

FROM THE EDITORS:

For a number of years the Synod's Foreign Relations Department published a Russian and English language Bulletin, which was mailed at no cost, to all the clergy of the Church Abroad, to many private individuals upon their request, and on occasion to the press.

Unfortunately, due to various reasons, this publication was discontinued. On occasion, the Foreign Relations Department publishes a few articles in "Pravoslavnaya Rus", or in the Synod's official periodical in Russian, "Church Life". Yet the need for regular information, especially in English, still exists. Therefore, we, a small group of Orthodox Russian individuals, have decided to fill this vacuum, and as a purely private initiative, to publish our "CHURCH NEWS", which in its context will be similar to the former "Newsletter".

In undertaking this task, the editors are well aware of the fact that their publication can in no way carry the same weight as the Synod's former "Newsletter", but we are planning to publish only information, the authenticity of which we have no reason to doubt, and we shall endeavor to verify said information by every means available to us. We hope that eventually we will be able to earn the trust and respect of our readers.

We initiate this publication with practically no financial base. Our first two or three issues will be made possible thanks to the generosity of the members of our group. The future of this publication will be totally dependant upon the generosity of our readers. We will be able to continue only if sufficient support is forthcoming from those Orthodox Christians who feel that the news that we publish is interesting and valuable to them. We are therefore asking for your support. If you feel that our publication is of interest to you, please be kind enough to recommend it to your friends and acquaintances. We have not set any specific price for its subscription. To start, we plan to publish bimonthly, but if we do get sufficient support, we will publish monthly. Funds are needed not only for printing and postage, but for subscriptions to a number of periodicals which carry the articles of interest, and from which we will glean the information for our publication. The more we learn, the more information we will be able to pass on to our readers.

We trust that you will find our "CHURCH NEWS" interesting and informative. We are taking the liberty of enclosing our return envelope. If you are NOT interested in receiving it, please be kind enough to inform us as soon as possible. In this way, we will not burden you with mail which you do not care to receive, and since our funds are so limited, copies can be made available to those who request them.

Many thanks for your very kind cooperation.....

FROM LETTERS RECEIVED FROM THE USSR (July-September 1987):

"We have much news. First of all the canonizations. The canonization of the Grand Duke Dimitri Donskoy is planned. The Service is already composed.

A Monk from the Lavra told me that the canonization of Theophan the Recluse has already taken place. He himself saw the Icon, but so far no one knows anything about it in Moscow."

"The Optina Pustyn was given back to the Church. The Abbot is already appointed. His name is not known, but it is said that he is a young man in his thirties."

"... The upbringing of our children now seems to be our main problem. I no longer have any doubts that our Government has decided to open the door to eroticism and pornography. It is being done in a "delicate manner". Pornographic videocassettes are confiscated at Customs, only to be shown clandestinely in private homes. Recently an article in a Latvian publication complained there are some 6,000 pornographic videos are circulating among private homes there. Very often there are organized showings of such videos, at which an entrance fee is charged. Light penalties do not stop anyone. It is quite obvious that enforcement of these penalties is just to pacify the "Conservatives", and that if the Government truly wished to put an end to this disgusting practice, with our system, it would only be a matter of days."

"... As for lowering the moral standards, this will happen fast, (with the Government's support) and we will be deprived (and already are) of the only advantage we have had against the West. "Who needs such a Russia?" said Constantine Leontiev. It is very likely that this last circumstance will lead to a catastrophe for Russia in regard to her external destiny."

"... "There is now a new characteristic of "Democracy" here. This is the emergence of youth gangs which are functioning totally unrestricted and seemingly under the protection of the Lubianka (the KGB Center). These gangs, which are called "Liubers" (after one of the regions near Moscow), have as their motto a defense of "the Soviet way of life", as opposed to the Western. They attack hippies and the fans of Western-style music, such as "Heavy Metal". The latter oppose them with their "army", and there are big fights, sometimes even murders. It is said that just recently the Liubers hanged one hippy in the park. They also dispersed and beat up the participants of a demonstration in defense of Soviet Jews - Otkansniki. It seems that they are attackers who can be directed against anyone, and in case of necessity, against the Church. Meanwhile, a Western observer is under the impression that the KGB has nothing to do with it, and all of this is just a new movement among the youth. These Liubers rent basements where they practice all sorts of wrestling."

OCTOBER 1/14, 1987 "I have no idea where "perestroika" and "glasnost" can bring us. But at the present time there is no reason whatsoever to be under any sort of illusion.* Rather just the opposite. We foresee the possibility for the flowering of the "theology of the revolution" and of the lowering of moral standards for youngsters. By the way, the publications that vigorously defend "glasnost" are the ones that aid and abet the moral destruction of our youth, and what is less important but still substantial, is the continued decline of the economy. Perhaps this decline will be halted in the future. It is not up to me to judge."

*Underlined in original.

REPOSE OF THE RT. REV. NIKANDR (PADERIN), BISHOP OF SAO PAULO AND BRAZIL.

On Dec. 2nd, 1987, while en route to San Francisco, Calif. to continue treatment for the cancer from which he was suffering, (upon the urgent advice of his sister who lives there) Bishop Mikandr reposed while in flight. The plane set down in Peru, where the Medical Examiner performed an autopsy. The two Subdeacons who were accompanying their ailing Bishop, vested him, and the coffin was flown to San Francisco where Bishop Nikandr was buried, after a funeral service at the Cathedral. He was 60 years of age.

APPEAL OF TWO "TIKHONITE" PRIESTS.

The Keston News Bulletin of 11/5/87 published the information that two priests, who signed their names only as "Priests Guri and German", who belong to the Church of "True Orthodox Christians" (in other words the Catacomb Church) sent a petition to Metropolitan Vitaly asking to be received into his jurisdiction.

This is not the first time that The Synod of Bishops has received such a petition. What is new, however, is that up to now such petitions were received and processed in a confidential manner, and now this information comes from a secular, not even an Orthodox, publication.

The Keston News Service has also received two issues of a new underground publication (Samizdat) entitled "For Orthodoxy and the Monarchy". The publishers inform their readers of their allegiance to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and acknowledge the spiritual authority of Metropolitan Vitaly.

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL OF THE SERBIAN BISHOPS.

At the end of May 1987, a Council of the Serbian Orthodox Bishops was convoked in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. At that time a decision was passed to convoke an Extraordinary Council. This took place from Oct. 3rd to Oct. 10th, 1987.

As is obvious from the meager information released by the official publication of the Serbian Church "Pravoslavlje" dated 11/1/87, the Council was convoked in order to discuss the question of relations between the Church and the State, and also to solve local Diocesan problems.

The Bishops complain that school children are harassed when it becomes known to the authorities that they are studying religion at home. Military personnel also suffer for being true members of the Church, and some of them are severely punished for attending Church Services. Priests are not allowed to visit the sick in hospitals or prisons. In addition, the Church cannot get a permit to have access to the media, (Radio and Television) for the purpose of preaching. Yet all kinds of perverted people, and even criminals, have no difficulty in obtaining such a permit.

In spite of all the protests made by the Church Authorities, Church property is constantly being confiscated, even the small plots of land adjacent to churches, which in theory, the Church is allowed to use. In addition, a number of large Church-owned buildings have been illegally confiscated by the State and have still not been returned. For example, the Theological Schools in Sarajevo and Sremski Carlovci.

Under the pretext that the State wanted to make copies of the Church metrical records, they were removed from the Church and never returned.

It is expected that the State will soon review some of its laws, and the Church wants to present its point of view regarding some of them to the Authorities.

According to recently received private information from a Professor at a major Theological School in Belgrade, in the midst of the Serbian Episcopate there are two clearly distinguishable schools of thought: one which is strictly Orthodox and strongly anti-ecumenical - the disciples of Fr. Justin Popovic, and the other the advocates of Ecumenism. Unfortunately, one must come to the conclusion that the latter group represents the majority, since the Serbian Orthodox Church, which so heroically defends its liberty and property before the Godless State, is sinking more and more into the terrible morass of Ecumenism.

ECUMENISM THROUGH THE EYES OF A JEWISH PROFESSOR AND A MUSLIM PHILOSOPHER.

The newspaper "Jewish Press" of 12/4/87 published a very interesting article by Prof. Paul Eidelberg, visiting Professor of Political Science at Yeshiva University. Prof. Eidelberg states that Ecumenism, which originated in Christianity, for a long period of time had no dialogue with Judaism. But now Rabbis and Muslims have become very active members of this movement. The State of Israel, wishing to ease the tense political situation, recently initiated religious contacts with the Muslims. Although Prof. Eidelberg does see a certain advantage for the Israeli cause from such "ecumenical contacts", he is definitely opposed to this movement.

While analyzing the question of ecumenism and "contacts" with different public figures, Eidelberg quotes a substantial part of a statement made by the renowned Muslim Philosopher Seyyed Nasr, who was recently appointed Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. Nasr, who is very critical of Ecumenism, called it a "transcendental unity of religions". Ecumenism, he writes, "is becoming an instrument for simple relativization and further secularization".

Prof. Eidelberg summarizes Dr. Nasr's trend of thought as "the tendency (of Ecumenism) to deny that any religion is the repository of exclusive truth. Ecumenism thus reinforces the doctrine of cultural relativism, according to which there are no objective and universally valid standards by which to determine whether the beliefs and practices of one people are superior to those of another"....."Moreover, because relativism denies transcendental truths, it cannot but breed secularism. That some religionists are also relativists, is only evidence of their superficiality or desire for popularity. Ecumenicals fit this description".

Doctor Nasr, now quoted by Prof. Eidelberg, states that "Like relativism, Ecumenism is not concerned with truth of a transcendent order, but rather with an outward and sentimental kind, which cannot but reduce religions to their least common denominator".

"In Ecumenism", writes Prof. Eidelberg, one detects a powerful tendency to reduce religion to morality, and morality to mere benevolence. In the process, revelatory knowledge and Divine authority are replaced by human understanding and consensus. But this means, says Nasr, that 'Ecumenism cannot but fall into a kind of Humanism, which only dilutes what remains of religion. It is really another form of secularism'. Prof. Eidelberg ends his noteworthy article with the words: "Ecumenism is not concerned with truth."

How said it is that something that is so correctly and deeply understood by a Jewish Professor and a Muslim Philosopher, still remains so unclear to all those members and activists of the Ecumenical movement who claim to be Orthodox.....

THE THEORY OF RELATIVISM IN QUESTIONS OF MORALITY.

The Ecumenical Press Service of 11/11/87 reports that a group of St. Vladimir's Seminary Alumni organized a symposium which was held at the Conference Center of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America in Pennsylvania. The main theme of this symposium was Today's Morality, and the main speaker was Fr. John Meyendorff, Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary. The symposium lasted for four days and covered a range of issues, including genetic engineering and drug abuse, but centered mainly on sexual morality.

Archpriest Meyendorff made a statement to reporters that "Orthodoxy in America is not forsaking its traditional positions, but is looking at challenges such as abortion, more directly, and is handling them more flexibly than is common in some Orthodox countries."

Fr. Meyendorff disavowed the "triumphalistic" claim of Orthodoxy that only it has all the answers to today's problems. "The Orthodox tradition is not legalistic and does not see morality as a matter of black and white," said Fr. Meyendorff. "Rather, there is something which is worse and something which is better. Homosexual activity is something worse. It cannot be justified as a positive fulfillment of humanity."

He thinks, and the majority of the Symposium's participants agreed with him, that today the attempts to frighten people with hellfire are ineffective, and that the Orthodox view of sexuality should be presented to people in positive forms, as an ideal.

Although Fr. Meyendorff did say that Orthodoxy in America is not forsaking its traditional positions, his remark that the sin of homosexuality is only "something worse", makes one doubt the steadfastness of "Orthodox" traditions in the U.S.A.

A "BLUNDER" BY CARDINAL RATZINGER.

On 10/24/87, a Conservative Italian Newspaper "Il Sabato", published an article by Cardinal Ratzinger, which created quite a stir in international circles. The cause for such concern was that Cardinal Ratzinger, when discussing Catholic-Jewish relations, wrote that "the Pope has offered not only respect, but a theological line that not only implies our union with the Faith of Abraham, but also the reality of Jesus Christ, in which the Faith of Abraham finds its fulfillment."

This sentence disturbed Roman Catholics as well as Jews. Both groups immediately demanded an explanation from Cardinal Ratzinger. According to the New York Times of 11/19/87, the Cardinal's Office made an explanation, stating that his words were taken out of context, and that the Cardinal intended to say that "for us" the Faith of Abraham finds its fulfillment in Christianity. Eugene Fischer, Secretary for Catholic-Jewish relations for NCCB, complained that the translation of the Cardinal's article was done without the feeling for the "nuance" of the Italian language.

Yet, the Jewish contingent continues to be dissatisfied, and the "Jewish Press" of Nov. 27th, 1987 insists that the words "for us" actually do not exist in the Italian and German texts of the Cardinal's explanation. They see in Ratzinger's explanation, (by the way, it is common knowledge that this Cardinal has a very strong influence over the Pope) evidence that the Vatican is not sincere in leading the dialogue, and threatened to cancel a meeting between their representatives and the Vatican, which was scheduled for December 1987. So far there has been no information received that such a meeting was held at the end of the year.

THE REPOSE OF BISHOP INNOCENT.

On December 22nd, 1987, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Bishop Innocent passed away from cancer. His Grace was Bishop of Buenos Aires and Argentina, and Paraguay. He was the former Archpriest John Petrov.

In his youth, Vladyka was a military man and participated in the Civil War of 1917, as a member of the Volunteer White Army. He was in the unit which was the first to storm the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg, in which the Royal Family and their faithful servants were murdered. At that time Vladyka rescued a piece of wall plaster which was saturated with the martyrs blood, and carefully preserved this relic, always carrying it with him next to his chest. After his death, this relic was given to Metropolitan Vitaly through His Grace Bishop Hilarion.

At the beginning of last year, Vladyka Innocent was feeling so badly that he asked the Synod to allow him to retire. He continued to live partly in Paraguay and partly in Argentina, and while in Paraguay he informed Archpriest Vladimir Shlenev in Argentina that he was feeling very poorly and that he needed immediate help. Fr. Shlenev went to Paraguay to pick Vladyka up by car, since he was not able to fly. En route to Argentina Vladyka started to bleed profusely and was admitted to a Buenos Aires hospital. After a few days he died there, having the last joy of seeing his only son who flew in from Yugoslavia. Vladyka was buried in Argentina by the local Clergy, since not one Bishop from America was able to go to Argentina to preside over the funeral service.

Bishop Innocent was an avowed anticommunist and fought this plague wherever he found it. He not only participated in the Civil War, but also became a volunteer of a Russian Anti-communist Corps in Yugoslavia (1942-1945). He was obliged to leave his wife and young son, and could not return to Communist Yugoslavia at the end of the war. Later he was ordained a Priest and served in Paraguay, where he was a personal friend of the President of that Country. In 1984 he was tonsured with the name of Innocent, and ordained Bishop, to be the Vicar of the ailing Argentinian Archbishop Athanasios.

In July of 1987, Archbishop Seraphim of Chicago passed away. In November of 1987, Bishop Nikandr of Brazil reposed. And now, with the death of Bishop Innocent, the Church Abroad has lost three of its Bishops.

THE EPISTLE OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE MARKING THE 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION.

The Moscow Patriarchate published "The Epistle of His Holiness Pimen, Patriarch of Moscow and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, to Their Graces the Bishops, Venerable Clergy, Honorable Monastics, and all the faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church", in connection with the 70th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The Epistle shows, as never before, how faithfully the Moscow Patriarchate is serving the Godless government. It is so disgusting in its tone, that even within the Soviet Union it caused a number of protests. Fr. Gleb Yakunin sent his protest to the Patriarch, criticizing this Epistle, and just recently we received a copy of another letter to the Patriarch, which is striking for its courageous tone. We offer our readers the complete text.

"Your Holiness,
Your Graces:

Your Epistle of October 17th, 1987 personally affects each and every Christian, since it presents them as revolutionaries. Not willing to accept such a stamp upon myself, I personally, and those who agree with me, want to remind you that a Christian is not a revolutionary, due to the peaceful spirit of the Church, and due to Christ's teaching about the nature of the Heavenly Kingdom being not of this world. Therefore, Christians cannot, without renouncing Christ and committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, justify the efforts to achieve worldly goods by cruelty and by the shedding of blood, (such as burying alive, hanging by the hair on the Royal Gates, splashing persons with water during a bitter frost, etc.)

Yet, Christians are able to exist in any society, making their benevolent influence visible, and protecting that society from destruction.

At the present time the authorities are undertaking some measures which are to be commended. It is appropriate to mention that it was not Your Graces, who being the spiritual leaders of the Church, suggested to them to act in this manner. Just the opposite is true. Your constant praises, lies and flattery only helped to slow down the process. Now, instead of helping them to find the path to achieve true goodness, Your Graces, as usual, prevent them from walking this path, distorting Christ's teachings, and they will be able to use these distortions to their own benefit.

At this time, when the authorities are rehabilitating their martyrs, You continue to step over the memory of the Christian Martyrs for the Faith--including our present-day Martyrs such as Fr. Vladimir Rusak who is incarcerated simply for speaking the truth about the history of the Church.

At this time, when the authorities, due to their policy of Democratization, do not exert any pressure upon you, you cannot as in the past, justify your actions with the excuse of "government pressure". Therefore, the teaching about the revolutionary character of Christianity which you laid out in your Epistle, is your own, expressed by your own free will, by which you renounce Christ's teachings and by which you commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

I urge Your Graces to practice, if not Christian honesty, then at least human honesty. Look in the Holy Scriptures and you will see that there is nothing in common between your "theology of the revolution" and Christian teaching. Do honestly recognize it and publish it in a forthcoming Epistle.

STEPHAN KRASOVSKY"