yelokhovo, where the enthronements of Patriarch Sergii (1943) and Patriarch Alexii Simanskii (1945) took place.

Later on the same day, the guests went to the Cathedral of the Resurrection (Voskresnii Sobor), the main conference venue. There they attended a solemn meeting opened by the Patriarch of Moscow. In his oration, Alexii defended the view that the dependence of the Russian Church on its mother church (i. e., the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople), had been symbolic since the conversion of Russians to Christianity.<sup>132</sup> Alexii also stressed that the 1448 autocephaly of the Russian Church had a positive effect on Orthodoxy as a whole, and he pointed out the help that his church had given to the four ancient Orthodox patriarchates in the past. Concerning the conference, he declared that its aim was to restore the destroyed unity of the Orthodox Church and refuted claims that it was an attempt by Moscow to subject the other Orthodox churches to its control. According to him, “these lies” were created by the enemies of Orthodoxy and Russian people.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, he did not let pass the opportunity to point to the absence of certain Orthodox churches from the celebrations. He said, “We are sorry that the highly pious heads of the ancient East Churches could not join to us as they were deprived of the freedom of traveling and action because of the regrettable conditions in their countries.”<sup>134</sup> His position was supported by the Romanian Patriarch, Justinian, who insisted on recording the passiveness of Greeks, thus making the next generations aware of “their responsibility for the needs and interests of the whole Orthodox Church.”<sup>135</sup> At the same time, any hints about the ambitions of the Moscow Patriarch to an ecumenical leadership of Orthodoxy were firmly rejected by the Russian clergy at the conference. Father G. Razumovskii even declared:

We are protesting not only against the first Rome, but also against the second. However agitation abroad, inimical to us, tries to present us as supporters of the theory of the Third Rome (Moscow), we do not wish the Third Rome, either. Our appeal is: not to Rome, but to the heavenly Jerusalem!<sup>136</sup>

After the patriarchal oration, the floor was given to the CAROC’s chairman, who underscored the understanding manifested by the Soviet government about the desire of the Russian Orthodox Church to celebrate the 500-year anniversary of its autocephaly. He claimed that the Moscow Patriarchate was completely free in organizing this event. Karpov repeated Alexii’s words about the missing Greek hierarchs and mentioned that despite their absence the forum was respectable enough. At the same time, he emphasized that “the Orthodox Churches of all countries, supporting the new order” (i. e., from the people’s democracies), were presented in the conference. Karpov concluded that in a time when the world was divided into two camps, “the Church was free only in the Soviet Union and the countries of the new democracy.”<sup>137</sup> What remained behind the scenes were the talks that the church delegations from people’s democracies had with the CAROC’s boss. His speech was followed by official addresses from the heads of the “democratic” Orthodox churches to their hosts. In general, they repeated the main theses of Patriarch Alexii and the CAROC’s chairman. Only the Greeks showed reservations.<sup>138</sup> In the end of this solemn meeting the delegates sent a telegram to Stalin greeting him as a world peacemaker.<sup>139</sup>

On July 9, the jubilation continued as a regular conference attended only by the representatives of the “democratic” churches. The metropolitans Germanos and Chrysostomos excused their nonattendance with reference to their lack of mandate to take part in the conference’s sessions. They also offered a reminder that they had announced in advance that their participation would be limited to the celebrations of autocephaly.<sup>140</sup> The conference was opened by Patriarch Alexii, who summarized its main issue.<sup>141</sup> The first of them concerned the Vatican. The Russian Patriarch accused the Roman Holy See of initiating political intrigues and using lay tools to achieve its aims. In this regard, he paid special attention to its

involvement in Hitler's war against Slavdom.<sup>142</sup> The next issue discussed was the Orthodox attitude to ecumenism. It provoked hot debates that revealed the lack of unanimity.<sup>143</sup> According to Karpov, the attempts of some church heads to oppose the antiecumenical line of Moscow was a result of the visits paid by leaders of the ecumenical movement to Eastern European churches in the summer of 1948, as well as of the influence of Metropolitan Germanos.<sup>144</sup> To calm the situation, Metropolitan Nikolay (Yarushevich) proposed to discuss these problems, not in the plenary sessions (9-10 July), but in commissions (July 11-18).<sup>145</sup> At the same time, the CAROC used the next days to exert pressure over Exarch Stefan and the Armenian Catholicos, Georg VI, who intended to speak in favor of the World Council of Churches.<sup>146</sup>

The third issue raised by Patriarch Alexii concerned the recognition of the Anglican orders.<sup>147</sup> IN this regard, Alexii mentioned that the patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Romania, as well as the Bulgarian Exarchate, had already acknowledged them. According to Russian hierarchy, however, this recognition could not be justified by dogmatic and canonical arguments, nor did it stem from the historical experience of the Orthodox Church. Finally, Alexii referred to the calendar question. In this case, he considered it important for the unity of the Orthodox Church to have the main religious celebrations on same days.

Under the CAROC's supervision, the pan-Orthodox conference strictly followed its agenda. During the sessions, the plenary papers were read by Russian theologians, followed by papers by representatives of separate Orthodox churches. The latter rigorously maintained the main theses of their Soviet colleagues and added some national content and data to the M.<sup>148</sup> THE major task of the conference was the adoption of four resolutions, dealing with the Vatican, the ecumenical movement, the Anglican orders, and the calendar question. In fact, their texts had been preapproved by the Kremlin, but their being voted on by the conference would legitimize them in the eyes of outside observers.<sup>149</sup>

The first resolution, directed against the Vatican, was of the highest importance for the Kremlin's plans. Its introduction summarized the traditional accusations of Orthodox theologians against Catholicism, while its core was focused on the Vatican's political crimes. It denounced Pope Pius XII as an initiator of "brotherkilling wars, the fight against democracy and defense of fascism."<sup>150</sup> IT appealed to Christians all over the world to condemn his activities as anti-Christian, antidemocratic, and antinational. The resolution ended with a prayer to God to enlighten the Catholic hierarchy and inspire it to reject the postulate of papal primacy and to cease to use the church for political ends. This document did not provoke any discord among the Orthodox churches from the Eastern European people's democracies, and they gave their unanimous support for it.

In accordance with Soviet priorities, the next resolution concerned the ecumenical movement. It rejected the idea of the establishment of an ecumenical church because the moment was not appropriate for such an endeavor. Moreover, the document accused the World Council of Churches of political activities incompatible with Orthodoxy. On these grounds, the resolution urged the necessity of rejecting the invitation to participate in the World Council of Churches, given the decline of the ecumenical movement from genuine Christianity.<sup>151</sup> This document, however, provoked the resistance of the Bulgarian Exarch Stefan, one of the founders of the ecumenical movement. He signed the document only after joint pressure from the Moscow Synod, Metropolitan Elevation of Prague, and the Bulgarian government.<sup>152</sup> At the same time, the Anglican Church paid special attention to this document. According to its observers,

the TASS report that “the World Council of Churches was condemned as being ‘anti-democratic’ is not confirmed by the [resolution] text, since this expression does not occur in it.”<sup>153</sup> According to the resolution on Anglican consecration, its recognition by some Orthodox Churches should be considered conditional. The document foresaw a future Orthodox recognition of the Anglican orders by an act of reciprocity; that is, it would become a fact when the Anglican Church accepted the dogmas of Orthodoxy, particularly those about the consecration as a mystery. The document also stated that in principle the Orthodox Church looked with sympathy on the request of the Church of England and was open to solving this problem after establishing a unity of faith and worship.<sup>154</sup> To some extent, this softer attitude was influenced by the Romanian Bishop Antim. He proposed that the paragraph on the uncanonical consecration of the founder of the Anglican Church Matthew Parker be excluded from the text.<sup>155</sup> According to an Anglican report,

As is natural the resolution about Anglicanism stresses the importance of dogmatic agreement between the Orthodox and Anglican Churches before any substantial steps can be taken towards reunion. The Conference showed that it was very anxious that the reunion should be achieved and the tone of this resolution was warm and friendly towards the Anglican Communion. It may therefore be considered to be a hopeful document, since the obvious deduction would be that conversations between theologians of the two Churches should take place as soon as possible, in order to clarify the situation and discuss what differences exist and how important they are.<sup>156</sup>

The final resolution was about the calendar question. According to this resolution, Easter should be celebrated on the same Sunday by all Orthodox churches in order to keep their unity. In this regard, all the delegates agreed with the calendar estimation of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, based on the old Julian style.<sup>157</sup>

Finally, the conference voted on an “Appeal to All Christians.” The fact that the stubborn Bulgarian Exarch, who caused much trouble to the Soviet hosts, was presented as its author provoked some questions. Keeping in mind the thorough preparation of every detail of the conference, including the preliminary censorship of the Romanian papers, it is difficult to believe that the writing of such a key document was entrusted to the main troublemaker among the conference participants. Most probably this step was aimed at discrediting Stefan in the eyes of his Western friends. In this way, any future attempts of the Bulgarian church leader to join the World Council of Churches were blocked. At the same time, the Appeal was read not by Stefan but by Metropolitan Nikolay of Krutitsy, the so-called foreign minister of the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>158</sup>

According to this document, the world was living in stormy times when the irreconcilable differences between the Catholic-Protestant West and the Orthodox East had become clear.<sup>159</sup> It stressed that while the Orthodox East was inspired by the glorious principles of peace and mutual fraternal love among people, the military aggression of the capitalist and imperialist world had become obvious to all of mankind. According to the appeal, every true Christian sought justice and peace and thus had to support the voice of fraternal love, humanity, and truth coming from Moscow. Therefore, the conference participants referred to progressive people with a call to support the Soviet efforts to stop the new warmongers. To assist their choice, the document “unmasked” the Vatican as “a fortress of Catholicism” and America as “a nest of Protestantism,” while portraying the Moscow Patriarchate as the only church ready to sacrifice itself on behalf of peace.<sup>160</sup> The document left the impression that Orthodox people were the only true and active peace-lovers who struggled against war. This ideological



interpretation was completely suited to the Soviet policy of “the imposition of doctrinal uniformity,” hierarchical order, and coordination in the socialist camp. It made clear why the conference was supported by the government of the Soviet Union and those of the “people’s democracies.”<sup>161</sup> The Moscow pan-Orthodox conference also followed the tendency of changing the focus from “the Soviet experience” toward “the leadership of the Soviet Union” in Eastern Europe.<sup>162</sup> According to the closing speech of Patriarch Alexii, the only aim of the conference was “to unite Orthodox Churches in one spiritual union.”<sup>163</sup> During this last meeting, the four resolutions and the appeal were unanimously approved by all delegates. They were also signed by all heads of the Orthodox churches who had attended the session.<sup>164</sup> On their return home, they were expected to impose the conference decisions on their clergy and flock.

Another important event that remained outside the attention of the external observers was the establishment of a network of the so-called podvoryes by the Moscow Patriarchate. On July 17, it made special gifts to the Bulgarian, Serbian, and Antiochian churches. Each of them received its own podvorye, that is, a temple whose administrator acted as ambassador to the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, special instructions for the management of these temples were drawn up.<sup>166</sup> According to this, the temples were given for full and temporary use (art. 1). Religious services should be conducted either in the national language of the corresponding church or in Church Slavonic, with the consent of its Holy Synod (a note to art. 1). Each priest in the temples had to name the Moscow Patriarch and the local Russian bishop (supervising the eparchy) alongside the head of his own Church (art. 5). The main priest of the temple and other clerics were to be appointed by a joint agreement between the corresponding church and the Moscow Patriarchate (art. 7). The Moscow Patriarchate appointed administrators responsible for the material valuables belonging to the temple (art. 8). The salary and accommodations for the representatives of the churches at each podvorye were supplied by the Moscow Patriarchate (art. 14). The donations left by believers in the church should be transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate (art. 15). Finally, all staff of the podvoryes had to observe Soviet law.

The draft of these instructions was submitted for approval to the Soviet state authorities, who made some revisions. Generally, they removed the texts that did not concern the interests of the Soviet state. The transfer of financial means from one country to another was also restricted. It is interesting that the CAROC defended the rights of the Moscow Patriarchate to elaborate in detail its relations with the autocephalous churches that had received podvoryes. On January 7, 1949, the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued its order No. 383, which permitted the Moscow Patriarchate to put the podvorye instructions in force.<sup>167</sup>