

NEWSLETTER # 1

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

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THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE PAN-ORTHODOX COUNCIL

On Sunday, November 21, 1976 in Chambesy, Geneva, the opening of the first Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference took place, with representatives of 13 autocephalous or autonomous Churches taking part. The Georgian Church was not represented, and the Orthodox Church in America was not invited as the other Eastern Churches do not recognize her autocephaly.

Archbishop Anthony of Geneva received an invitation to the solemn opening of the Conference but replied that although he appreciated the invitation, nevertheless he could not be present as our Church does not agree with the convening of a council under the present conditions.

Depending upon the sources of information, the tone in which the Conference was conducted was more or less optimistic. Yet one could say that there was no full agreement, resulting in the agenda of the future Conference being limited. It was obvious that efforts were made not to put on the agenda any questions which might cause controversy. The President of the Conference, Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, from the beginning informed press representatives, among whom was Archpriest A. Troubnikoff (Synodal priest from Paris) that the Conference would not discuss any dogmatical or political questions.

On the second day, Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev, the leader of the Moscow Patriarchate delegation, read the decree of the Moscow Synod which criticized the manner in which the preparations for the Great Council were being made. In addition, he read a decree which condemned in 14 points the actions of the Constantinople Patriarchate toward the Russian Church beginning with 1922. This unexpected move created a lot of scandal and

confusion, yet not a single report to the press from the Secretariat of the Conference mentions this incident at all.

The question of intercommunion with the Roman Catholics was not discussed. It seems that the Pope was given hopes in this respect, since in his address to the Conference he expressed a wish that "the Conference would encourage the establishment of complete communion between our Churches" and would hasten the day when all obstacles will be overcome and we finally will be able to serve the Eucharist together. But no report mentions any decisions of the Conference in this area.

According to the official information provided by the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Geneva:

"The Conference particularly occupied itself with the subject of the place of the Orthodox Church within the ecumenical movement in general and the World Council of Churches in particular, and decided to continue and intensify its involvement in the ecumenical movement, and through cooperation in all of its activities, especially in the WCC, make an effort to prove its participation as active as possible, while adhering to the preservation of its ecclesiological principles in order to better serve the cause of ecumenical Christian unity.

"The Conference also expressed the wish of the Orthodox Church to help inter-religious understanding and cooperation, and through this to eliminate fanaticism coming from any side, and to work towards bringing about liberty, fellowship of the nations, and peace throughout the world in service to contemporary mankind without distinction of race or religion, and decided to collaborate with other, non-Christian, religions.

"The Conference especially engaged in the question of the common celebration of Easter by all Christians. It expressed agreement in principle of the Orthodox Church to carry this out. However, since in such matters, which deal with the unanimous expression of Christianity, it must seriously

consider the practice of the ancient Church as She existed in the East, and also the pastoral difficulties which may result from such a change, and also weighing the different Orthodox pastoral demands which exist in the West, the Conference, in order to achieve a balanced approach to this question, decided to study thoroughly the whole matter from all points of view before making a pan-Orthodox decision. Therefore it approved the decision to commission the Secretariat for Preparation of the Holy and Great Council to call a conference as soon as possible of responsible hierarchs, canon lawyers, astronomers, historians and sociologists which would report its findings through the Secretariat for consideration at the next Pre-Synodal Conference.

"The first Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference, considering the above mentioned decisions, had three views in mind: to give a positive character to the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, to develop and further inter-Christian relations and the ecumenical movement in order to promote Christian unity, and through the establishment of tolerant inter-religious cooperation to serve humanity in its individual, unique and inimitable human personality."

The mentioning of ideas of "liberty, fellowship of the nations and peace throughout the world in service to contemporary mankind" and so on clearly reflects the influence of Moscow in spite of the announcement of supposedly putting aside political questions.

MORE ON THE PRODUCTION OF THE SACRELIGIOUS FILM "THE PASSOVER PLOT"

In fulfillment of the decree of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, upon being informed of the premiere of this film being held in California in connection with the Bicentennial celebration, its President, Metropolitan Philaret, asked that the representatives of the various Christian denominations, senators and congressmen join in the protest

against the showing of the blasphemous film "The Passover Plot" which is an insult to anyone calling himself a Christian. Accordingly, the Metropolitan also addressed the Congress of Catholic Bishops in America, asking them to join him in this protest.

The Roman Catholic paper "The Twin Circle", on December 26th, informed its subscribers that the producer of the film, Wolf Schmidt, declared that he had received no less than 6,000 protesting letters which were prompted by the action started by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. When asked if this number was enough to influence the future showing of the film, Schmidt answered, "We're explaining in our advertisements that the letter campaign is a phony and that the letters are signed by people who haven't even seen the film." The film was shown in 10 cities so far and will also be sent abroad. The General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Rt. Rev. James Rausch, on November 15th, responding to Metropolitan Philaret's telegram as requested by the President of the Conference, stated that "the Office for Film and Broadcasting has been working on the best means for discouraging attendance at this woeful distortion of the life and work of Our Saviour, but at the same time it is aware that public outcry unfortunately appears to encourage greater attendance on the part of the curious." A copy of this letter was forwarded to the Secretary of the Office of Film and Broadcasting.

The Secretary of the Office of Film and Broadcasting, Rev. Patrick J. Sullivan, S.J., in his own letter to Metropolitan Philaret on December 1st rather contradicts his superior, Bishop Rausch, to whom he also mailed a copy of his letter. His answer is quite in line with the principles of his order: "...the film has opened in Los Angeles, we have not yet been offered a screening of it. Hence we must wait for the film's appearance in New York metropolitan area theatres before we are in position to publish an official review and/or statement concerning it." Apparently Dr. Schonfield's "best seller" book never reached Rev. Sullivan.

THE GRIEF OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

As reported in the National Catholic Register of December 26th, the Pope, addressing pilgrims from his balcony on two Sundays before Christmas, spoke about the situation of his church, describing it in very gloomy colors. He could not restrain himself from mentioning the events of the Detroit Conference, which proposed the ordination of women and permission for them to preach, the Vatican's allowance of priests to marry and continue their ecclesiastical status, that American bishops set the rights and duties of married couples but leave up to their conscience the use of contraceptives, and that the church encourage various organizations which are designed to "reconcile the Church with its homosexual brothers and sisters." The Pope also mentioned the newly arisen problem of his conflict with Archbishop Lefebvre.

AN OFFER TO OBSERVE SATURDAY INSTEAD OF SUNDAY

In connection with the increasing number of stores open for business on Sunday, the Protestant magazine "Christianity Today", in its recent editorial discussed the pros and cons of this proposal. On one hand there is a 300 year old law which prohibits sales on Sunday, and on the other hand there are attempts to work straight through all seven days of the week. To this there are also some religious objections, since the Jews demand a day off on Saturday and the Christians on Sunday. Also, there are some organizations for the conservation of our dwindling natural resources which favor a day off so that fuel may be saved, and this would be a considerable economy.

Strangely, the Christian magazine decided the question in favor of SATURDAY and not Sunday, and offers to people the use of the Sabbath alone for their rest. "Jews and other Sabbatarians would be well served by this decision. For Protestants and Catholics it should prove no theological hardship: apart from the fact that our Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week,

there is nothing in Scripture that requires us to keep Sunday rather than Saturday as a holy day. In the interest of the nation, Protestant and Catholic Churches could change their worship services from Sunday to Saturday. Or we could keep Sunday as our sabbath; whatever inconvenience we suffered would be a token of our good will toward a minority whose sensitivities we respect and whose legalistic attachment to Saturday as the sabbath binds them in a way we are not bound." The magazine calls on "responsible leaders" to discuss this possibility, since "it would serve the larger interests of humanity." (November 1976)

#### THE PROSPECT OF WOMEN PRIESTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

One can say that beginning with last year all Catholic periodicals have had numerous articles and information dedicated to the question of the priesthood of women. Edward Wakin, a reporter for "U. S. Catholic", very enthusiastically expressed his joy over the fact that many Chaplains very carefully "cross out sexist language such as 'he', 'men', etc. and put in 'people'". He also described the concelebration of a Catholic priest and a woman during the midnight mass of Easter Sunday as the most "moving experience" he ever had. "There, at the altar stood out co-chaplains, one a priest, the other a single woman who belongs to a religious order. They stood side by side during the Liturgy of the Word. One held up the Chalice. One held up the Host." (October 1976)

The regular reporter of the "National Catholic Register", Monsignor R. G. Peters, in his long article discusses the problem: should women be ordained priests? The Monsignor feels that "the day will probably come for the ordination of women to the priesthood", although he is not able to say how soon. (November 1976)

Monsignor Raymond Bosler, who is in charge of the question and answer section of the Roman Catholic "Tablet" states in a headline that the "ordination of

women foreseeable". In answer to a young female student, who feels that she has a special "call" to be a priest, he advises patience, and to "prepare yourself to be a religious education coordinator and preferably become a religious and wait until the day you are around 50, for it is from that age-bracket, I suspect, that the first woman to be ordained will be selected."  
(September 1976)

The Louisville Archdiocese published a study which encompassed the theology of women and the needs of the local church. Archbishop Thomas McDonough said that the purpose of this document was to "raise consciousness on the issue of women's role" and to inform and prepare people to accept women in leadership roles. (The Tablet, December 16, 1976)

#### RESULTS OF THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN BY THE ANGLICANS

In spite of the decision of the Episcopal Convention to ordain women priests (as well as allowing them to be elevated to the rank of bishop), it has created strong opposition within this denomination. "The National Catholic Reporter" of December 10th reports that the Episcopal parish of St. Mary in Denver, Colorado, officially withdrew from the Episcopal Church. Fr. James Mote, the rector of this parish predicted that no less than 50 parishes will follow their steps in the near future. Bishop William Frey stated that the vote was illegal, since the parish did not obtain the permission of the chancery of the diocese to amend its constitution.

#### ECUMENICAL SERVICE IN JERUSALEM

The Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition on Mt. Zion participated in an inter-religious service to pray for peace in the Holy Land. The ceremony, which was called "Abrahamitic Ecumenic" also marked the 70th anniversary of the arrival of German Benedictines in Jerusalem. The Abbot, Laurentius Klein, a long time

champion of interfaith relations presided over the special service. The Lord's Prayer was intoned in Gregorian Chant in Hebrew. Dr. Bernard Resnikov, who represented the American Jewish Committee read a passage from the Book of Isaiah. Passages from the Koran were recited by Sheikh Marwan Abu Sayyad, a Muslim leader in Jerusalem. The Holy City's Armenian Cathedral Choir provided the religious music for the occasion.

#### HOMOSEXUALS IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

An Anglican priest, the Rev. Peter Elers, who is the President of the Gay Christian Movement in England, announced to his two bishops that "he has given a solemn promise" to no longer conduct lesbian "marriages" in his parish church. Such an announcement came as a result of the "marriage" of two lesbian couples which became public knowledge. He insisted that a marriage could never be performed between couples of the same sex. A service, called "blessing of lovers", was conducted, which uses the wedding service in the Prayer Book, but also includes a formula for living together "so long as we both shall love." (Living Church, December 1976)

In step with their co-religionists in England, more than 30 Episcopal priests in New York serve gay people and work for obtaining all legal rights for them. Among the different goals of the "Gay Episcopal Forum" in the City of New York, is listed the effort "to support through education and legal reform those programs which reflect our best understanding of human sexuality and spirituality."

#### UKRAINIANS UNSUCCESSFUL IN THEIR REQUEST FOR A PATRIARCH

Pope Paul VI again made it clear during the reception of Cardinal Joseph Slipyi and a group of Ukrainian bishops that he cannot grant permission for the often requested establishment of a Patriarchate in the Ukrain. The Pope informed Cardinal Slipyi and his 6 bishops that they must "know that there are certain



norms covering the subject of a patriarchal title". "The Tablet" of December 16th informs its readers that "it is generally accepted that the Vatican's granting of a Ukrainian Patriarchate at this time would be viewed in Moscow as a highly provocative act and endanger Vatican efforts to re-establish the Church in countries under Soviet influence in Eastern Europe."

#### ARCHBISHOP LEFEBRE OPENS NEW SEMINARY

"The National Catholic Register" of December 10th reports that Archbishop Lefebvre, who is suspended by the Pope for ordaining 13 priests in spite of the Vatican's strong interdict, opened a seminary in America. A large farm was purchased in Armada, a small town in Michigan, and in the house 12 seminarians and their teachers have settled. The seminary follows a pre-Vatican II program, and the seminarians wear cassocks and strictly follow all of the old Roman Catholic regulations. The seminary is headed by Rev. Anthony Ward, who was ordained by Archbishop Lefebvre. The seminary is also to serve as a base for the activities of Catholic traditionalists. The followers of Archbishop Lefebvre in America have established more than a dozen missionary points in various states, but now they have their own seminary. The main seminary with its 100 students is still functioning in Switzerland. It is assumed that there are at least 50,000 Roman Catholics who faithfully follow pre-reform Catholicism and do not accept the new Mass as valid.

#### SYNOD BOOKSTORE OPENED

On Tuesday, December 8/21, the Dept. of Public and Foreign Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia opened a bookstore. It is situated on the third floor of the Synod Headquarters at 75 East 93rd Street (corner of Park Avenue), and will carry books in both Russian and English as well as icons and records. The Bookstore will be open:

Monday thru Friday 11:00 AM to 7:30 PM  
Saturday 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM  
Sunday & Feast Days Briefly, immediately following Liturgy

Any inquiries should be directed to the bookstore manager, Father Hierodeacon  
Adrian. The telephone number is (212) 369-0288.

DONATIONS RECEIVED AND GREATLY APPRECIATED:

Archbishop Theodosy of Australia, Archpriest J. Shachneff, Priest A. Skliarov,  
Mr. P. Ilinsky, Thomas Kane, M. Nedelsky, R. Klancko, T. Khoury, P. Betz, Rev.  
S. Weber, E. Kulschinsky, L. Zimmerman. Zar's Fund.