

NEWSLETTER #4
Department of Foreign Relations
Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church
Outside of Russia

July 1976

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL.

The Geneva French language bulletin of the Constantinople Patriarchate, "Episkepsis", in its issue of May 5th, 1976, informs us about the successful course of negotiations of the Patriarchal delegation, headed by Metropolitan Meliton, with the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow and Georgia, as well as the representatives of the Polish and Czechoslovakian Churches.

Agreement was reached on the following points:

- a) The necessity to call the Council as soon as possible.
- b) The Council should be of short duration.
- c) It must resolve the most urgent church problems in regard to the Clergy and the Orthodox faithful.
- d) It should concentrate on the dialogue of the Orthodox Church with other Christian Churches, as well as relations with the Ecumenical Movement, so that a Pan Orthodox program can be worked out in matters concerning Christian Unity.

It is reported that the Patriarchal Delegation was met everywhere with due hospitality and honours, and pleasure was expressed that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is accelerating the convocation of the Council and that it is giving preference to important contemporary subjects.

As the bulletin reports, at present it is clear that the first Pan Orthodox Conference will be held in Chambesy, Switzerland, and that it is expected that the resolutions concerning the program of the Council and its proceedings will be accepted unanimously, with consideration given to the above-mentioned all-Orthodox resolutions. Satisfaction was expressed that "It is possible to state the obvious unity of Orthodoxy in all external consultations and the will of the Orthodox Churches to manifest this unity once more, in order to strengthen the sork for Christian unity, which in turn will reflect upon the whole of humanity." It is expected that there will be more consultations in Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, Cyprus, Greece and Findland.

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND JEWS.

The representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and of other Churches who have a "dialogue" with the Vatican, should seriously consider how much the Catholic Church has changed already and what kind of changes one may expect in the near future. This is no longer the Church of the Florentine Unia or even of the First Vatican Council. For example, the question concerning the ordination of women, which is formally rejected at present, might easily be settled in a short while, since the Vatican has already created a committee for its study. We do not mention a whole number of reforms which have already taken place and which are Protestant in character. Even more important is the problem of Judaism.

The National Catholic Register, in its issue of July 4th, 1976 writes: "The zeal of the United States Catholic Bishops in fostering friendship and understanding for Jews and Judaism, is unprecedented in the long history of Jewish-Christian relations", the Synagogue Council of America said here, e.g. New York. "The document repeats earlier repudiations of anti-semitism." the Council said. "But we are impressed with its acknowledgement that at the heart of the old hostilities toward the Jewish people, was an anti-Judaic theology. Particularly noteworthy is the document's commendation of efforts to reformulate Christian theological expositions on Judaism along more constructive lines."

It is interesting to compare these words with the report of the Vice

President of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Msgr. Charles Moeller. Msgr. Moeller, in an address delivered on Dec. 16th, 1975 in Washington, D.C., at the national celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Vatican II declaration on the relationship of the Church with the Jews (The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City Information Service, #30, 1976/1). He reminded the audience that in October 1974 the Pope elevated the Office for Catholic-Jewish Relations to the rank of a separate Pontifical Commission. And that in January 1975 a special document was promulgated in Rome, entitled "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration " Nostra Aetate". The speaker pointed out that it took almost 2000 years for the Catholic Church to "come to a fuller grasp" of the Gospel's teaching about the Jews. "It took time for her to put aside an attitude which had too quickly become negative toward all that was outside of her (the Church) and even toward all that tradition in which she herself was rooted, and to come to the point, through the mediation of an ever more open tolerance, where she could give an appropriately positive consideration to all men of good will..." (p. 28-29) While presenting the new approach to Judaism as a "long process of development and slow maturation", the speaker fully agreed with the evaluation of the Vatican Guidelines made by Rabbi Henry Siegman, which he called a "Jewish theological analysis of this document". The Rabbi said: "The Guidelines were not intended to END but to INITIATE a process. What the Catholic Church has done is to create the tools that make possible a reexamination of the entire range of its own internal life - in education, in the training for the priesthood, in its understanding of the Bible, in its catechism, - insofar as these relate to an understanding of Judaism. These tools did not exist before.....The big question is therefore, whether the Church will put these new tools to good use." (p. 30)

The Monsignor is inclined to give a positive answer to this question. " It is with pleasure that I share those sentiments expressed by Rabbi Henry Siegman in his conclusion, but, to the extent that his formula still contains a conditional judgement, I assume them for my part, the value of a fully expressed hope, and even, with the help of God, of a certainty." In other words, a Catholic Monsignor, Vice President of the Vatican Commission, in his dialogue with the Jews, is willing to put to discussion the very basic principles of Christology. But one can ask: Is it possible to have a dialogue between Christians and Jews on this question if one is steadfastly confessing belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Messiah? From other articles written on the same theme we can see that the Jews, in order to continue a dialogue, would be willing to acknowledge the Saviour as the first but unsuccessful Messiah, while still awaiting the "real one" to come, whom we would consider to be the Anti-Christ. It becomes especially clear when one reads the "NICM" Journal which is edited by a group of Jews, Catholics and Protestants, and is especially devoted to such a dialogue. (Spring 1976, Vol. 1, #2)

COURT DECISION CONCERNING THE SERBIAN CHURCH.

The United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. made a decision in favour of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Church, mainly basing its ruling on the principle that a civil court cannot abrogate the decision of the Church authorities in canonical and Church administrative matters. The followers of former Bishop Dionisije have the right, within 25 days, to submit their memorandum concerning this decision, and during the same period of time the Serbian Synod may present its reply. It is difficult to predict how much time the Supreme Court will need for its final decision. The Court might accept or reject Dionisije's petition. After that the case will be forwarded to the Supreme Court of Illinois for rehearing, and then to the Waukegan, Ill. District Court for a final ruling, which still can be appealed. So that the case, which was in principle, decided in favour of the Serbian Church, practically speaking, will be legal for some time to come.

CONDEMNATION OF CHARISMATICS IN GREECE.

In the beginning of this year, Archimandrite Eusebios Stephanou, promoter of the Pentacostal-Charismatic Movement, arrived in Greece. At that time the Chancery of the Archbishop of Athens published an Encyclical Letter which said : "We vehemently call your attention to the fact that in recent days Archimandrite Eusebios Stephanou, a clergyman of the Holy Archdiocese of America, who is here on leave of absence, attempted to preach in private auditoriums, supposedly the word of God, in a totally heretical manner." After the first three meetings at which the heresy of Fr. Eusebios became quite obvious, he was forbidden to lecture in church-owned buildings. He then proceeded to use private halls. The Archbishop's Office ordered the priests to warn their flock against the dangers of listening to the sermons of this "heretical clergyman", who, "as a wolf in sheep's clothing, (because he presents himself as a Greek Orthodox priest before his audience) seeks to draw the faithful into error." From the same letter it is obvious that the Greek Archdiocese has appealed to Archbishop Iakovos, under whose jurisdiction Fr. Eusebios is, asking Archbishop Iakovos to forbid him to preach and to impose canonical sanction on him.

BISHOP PETER OF ASTORIA.

Old Calendarist Greek Bishop Peter of Astoria, as an exception to the rule, was permitted to take part in the concelebration of the funeral service (but not the Liturgy) for the late Archbishop Averky. However, the Synod of Bishops ruled that its decision of 6/19th of September 1975 should remain in force, according to which it was resolved "to abstain from concelebration with Bishop Peter and his clergy, because of his questionable canonical position since his exclusion from the Greek Hierarchy of Archbishop Avxentios."

PROTEST OF FR. S. ZHELOUDKOFF.

In connection with the appeal of Frs. Gleb Yakounin and L. Regelson, Priest Sergius Zheloudkoff of Moscow has sent to the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, a strongly worded protest against the actions of the Conference in Nairobi, which refused to manifest its support of those persecuted for the Faith in the USSR. He is filled with indignation that, being influenced by the Moscow representatives, the Conference showed complete indifference to the sufferings of the Christians of the USSR. It is well known that Fr. Zheloudkoff criticized A. Solzhenitsyn for his open letter to Patriarch Pimen. In his letter to Mr. Potter he explains his position. "I must state that I do not belong to those who unconditionally condemn our Church Hierarchy. One must understand its position. The very first responsibility of the Hierarchy is the Church Services. And all the practical conditions for the Church Services, beginning with the building itself and ending with the legalization of the Hierarchy, are in the hands of an Ideocratic System. The System begrudgingly gives its permission only under very special conditions. These conditions are not simply "loyalty" or "indifference to politics". No, it is the total devotion to the System. Whoever does not wish to or cannot comply - let him go. There will always be someone else to replace him. There will always be Church administrators who will accept the conditions and, what is more important, the faithful will support him. The people, our women are very religious, know nothing about the prisoners of conscience, they are not shown on TV. What the people need is that Church Services are conducted in their regular order, in the closest, still-existing church. The Church Services have for us, their own highest value."

"The administrators of all the legal religious societies in our System are in the same situation. But our Church Hierarchs are exclusively and in the highest degree, condemned to deliberately disgraceful public appearances.

Each time this happens we suffer a great deal, witnessing our high-ranking clergymen leading Church Services and with the same breath preaching falsehoods.

LATIN OLD BELIEVERS.

The introduction of the new Mass after Vatican II has not always run smoothly. In almost every country there are conservatives who oppose it. Archbishop Lefebvre has been given especially wide publicity. The Archbishop was a very prominent Catholic Hierarch, former Archbishop of Dakar, Apostolic Delegate for West Africa, and Head of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. It was the largest congregation of Catholic priests-missionaries and he led it in the conservative manner. He was also one of the outstanding conservatives during the sessions of the Vatican Council, and even after its conclusion he never changed his stand. After being relieved of his position as head of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, he settled in Switzerland, opened a Seminary there and established the clerical Brotherhood of St. Pius X. Just recently, in spite of the Pope's prohibition, he ordained ten priests according to the old rite, causing a strong protest by the local Church authorities. He continues to celebrate the old Mass and says that if others are permitted to experiment with the New Mass, he can also experiment with the Old Mass. He bases his position on the condemnation of Pope Pius X, which was proclaimed at the time the Tridentine Mass was established, against anyone who would attempt to change it. The beginning of the schism of the Traditionalists was underlined by the celebration of the Tridentine Mass in Geneva, in spite of the prohibition of the Archbishop of Lausanne. Archbishop Lefebvre delivered the sermon on this occasion, explaining that he feels that it is his duty to "defend the true faith". He is the most popular and the most prominent opponent of the reforms of Pope Paul VI. According to the latest information, the Pope has suspended him for a period of one year.

APPEAL FOR UNIFICATION OF THE UKRAINIANS.

Cardinal Joseph Slipyi has published an appeal in which he urges all the Ukrainians, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, to "unite in one certain Ukrainian Church headed by a Patriarch". He still pretends to the title of Patriarch, in spite of the refusal of the Pope to elevate the Uniate Catholic Church to the rank of a Patriarchate. In his epistle, Cardinal Slipyi asserts that "impartially speaking, there are no fundamental dogmatic differences" between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Urging the Ukrainians to preserve their traditions, he also appealed to all the Protestants for unification. With an ecumenical easiness he is placing national unity above the Confession of the Faith.

BLASPHEMY IN A PRAYERBOOK.

The U. S. Armed Forces Board of Chaplains has permitted the publication of Hymn #286 in its Book of Worship. The Episcopal journal, "The Living Church" of July 18th, 1976, writes that this hymn, entitled "It Was On Friday Morning", is blasphemous. The words which are put into Christ the Saviour's mouth are a blasphemy, and one does not wish to repeat them here. It is impossible to grasp how the Board of Chaplains, which is dominated by representatives of Christian faiths, could permit such a blasphemy in its hymnal.

EPISCOPALIANS AND WOMEN PRIESTS.

According to information published in the New York Times of 6/15/76, the majority of Bishops of the Episcopal Church have stated that they will co-sponsor Church legislation to permit the ordination of women to the priesthood. In their statement, which was signed by 67 Bishops, they indicated that, when joined by another 15 Bishops who have already declared themselves in favor of women's ordination, the majority of votes in favor of this reform will have been secured.

Again we wish to thank the following benefactors for their very generous donations: His Eminence Metropolitan Philaret, Bishop Constantine, Archpriest B. Kitcenko, A. Tjelov, Mavrekes Yatralis, and one Anonymous donor. Also we ask any future donors to please make checks or money orders payable to SYNOD FOREIGN RELATIONS. Again, many, many thanks.