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RESPONSE

by the clergy, monastic and laity of the Russian Orthodox Church to the "CHRISTMAS APPEAL of Eulogy, an Archbishop of the Moscow Patriarchate to the clergy and laity of the Russian Autonomous Church"

Beloved in Jesus Christ fathers, brethren and sisters!

Unfortunately we learned of the existence of this Appeal of Archbishop Eulogy of the MP quite by accident on January 22, 2000, since it was neither handed to any one of us nor sent by mail. Therefore our response is somewhat delayed.

We would like to believe that the love of Christ and His Church, as well as feelings evoked by the anniversary of 2000 years from the appearance in the world of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, have prevailed and the hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate no longer want to persecute believers of the Russian Orthodox Church. No longer will they initiate litigations against us and take away our churches with the support of government agencies and members of OMON [the police in Russia, "Ch.N."]. That they have realized that they were not moved by brotherly love when they wrote all kinds of misrepresentations of the Church Abroad, accusing her of treason against the Homeland and the Russian flock. We are ready to believe that the Moscow Patriarchate Archbishop of Vladimir and Suzdal Eulogy sincerely wants to join with us in the bosom of the One Holy and Apostolic Church.

We are grateful to the Lord Who guides toward salvation all those who have lost the right way. How would not we wish to be united when the vast majority of the Russian people suffers from schism and lack of Church unity!

In a Christian manner we have long ago pardoned all our offenders. Although, to forgive does not mean to forget.

But what is needed by the Church of Christ from Her members which defines Her unity - neither we, nor you can not change, because it is said: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal.1: 8). The Holy Fathers taught that the main task of a Christian is to preserve the Orthodox Faith.

We are divided from you by the very understanding of what the Orthodox Church is. The leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate distorted the Church not only in the canonical sense, but dogmatically as well.

It is the duty of an Orthodox person, who observes the doctrines and canons, according to the 15th canon of the 1st and 2nd Councils of Constantinople, is to depart from a leadership which betrays the Orthodox faith: "Thus for those persons who, on account of some heresy condemned by the Holy Councils or Fathers, withdraw themselves from communion with him who presides over them when, that is to say, he is preaching heresy publicly and teaching it bareheaded in church, such persons not only are not subject to any canonical penalty on account of their having walled themselves off from all communion with anyone called a bishop prior to any conciliar or synodal verdict has been rendered, but, on the contrary, they shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the honor which befits them among Orthodox Christians. For they have defied, not bishops, but pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers, and they have not sundered the union of the Church with any schism, but, on the contrary, have been sedulous to rescue the Church from schisms and divisions."

No one prevents anyone, as you have pointed it in your Christmas Appeal, from finding "joyous salvation, the most reasonable exit from the pit of delusions, worthy of the most joyous and lustrous crowns." For that not much is necessary:

1. To renounce the participation in the politics which the Moscow Patriarchate has made virtually the main part of her activity. This habit of decades of pleasing the godless government has led to the loss of independence and respect in eyes of the believers and is indissolubly connected with other sins.

2. Return to the path of teaching of the Orthodox Faith and Holy Canons.

3. To condemn the sin of Sergianism and forever to abstain from it as from a horrible leprosy, which brings forth nothing but anguish and spiritual death.

Sergianism is canonically a violation against the 30th Apostolic rule which reads:

"If any bishop obtain possession of an episcopal rank with the aid of the temporal powers, let him be deposed, and all who communicate with him."

4. To cleanse the Church of Christ from those who have become a disgrace for Orthodox and a laughing matter even for unbelievers, - those who gain unrighteous wealth not only by means of tobacco and vodka, but also by sufferings of unfortunate and deprived compatriots.

The 17th canon of the First Ecumenical Council reads: "Forasmuch as many enrolled among the clergy, following covetousness and lust of gain have forgotten the divine Scripture which says, "He hath not given his money upon usury" and in lending money ask the hundredth of the sum (as monthly interest) the holy and great Synod thinks it is just that after this decree anyone be found to receive usury, whether he accomplish it by secret transaction or otherwise, as by demanding the whole and one half, or by using any other contrivance whatever for filthy lucre's sake, he shall be deposed from the clergy and his name stricken from the list."

The same is said in the 44th canon of the Apostolic, the 10th of the 6th Ecumenical Council, 4th of the Laodician Council and the 21st of the Carthage Council.

5. To recognize the sainthood of the Imperial Family and all the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia who sacrificed their lives for God, Tsar and Homeland.

The 20th canon of the Holy Local Council in Gangra reads: "If any one shall, from presumptuous disposition, condemn and abhor the assemblies (in honor) of the martyrs, or the services performed there, and the commemoration of them, let him be anathema."

6. To refuse to have any sort of relations with the lawless "World Council of Churches" and other similar organizations and with the terrible heresy of Ecumenism into which you have already involved a huge part of your flock of little knowledge.

[To reject] the Ecumenist teachings which are incompatible with Orthodoxy yet are the official confession of Faith of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The 45th Apostolic canon reads: "Let a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, who has only prayed with heretics, be excommunicated: but if he has permitted them to perform any clerical office, let him be deposed."

When all the above mentioned blemishes of the Moscow Patriarchate will be overcome, when its hierarchs will bring forth their repentance before God and the Orthodox People, when their repentance will bring forth worthy fruits, then also we will joyfully "embrace one another" and the Russian Orthodox Church would verily "become a bright testimony of the Truth of Christ's Nativity, as a feast of peace and love."

Zealous for your salvation and with much love in Jesus Christ,

VALENTIN, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir

Suzdal, January 17/30, 2000

Our editorial office also received a copy of this "Nativity Appeal" by the Archbishop of Moscow Patriarchate addressed to the flock of the Russian Orthodox Church. It can be characterized with Psalmist's verse: "Their words were smoother than oil, and yet they are darts" (Ps. 54: 24, Sept.).

DOCUMENTS REGARDING SEIZURE OF PROPERTY IN JERICHO BELONGING TO THE ROCOR

As our readers might remember, in issue Vol. 12, # 1(83), 2000, in an article about the alarming Nativity celebration of "2000 years of Christianity" (instead of in 2001), on page 4, we expressed our concern about the motives behind the arrival of Alexis Ridiger and the 1000 "pilgrims" with him. And in addition, referring to the information published by the "Ecumenical News International" of December 15, 1999, noting the unprecedented arrival of so many "Orthodox", we expressed our apprehension that this might be a repetition of the Hebron "precedent" for seizing the property of the Church Abroad in the Holy Land. We made an error of 8 days, because on 2/15 of this January the Soviets seized one more property of the ROCOR.

A Declaration by Archbishop Mark

January 21, 2000 - Jerusalem-Jericho

His Eminence Mark, Archbishop of Berlin and Germany about the situation in the Holy Land.

On Saturday, January 15th, monks of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia were expelled from our property in Jericho. Meanwhile, there continue to remain two of our nuns, Sisters Maria and Xenia. [In addition: both have USA passports].

Beginning with Monday, we, together with the Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Abbot Alexis [Biron] and a priest-monk from New York City, Fr. Joachim (Parr), visited representatives of other Christian confessions in Jerusalem, explaining to them the situation. All were genuinely alarmed, realizing that similar state interference with church affairs might impact upon their lives. Even if it were the case that the Russian Federation or the Moscow Patriarchate would have any sort of right to possession of the above property, they should have addressed us or a court in order to establish their "rights," but not used blatant seizure by military powers.

Since last Saturday, members of the Russian Consulate and MP are a constant presence on the Jericho property. This, once more, clearly demonstrates the close connection and dependence of the MP on the post-Soviet government, that is, the Sergianist subservience of the Church to a godless state. In this case the behavior of the consulate staff and that of Patriarchate testifies to their equality in godlessness. Members of the consulate staff openly threatened to kill the nuns. The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate behave in a similar manner, so it seems that, in fact, the Palestinian soldiers defended our nuns from the terror of these individuals.

Yesterday I delivered a complaint to the head of Israel's Department for Religions that the Israeli government tolerates on its territory "Archimandrite" Theodosios and other similar activists, who revealed themselves in Jericho as members of a terrorist organization. The Israeli government should not tolerate such people on its territory and, in addition, grant them diplomatic status,

Yesterday, two representatives of the American Consulate for half an hour were in Jericho again and spoke with Sisters Maria and Xenia.

In the evening I myself went there with clergy from the Mission. In front of our plot there are some 20 nuns from both our convents constantly on duty. The Palestinian soldiers, who quite obviously are in the grip of Soviet agents, in the beginning didn't want to let us speak to the sisters. Finally, they let Sister Xenia come to the gates and talk to us. She related that in the morning they were visited by a Palestinian doctor, because during the night soldiers built a fire in order to warm themselves and the smoke filled up their room causing Sister Xenia to have an attack of asthma. They are still not permitted to go the rooms which have a sink, so they have to brush their teeth at the faucet outside, in view of the soldiers.

Clothed in riassas, the organizers of this action, including "Chief Archimandrite Theodosios," who freely walks in and out, occupy two large buildings in which there are lavatories.

The American vice-consul managed to obtain a promise from the Palestinian authorities, that I will be permitted to speak to both sisters, but yesterday the soldiers again did not permit Sister Maria using as an excuse the darkness saying that in the darkness they are not able to guarantee their safety from the consular and Patriarchal agents.

Yesterday, in front of the gates Priestmonk Elias in the presence of Abbess Moiseya and some 25 nuns served a moleben at a part of the gate which has a grating, so that Sisters Maria and Xenia stood on one side of the gate and the rest outside.

But today we were informed, that during the night boards were put over the grating, so that we can no longer see the sisters. A concentration camp has been created. Such is this "churchly undertaking." How sad this is for Russian people who suffered so much under the Stalinist regime! Indeed these masters in riassas pretend that they are representatives of Russia and the Russian Church, yet at the same time they force upon the world their "Sovietism."

Today I requested that the American vice-consul demand again from the Palestinian commander Colonel Rajoub to allow me access to the sisters. I also asked the International Red Cross to check up on the sisters' physical condition.

Jerusalem 8/21 January, 2000

Mark, Archbishop of Berlin and Germany, Administrator of affairs of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem."

The Editors of "Church News" received "for publication and wide circulation little known information" signed by a member of the ROCOR, Tatiana Olegovna Kameneff, President of the OPS. While including a verbatim copy of this excellent "communiqué" by T.O. Kameneff, we consider it our duty to clarify certain legal details of the statutes of the Orthodox Palestine Society.

Before the Soviet Revolution it was administrated by administrators in Jerusalem. Yet, in 1969 when Archimandrite Anthony (Grabbe) was appointed to the post of Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission and was elected by the Council of OPS to membership, and who later on, after repose of its President, General Khripunoff, became its President. For the purposes of defending the REM and OPS he brought the Israeli government to court, demanding compensation from property expropriated, at that time, 40 years before. Therefore, as a temporary measure, there were established two more sections of the OPS: in Europe and USA. These two sections were incorporated according to local statutes in the USA and in France, and tightly cooperated with the basic "section" of the Society in the Holy Land. Every one of these three sections (internally acting independently) temporarily were under the protection of the so-called Supreme Council, in order to coordinate the activity of all sections during the court procedures, as protected by the American corporation, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Such temporary cooperation was under the nominal chairmanship of Metropolitan Philaret and it lasted until his repose in 1986. The Chief of the Mission, Archm. Anthony, won the court case in 1985.

After his removal from post of Chief of the Mission, the Synod of Bishops, in violation of the Society's Statutes, deposed Archimandrite Anthony from post of the President of the USA section and instead of holding elections, appointed its own President, pretending to hold dictatorial control in Holy Land, Europe and USA. This was done in violation of the Statutes of OPS and a legal commentary made by Professor Baronet Nolde, a former member of the International Tribunal in Hague.

At present, in the Holy Land the president's duties in the Holy Land are legally carried out by Bishop Anthony (Grabbe). The President of the European section is Mrs. Tatiana Kameneff, residing in France and in the USA, the President, appointed by Synod of Bishops, is Princess Bagration-Moukhransky.

Communiqué

Paris, January 25, 2000. Seizure of Jericho.

In contradistinction to what is announced by certain information media, this matter concerns a third unlawful seizure of the property belonging to the "Russian White Church" on the territory of the Palestinian Autonomy, after seizure of the Garden in Jericho and handing it over by Palestinians to the "Red Church".

Such an unlawful and forcible expropriation was predictable ever since 1995 when some representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad entered into negotiations with Y. Arafat regarding some real estate which resulted in a profitable compromise for the Russian government. This weakening of position of the ROCA ended with the loss of first the garden in Jericho and created a precedent.

In some way also the seizure of the second property in Jericho might have been prevented if in 1996 Archimandrite Bartholomew, who was at that time Chief of the Russian Mission in Jerusalem, could have presented the relevant deeds of purchase to the Palestinian high authority, who demanded their presentation in Hebron. But at that time Archimandrite Bartholomew established that there was no a purchasing deed for this property in his files. His numerous requests to Synod headquarters remained unanswered and he could only swear on his word of honor that they exist. That was the only official document he could present to the Palestinians.

Let us remember that during the stormy events regarding the Hebron monastery, the very same disappearance of property deeds from the office was discovered, which was also accompanied by changes made in the land survey records, which were backdated with a difference of 5 months and worked to the benefit of the "Red Church." This

exposed a prior forgery. The ineffectiveness of the work of the committee appointed by the Synod of the ROCOR in order to settle the Hebron matter is confirmed today, two years later, by the theft of the second garden in Jericho, completed under similar circumstances.

In this way, one may pose a reasonable question: why did not this committee work on the essence of the matter, namely the defense of the legal rights of property and what is the fate of the property deeds? After all, everyone remembers the official apologies offered by the Synod of Bishops of the Church Abroad to Y. Arafat, which didn't contain a single word of protest against the illegal Hebron theft and that the administration of the Mission at a later time, in 1998, insisted that the deeds of purchase were in the Mission's office, which contradicted the facts.

In the communiqué published by Archbishop Mark on January 21 regarding Jericho 2, there is already visible an embryo of the very same defense "not of the essence" of the matter, similar to Hebron: "the interference of civil authorities in internal church matters," while primarily the matter is about the civil rights of property ownership.

Since the Synod, in person of its communication director, insists that the deeds of purchase for Jericho 2 and Hebron are in place, then let him publish them and explain the reasons why he did not present them in time of need and as a result, two properties were lost.

All the information regarding the above-mentioned matters was set forth in detail in the so-called "Hebron report."

Tatiana Kameneff, member of the ROCOR, President of the Orthodox Palestine Society.

19, rue Claude Lorrain. 75016 Paris, France

In connection with the seizure by the Russian Federation and the Moscow Patriarchate of property of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem and of the Orthodox Palestine Society (which was seized by Arafat in 1996 and which the OPS learned of in 1997 immediately registering a protest through its lawyer) in the press and internet a number of various details and information were published.

In the first place, the sincere gratitude of the Russian people abroad is due to Sister Maria (Stephanopoulos) who is the sister of the former important aide to President Clinton. If not for her energetic protests and immediate appearance on the sight of the crime, one has to believe that this property theft also would quietly have been accomplished at the hands of the Russian government and Moscow Patriarchate. Because of the publicity, Archbishop Mark had to move.

His declaration presents an amazing and totally unexpected metamorphosis. In June/July of 1998 Archbishop Mark in writing and in interviews quite openly discussed his efforts to unite the Church Abroad with the Moscow Patriarchate, although he thought that, "Now, for the time being, one has to abstain in some manner and very carefully bring to general knowledge the information about what is actually going on." The differences between the Church Abroad and Moscow Patriarchate in his view were at that time quite minimal. But here, in his official declaration, all of a sudden we hear what was repeated for nearly 80 years in a row the Russian Church Abroad through the persons of her outstanding First Hierarchs.

It is very pleasant to find out that finally Archbishop Mark noticed "the close connection and dependence of the MP on the post-Soviet government, that is, a Sergianist subservience of the Church to a godless state" and that "the behavior of the staff of the consulate and the Patriarchate testifies to their equivalence in godlessness." He even reports on the "organizers of this action in riassas, including 'Chief Archimandrite Theodosios'".

But one has to wonder why Archbishop Mark, who asked for help from a representative of the American government in Israel, did not realize that he received it from the Consul General and not from a much lower diplomatic officer, a vice-consul!

In connection with the Jericho events, Abbess Juliana, who for defending Hebron suffered from Palestinian soldiers and then later from the administration of the Synod of Bishops, which, at the demand of Archbishop Mark, exiled this brave woman to Chile, instead of rewarding her for faithfulness to the Church Abroad. At the same time, Archimandrite Bartholomew, who also suffered and zealously defended property of the ROCOR, was deposed from his position as Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission and exiled to a very remote place in Canada!

This time the Synod of Bishops, which previously did nothing regarding the Hebron matter and who left its defense to the responsibility of Archbishop Mark of Berlin, took some action.

In January a delegation went to Washington D.C., headed by the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Laurus. With him, according to information provided by Archpriest V. Potapov went: himself, his matushka, a clerk of the Synod's office N. Okhotin, a member of the Senatorial Republican Committee, Jim Jatras, the Synod's lawyer Helen Zezulin and a member of the Washington parish and a clerk of the State Department, Paul Campbell. The delegation had several meetings with officials of the State Department and was assured that the matter of seizure of Jericho will be placed on desk of President Clinton during his meeting with Arafat.

Certainly, it is very consoling to find out that finally some steps were taken to defend our properties in the Holy Land, and, yet, the most important part of this delegation, which represented in Washington the interests of the ROCOR, must have done so with some grave reservations.

Archbishop Laurus, while in Russia on several occasions, not only mainly visited places which belong to the MP, but created great sorrow and confusion among a number of Russians when they found out that His Eminence, the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, did not accept the invitation from a priest of the Church Abroad, but spent 2 weeks at the home of a MP priest at a nearby village.

Archpriest Potapov, long before the fall of Communism in Russia went with his parishioners to Gorny Convent in Jerusalem, which belongs to MP. For that he was strongly reprimanded by the Bishop of Washington and Florida Gregory (Grabbe). Even later he never hid his sympathy toward the MP. Ms. Zezulin, the Synod's attorney at law, for unknown personal reasons took to Moscow a part of the archives of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, which is testified to by her letter to the lawyer Martin of May 22, 1995, in which she informs him that she signed a one year contract with a firm Moscow, but will continue to represent Synod matters and "I have just this morning shipped my entire arbitration file to Russia, including originals of the affidavits, etc. If it all gets lost in transit I shall have to reconstruct from your files!" It is worthwhile noting that Ms. Zezulin did not personally bring very important Synod documentation to a place where it was in danger of falling in its enemies' hands, but, worse than that, forwarded it in such a manner that she herself foresees the possibility that it might be "lost"! By the way, her "distinguished" partner in the defense of Synod's property in Israel, the lawyer Martin was arrested by the Israeli government on charges of alleged swindling. Such a "representation" of the interests of the Synod of Bishops, unfortunately makes one feel that in this case we deal with a cover up to prevent charges that property of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem had been given up without a fight.

A bulletin "Vertograd-Inform" published in Russia in a special issue of January 16th published a short note by Abbess Juliana, entitled: "Jericho - Result of Our Silence." In it Abbess Juliana says:

"Silence is a sign of assent. For more than two years we did nothing, asking pardon from bandits. Our Church was humiliated before Muslims and atheists! The so-called 'commission' (established by the Synod of Bishops after the events at Hebron in 1997) did undertake something in secrecy, silently, sharing nothing with others. The result?..."

At this time the thieves made an error in that they attacked an American citizen and not an Arab woman without rights. But the method is very same! They act on Saturdays, since they know that on this day there is no way to reach the American Consul by telephone. Poor Brother Basil for a second time is beaten by the same people." Then a bit further Abbess Juliana says that there is no use saying, "Oh dear, we have to close ranks." To that end she invites those interested to come to Chile. Then she writes: "As the lawyers say, the situation in the Holy Land would not be so complicated if we had all the documents proving church ownership. But the problem is we have no documents; they were stolen long ago. And there are plenty of traitors!"

Following the note of Abbess Juliana, the editors of Vertograd published another short article, entitled: "Hebron... Bari... Jericho... and what is next?"

The authors of this article write that they would understand "the logic of our brethren abroad" who are longing for union with the MP -- which almost daily assaults clergymen and lay people who belong to the ROCOR and destroy their churches -- if this could be explained by fact that "they are very far away from Russia and therefore might not have the ability to soberly evaluate what is going on here. But in this case the MP itself went outside her "canonical territory" and decided to remind us of her nature. Her actions become more and more overt due to impunity. And the efforts of Archbishop MARK in Chisty Pereulok (the residence of the MP) and a committee he chairs, which constantly asks pardon either from the aggressors or from their protectors, evokes nothing but malevolent laughter. Indeed it is hard not to call it absurd that a pastor aspires to feel as guilty as possible before the wolf, which doesn't stop plundering his flock."

It seems that somewhat aware of the inadequacy of his defense of the REM property in Jerusalem, Archbishop Mark on January 27th published an additional declaration in which one feels he is preparing us for the failure of his further activity in the Holy Land.

Speaking of the difficulties and "very delicate" (?) negotiations with Palestinian government and quite rightly expecting justified criticism of his actions concerning Hebron, Archbishop Mark "would hope that our people would be careful in what they say about the committee working on the Jericho issue and we ask that they pray for the committee instead of making judgements on the grounds of unfounded allegations." This quotation is from a text we received from Europe. But the Russian text, published by "Pravoslavnaya Rus" # 2 of January 14/28th, has a different, "touched up" version. The Russian text is: "We hope, that being conscious of the extreme difficulty of these negotiations, all those, who wish us success would carefully weigh their pronouncements. Above all, we ask for prayerful support."

We believe that Archbishop Mark made a fatal error in Hebron when he kowtowed before the aggressors instead of presenting to them the deed of purchase and other later deeds, and also by not proving that the MP in no way can claim to be the rightful heir of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Palestine Society. According to an interview given on January 16 by Palestinian Colonel Jobrill Rajoub, Palestinians recognize only the MP because "the subject concerning us is not political, it is a religious matter and one of claiming rightful ownership which was handed to the MP "according to legal documents." Why then in due time didn't Archbishop Mark compare the authenticity of "the legal documents" received by Arafat and did not find out how he got them and why he did not present the "legal documentation" which for more than 100 years was in the Mission's archives up to the year 1986?

According to the agency Orthodox Christian News, Inc. of January 24th, during a meeting between Arafat and President Clinton over peace treaties between Israel and the Palestinians, the matter of the seizure of property of the REM in Jerusalem was raised. This publication reports that at the meeting of Arafat and M. Albright, there was a "lengthy and very animated discussion" regarding this "controversial" matter, although no details were given. Yet, from another source (an anonymous State Department employee) it became known that the issue of the seizure of the Jericho property has international implications. Palestinians have offered to meet the representatives of the ROCOR from the USA and from Russia, which is scheduled in a week's time in Switzerland at a conference on economic matters.

The contemporary Chief of the REM in Jerusalem, Fr. Alexis Biron declared that the Church Abroad, as a temporary measure, is willing to share the property with the Moscow Patriarchate under the conditions that supposedly at a later time the property should be returned to ROCOR. Does it mean that the cohabitation of monastics from MP and those of the Church Abroad will drag on for a period until all have become accustomed to it and, without other troubles, the MP will retain at least a half of the foreign property in Jericho?

One thing is quite clear: thanks to efforts and persistence of Sister Mary Stephanopoulos this conflict received international notice.

Involuntarily one has to ask why Archbishop Mark did not act as did Sister Maria, in order to raise international ruckus about the seizure of an much more important place - the Oak of Mambre and the monastery in Hebron? After all, at that time the international press and TV media were very eager to assist the Church Abroad against Arafat, but the shameful apology to him, unfortunately signed by Metropolitan Vitaly under strong pressure of Archbishop Mark made the press quit in order not to look foolish.

The Moscow Patriarchate, after seizing the Mission property in Jericho, made an official announcement stating that finally the justice had been done and the property which belongs to the "Russian Church" has been returned to its owner. In Moscow, according to a report of Itar-Tass of January 28th, Alexis II made an announcement that in the conflict over seizure of property belonging to the Church Abroad the American government... is at fault. In his declaration Ridiger said that "There are leaders and believers in the Russian Orthodox Church abroad who want to unite. But I am convinced that the leadership of a church which invented various accusations against the Moscow Patriarchate, including its alleged collaboration with the Soviet regime, in reality is politicized itself and unfree to decide on unification."

Ridiger conveniently "forgets" that no matter where the administrative center of the ROCOR during those 80 years of existence abroad may have been located outside the homeland since 1927, when the infamous declaration by Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky was issued, the Church Abroad has always, persistently proved with sufficient documentation the collaboration of the MP with the godless government. Just the appointment of Sergius Stragorodsky by Stalin to the post of Patriarch of Moscow and after him all other Patriarchs, the "Moscow Patriarchs" fall under condemnation of the 30th Apostolic canon. And regarding Ridiger himself, V. Furov, (a deputy chief for religious affairs) in his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, characterized nearly all Moscow hierarchs, by separating them into 3 groups. In the first are those "church officials who prove their loyalty not only by word and deed, but by observing the laws on religious rites and educating their parish priests and their congregation in the same spirit. They are fully aware of the state policy of not expanding religion and the role of the Church in the society and, thus, they are not very anxious to expend the influence of Orthodoxy among population. This category includes: Patriarch Pimen, Metropolitans: Alexis of Tallin..." Then are listed a whole number of Metropolitans, who are well alive even today and are members of the Synod. By now the KGB agents' code names have become well known.

When the report by Furov was received abroad, it was not known that Alexis, Metropolitan of Tallin has the agent code name of "Drozdov."

TWO CONFLICTING DOCUMENTS

On January 23, 2000 the internet board Orthodox@listserv.Indiana.EDU published following announcement, made by Archbishop Mark of Berlin:

Today, Sunday, Jan. 10/23, after liturgy Archbishop Mark, Abbot Alexis and Hieromonk Joachim had a meeting with Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem and All Palestine. After an exchange of greetings, we informed his Beatitude of the events surrounding the Jericho issue, stressing that this was a repetition of the seizure of Hebron in 1997. The patriarch expressed his dismay with the illegal interference of government into the life of the Church. Twice he repeated: We will testify that your Church has always held these properties. His Beatitude further assured us that he will make a public statement on this subject. He would personally contact Arafat on the issue as he did in the Hebron situation.

At 11:30 we arrived in Jericho. There was already [present] a large number of monastics from our convents in Jerusalem. Two officers of the US consulate informed us that yesterday's agreement had not been met. They again had been denied access by the Russian consul. They contacted Mr. Abed by phone and were assured that the agreement would be implemented today. This, however, was still not completed by 1800 hrs. and no signs of any implementation were to be seen. We were informed by a Palestinian official that the Palestinians were still engaged in negotiations. Obviously, the Russian consulate is giving the commands and still move their personnel in and out freely. We talked to both sisters, who were able to come to the back gate. They are holding up well.

Jerusalem, Jan. 10/23, 2000

Archbishop Mark

A second document is published by an editorial staff member of "Vetrograd-Inform." This is a "press release" from the Moscow's Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations:

Press-release, February 1, 2000

Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem of All Palestine Supports the transfer of the Monastery in Jericho to the Moscow Patriarchate.

On January 31, 2000, the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk, met with His Beatitude Patriarch Diodoros I of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine. Participating in the meeting was also Archimandrite Theodosius, head of the Russian Mission in Jerusalem.

They discussed problems involving in the need for administration of the Palestine Autonomy to transfer the monastery in Jericho, illegally held by the Church Abroad, to the Moscow Patriarchate. Patriarch Diodoros unambiguously spoke for the need to overcome as soon as possible the schism between the Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate and supported the transfer of the plot to its legitimate owner.

His Beatitude Patriarch Diodoros stated his desire to visit the above mentioned plot of land and to give his patriarchal blessing to the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate serving there.

Precisely which of these hierarchs, and why, "distorted the truth" after only eight days?

ABOUT THE ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH IN BARI

The office of His Grace Bishop Ambrose of Vevey, on February 10, 2000, published an official explanation on the situation in Bari, Italy, where the Moscow Patriarchate is trying to seize St. Nicholas Church.

Unfortunately, the size of this information is too extensive to be printed in full by us. Therefore, we will publish the quotations from the most important paragraphs in this report.

In connection with efforts of the Moscow Patriarchate to seize the Russian Orthodox Church in Bari, our publication printed in # 1 (77), 1999, on p. 2 the basic history of St. Nicholas Church in Bari and in # 7 (74) on p. 11 details on the false statement made by the MP that the agreement was signed between the MP and the mayor of Bari to hand over this property to the Patriarchate.

The Moscow Patriarchate, encouraged by the unsuccessful defense of the ROCOR property in the Holy Land, uses the very same aggressive tactics also in the matter of the church in Bari. But at this time it met with the serious resistance on the part of Ambrose, Bishop of Vevey.

The report from Bishop Ambrose's office starts with the history of the construction of St. Nicholas Church. Then it states that "before 1996, during the time when repairs were being made in the upper church, services were celebrated alternately in the upper and lower churches. Daily services are still currently celebrated in the lower church: Fr. Nicholas Todorovich, appointed to the church in 1999, celebrates Vespers and the Typica daily.

"In 1996 the office of the Mayor of Bari offered the ROCA to create a commission to discuss the current situation and find ways to define new rules that would take into account the flux of pilgrims from Russia. Bishop Ambrose, who is responsible for the ROCA parishes in Italy, agreed to discuss this issue. During the month of May 1998, however, Bari without ever having called the commission into session or consulting the ROCA signed a memorandum of intention and later, in November of the same year, an agreement with the MP. This agreement stated that the church and several sections of the former house for the pilgrims were to be handed over to the MP. The agreement also referred to some undefined 'rights of the current users.' The MP immediately appointed a priest for the church in Bari, Fr. Vladimir Kuchumov, but he arrived in the city later and began to celebrate only in December, 1999, in the upper church that is currently undergoing final repair.

"This situation was unacceptable to the ROCA: the 1937 agreement had been unilaterally violated, the ROCA parish was deprived of legal status, while the area available for the parish, the religious services and housing for the priest was substantially reduced. During 1998 Bishop Ambrose sent several letters to the mayor of Bari asking for clarification; he also offered a plan for a settlement in response to a request made by the authorities. His letters and his proposal never received any response. There can be no doubt about the fact that a church should not have to prove its ecclesiological existence in front of a secular court. This blunt violation of the 1937 agreement forced Archbishop Ambrose to seek to defend the rights of his parish by legal means. In January 1999, a civil lawsuit was filed against the municipality of Bari.

"In October of 1999 the court rendered a preliminary verdict which prohibited the municipality from making any changes to the legal ownership of the church premises until the final verdict of the court. Basing his actions upon this decision, Bishop Ambrose demanded from the authorities a full implementation of the 1937 agreement. The authorities refused to comply. In response, Bishop Ambrose, in accordance with the preliminary verdict of October, 1999, during his visit to Bari for the Feast of St. Nicholas on 18/21 December, 1999, secured for the parish two adjacent buildings which had always belonged to the parish. It was planned that the family of the priest would live in them, since for the first time in many years a married priest with a family was appointed to the church. Previously, there had been no need for such accommodations. On December 23, immediately after the departure of Bishop Ambrose, the local police, responding to a call from the MP priest entered the church premises. Father Nicholas was manhandled in front of his 12-year-old daughter and had his keys taken from him by force. The police even had the impudence to brutally interrogate Fr. Nicholas while using his daughter as a translator. Bishop Ambrose returned to Bari on December 27 when he filed a lawsuit (a criminal lawsuit this time) against the mayor and the chief of police. Following Bishop Ambrose's departure, the police broke into the church grounds again, forcibly expelling Father Nicholas who was forced to leave Italy for Yugoslavia. He was allowed to return two days later.

"What has happened, and what is still happening, is a blunt abuse of power by the city authorities, instead of upholding the rule of law and order, refuse to submit to the decisions of the courts. Bari and the MP priest, who constantly interfere with the life of the ROCA parish by for example preventing Fr. Nicholas from accessing the bell tower. The court decision is expected to be handed down in a few weeks, but it is already becoming obvious that the dispute in Bari is not simply an issue of 'ownership' and that it has much more profound dimensions. The current struggle in Bari is a struggle between, on one hand, those who for three quarters of century were being the true witnesses for Orthodoxy during the time of the worst persecutions the Church has ever suffered, and on the other hand, the successors of those who executed and approved of these persecutions."

The satanic malice of the MP against the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and all those who are unwilling to join in the Sergianist and Ecumenical heresies has no limit, even, unfortunately in "democratic" countries.

FROM THE LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX FREE CHURCH

At the beginning of January we received information that recently a representative of Archbishop Eulogy visited Archbishop Valentin of Suzdal and Vladimir who, in the name of his ruling bishop, verbally offered to meet him and promised a very secure confidentiality. And shortly before that in some churches of the Vladimir region, the priests informed their parishioners that Vladyka Valentin is eager to meet with Eulogy in order to reconcile with MP and return to it. To this Archbishop Valentin responded with categorical refusal and said that messengers with such a proposal should not be sent to him, because it would be necessary to escort them outside and in not too polite a manner.

"Shortly after that an executive director of the Government Ecological Foundation for Vladimir Region, Alexander V. Soloviev (his address: 600017 Vladimir, Lounacharsky 3), visited a printing press where we always used to print our publications and in the name of administrative head of the Vladimir region, Mr. Vinogradov, threatened the president of the press unless he ceased printing our publications on the grounds that the citizens of Suzdal are schismatics who do not respect Alexis Ridiger and his lawful representative Archbishop Eulogy.

Since Soloviev carried out the orders of Vinogradov in a rather loud voice, this became known to the employees of the printing house and they related it to the administration of Suzdal-Vladimir diocese.

On the other hand, in Suzdal there are very cordial relations between Archbishop Valentin, Bishop Theodore and various businesses and a president of one of them invited Archbishop Valentin to bless the shop section. At the opening of this business the head of Vladimir region administration, Mr. Vinogradov, was also to attend but he made his participation conditional on the presence of a representative from the MP. Obviously this excluded the presence of Archbishop Valentin. The poor president at a very late evening hour sent a messenger to apologize, saying that if he were to go against the head of the regional administration, the success of his enterprise was sure to be over.

At the same time we received a report from two brothers, the Archpriests Novakovsky, who report a raid organized by the Moscow Patriarchate to seize the St. Olga Equal to Apostles Church in the city of Zheleznovodsk.

On December 7/20 1999 at 7 AM the two archpriests were visited by representatives of the local Cossacks who informed them that on the orders of Metropolitan Gedeon they would not be allowed to enter the church. At that moment some 45 Cossacks came into the churchyard and placed guards at the church doors and over the telephone in the church office. Nun Irene (Volokhov) and Reader G. Golubov were held during the night under guard to prevent their using the telephone or going up to the bell tower to summon the parishioners for help. Fr. Anatole managed to squeeze over the fence gate and enter the churchyard. Since this priest in 1991 had opened a "Cossack circle", the ataman (Cossack chieftain) decided to let him pass. The priest called the militia and the office of the public prosecutor for help. After leaving the office he informed the ataman that he expected the arrival of members of the public prosecutors' office in order to make a record of the illegal actions of the Cossacks. This "Cossack army" immediately disappeared.

A newspaper the "Caucasus Toast" on August 10, 1999, published an interesting appeal signed by Gedeon, Metropolitan of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz. It is a bit late to be publishing it in our bulletin but it is such a document so typical of the Moscow Patriarchate that it would be an omission not to publish it.

Appealing to the atamans of "The Union of Russian Cossacks" of Kuban and Terek troops Gedeon writes:

"I am extremely concerned by your indifference toward our centuries old holy Orthodoxy in Russia. You talk and write a lot about your adherence to Orthodoxy and even solemnly declare that from time immemorial Cossacks have been the support of Orthodoxy. But unfortunately, on the territory of territory belonging to Cossacks from time immemorial, where people who call themselves Cossacks live, where there are groups, atamans, rules, the servants of NATO [?!], representatives of the American Church Abroad seize Orthodox churches in a barbaric manner.

In the Stavropol diocese, in lands of the Terek, Kuban and Stavropol Cossacks those renegades, thrown out of the Russian Church for their bribe-taking, drunkenness, adultery, grabbed churches in Zheleznovodsk, in a stanitsa (settlement) in Zekenchuk and now in July of this year in the village Kursavka. All this happened before the very eyes of the Cossacks with their tolerance and even their support. When the diocesan committee chaired by my secretary Archpriest G. Samoilenko arrived at Zheleznovodsk in January, 1993, the ataman of Zheleznovodsk threatened the priests with physical violence. In the stanitsa Zelenchuk, former Ataman N. Liashenko assisted the schismatic Boiko in building an 'alternative' church and this is during the most critical situation in Karachevo-Tcherkessia, when Russians are in extreme need of unity. And finally, the latest case in Kursavka, where again it seems that the Cossacks do not support

Orthodoxy against schismatic attacks. At least, brother Cossacks, take the position of detached observers, although not the canons alone, but also the civil law, considers the actions of schismatics to be illegal.

As it is stated in the newspaper "Cossacks News" (# 5 [29] July, 1999) there is a committee in the USA to control religious freedom throughout the whole world. You know no less than I that the American 'rights defenders' consider religious freedom in Russia to be supporting various sects and schisms and the destruction of the Russian Orthodox Church. The events of which I spoke previously demonstrate that Cossacks actually support the actions of this committee. This is understandable by godless poseurs and enemies of Russia, but for the 'support of Orthodoxy', the Cossacks -- this is a disgrace!

To me, a spiritual father of the Caucasus, with gray hair and a hereditary Kosan, it is very sad and offensive to see how the 20th century Cossacks disgrace themselves. They permit the self-proclaimed Bishop V. Rusantsov of Suzdal who exists on subsidies from America and gets his orders from there, a man who was excommunicated from the Church by the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, to appoint his own protege in Kosan settlements in a distant diocese, thousands of miles away, in the fire-breathing Caucasus. It is an unbelievable fact: Cossacks accept and support false pastors in Zheleznovodsk, Zelenchuk, Kursavka, not recognizing Orthodox clergy and the metropolitan, and work hand in hand against Orthodoxy with the traitors of the Church in Russia. Our forefathers didn't behave in such a manner; they didn't spare their lives for the sake of holy Orthodoxy. If you proclaim yourself to be the heirs and continuers of Kosan traditions, you have to make sure that in your region there is only your mother, our Russian Orthodox Church, and towards sectarians and schismatics you have made a worthy rebuff, in which, may the Lord help you.

GEDEON, Metropolitan of Stavropol and Caucasus.

Editors note: We reprint exactly this document, composed by the "spiritual father of the Caucasus". His anger is quite clearly manifest while Kosan so obviously and harmoniously supports the "renegades" and "schismatics" headed by the "self-proclaimed Bishop V. Rusantsov from Suzdal"!

"THE FULLNESS OF ORTHODOXY" CELEBRATES MILLENNIUM

The "New York Times" in its issue of January 8 published on the front page a report about the "glittering" celebration of Christ's Nativity in Bethlehem where due to the coming of the year 2000, at which the "fullness of Orthodoxy" decided to follow a suggestion made by the Westerners to celebrate the "beginning of Christianity" one year ahead of time. To this celebration came not only the heads of all the Orthodox Churches, but also the heads of governments with majority Orthodox populations in their particular states. Also Mr. Yeltsin attended who just shortly before resigned as president of the Russian Federation.

Five presidents of the former Communist countries received from the hands of Patriarch Diodoros a star of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, established during the times of Emperor Constantine. Now the Jerusalem Patriarch only for "special services gives out this decoration to the Church and achievements in the struggle for peace." The recipients of this order were: B. Yeltsin, Peter Louchinsky (Moldavia), G. Shevarnadze (Georgia), Alexander Lukashenko (Belorussia), E. Konstantinesku (Romania) and L. Kouchma (Ukraine). One should know that all the knights of Holy Sepulchre Order (Shavarnadze excluded, since he is baptized) are, if not militant atheists, than at least unbaptized.

It would be interesting to know what kind of services to the Church in the struggle for peace did those "former" communists-atheists render?

Displaying his religious tolerance, Y. Arafat attended the service in Bethlehem. Then the celebrations were continued in Jerusalem, where there was held a mysterious three-hour Pan-Orthodox meeting behind closed doors.

The newspaper also reported an Ecumenical prayer service at which, besides the "Orthodox," participated heretics of all colors, and in particular the Armenian Monophysites. Commenting this event the Armenian Patriarch Torkom Manoogian said that "it is the first time in history that all denominations are together, respecting each others' traditions and celebrating Christmas together."

There are few Armenians in the Holy Land and they have "for theological and ethnic reasons never been part of the wider Eastern Orthodox community. Yet their participation in today's service - and welcoming embrace of the visiting Orthodox bishops - was seen as evidence of a new Ecumenical spirit".

The "new Ecumenical spirit" was evident during the papal services in Rome on January 18 and 19, 2000, which the Pope declared to be a "Holy Year". Usually the Vatican declares every 25th year to be a "holy year" and at that time the Catholics can purchase indulgences. Certainly, they were sold also now.

January 18th opened a "week of prayers for Christian unity" which doubtless was attended also by all participants of events on January 19

According to the "Ecumenical News International" of January 26, a number of Protestant groups refused to participate in the Vatican festivities because of the sale of indulgences by Catholics. Yet, the very same indulgences did not prevent "Orthodox" from abstaining from concelebrations with the Pope, Episcopalians, Protestants and Monophysites.

A WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IN ROME

For a number of years on January 18th the Vatican has arranged Ecumenical prayers for the unity of all the Christians (and by now also non-Christians and even pagans) in Assisi, Italy but this time, because of the Jubilee Year these prayers were offered in Rome. The opening ceremony for the Jubilee years begins with the opening of the inside doors of a particular basilica, which remain open during the whole year. At this occasion the doors were opened in Basilica of Apostle Paul. The Pope himself, the Archbishop of Canterbury G. Carey and Metropolitan Athanasios, a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch simultaneously pushed open the door.

As reported by "Ecumenical News International" of January 26, "Never before - in 700 years since Rome began celebrating jubilee years - has this event been shared in this way with non-Catholic churches" and it also noted, that "such widespread participation in an event in Rome was unprecedented."

Olga Mitrenina, a member of editorial staff of "Vertogad Inform" published over the Internet a detailed description of this event and lists the names of its participants:

From the Ecumenical Patriarchate (2); Alexandria Patriarchate (1); Antiochian Patriarchate (3); Jerusalem Patriarchate (1); Serbian Patriarchate (1); Romanian Patriarchate (1); Greek Orthodox Church (1); Polish Church (1); Albanian Church (2); Finnish Church (1); then there are mentioned official heretics: Apostolic Church of Armenia (1); Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria (1); Catholicate of Cilicia of Armenians, Lebanon and Antelias (1); Assyrian Church of the East (1); the Anglican Communion headed by Archbishop of Canterbury Carey under whom are various Episcopalian groups with 4 members; the Old Catholic Church - Union of Utrecht (2); Lutheran World Federation (3); World Methodist Council (1); Disciples of Christ (2); Pentecostal Church (1); World Council of Churches (3) representatives. Not mentioned as participants were: The Churches of Sinai, Cyprus and Czechoslovakia. Cyprus' Archbishop is very sick and the Czech Metropolitan died a while ago.

The ceremony was in three parts and each one had some prayer for unity and reading from the Epistles. In the first part, after opening of the doors and a short prayer, an "Orthodox" deacon brought to the Pope the book of Gospels, which this Catholic lifted up and showed to those present and then both the Pope and deacon entered the basilica. Then some readings from the Gospels were made.

After the sermon, two deacons in Greek and Latin urged the participants to "make a gesture of fraternal communion." Then the Catholic Bishop Marini stated that "The celebration will be presided over by the Holy Father and 'concelebrated' by the representatives from other Churches and ecclesial communities. These representatives will participate directly at various times during the ceremony... At particular moments during the course of the rite, after the Holy Father, representatives from Orthodox, Pre-Chalcedonian and Reformation Churches will take part. In this way we will be able to contemplate, unfortunately, the great divisions that have taken place between Christians over the course of the centuries."

It is self-explanatory that all the sermons and appeals spoke about the necessity of union only.

A Russian language Catholic newspaper "Russkaya Mysl" ("Russian Mind") in the issue of February 27 reported a radio speech made on Vatican Croatian radio by John (Pavlovich), Metropolitan of Zagreb, Lubljana and whole Italy -- an hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In it he reported on the Ecumenical prayer event in Rome at which he himself participated among the 23 representatives of "Christian" Churches. This prayer event was described by the Serbian Metropolitan as an "outstanding phenomena for all Christians." Then the Metropolitan declared that Europe has to preserve her Christian identity and that "if one were to turn to the early centuries of Christianity, then it will be obvious that at that time there also existed different cultures, but until the XIth century nothing stood in the way of unity... I feel that now at the beginning of a new millennium, Christians should give it a second thought. In particular, this concerns the church hierarchy, the representatives of Churches of West and East." He also quoted the words of Pope John XXIII, who once said that "it is necessary now to open a window, so that new fresh air may enter the Church."

This bacchanalia was noticed by a priest of the ROCOR who saw a video from the concelebration of the "Orthodox" with the Roman Pope and other heretics broadcast by the Catholic TV channel in Arizona.

Posting his impressions about this film through the Internet, Fr. Stephen Fraser noted that all the "Orthodox bishops" while greeting the Pope kissed his shoulder. Fr. Stephen quite correctly points out that the bishops, by kissing Pope on the shoulder in this manner, recognized him as a head of a "sister church", as well as the existence within Catholicism of grace and valid "sacraments."

Then, stressing the meaning of this mass treason by the representatives of "the fullness of Orthodoxy," Fr. Stephen said that "The ecumenical prayer service did accomplish one thing, we now know that a choice has to be made. What will it be: stick our heads in the sand and say that all this will go away, or individually (and collectively as the Church) leave the false bishops."

It is quite obvious that during this celebration of the millennium which was orchestrated with such a wide spread advertisements all over the world, there was demonstrated visibly the hopeless apostasy of the "fullness" of the once Orthodox Patriarchs and the heads of autonomous Churches. Not one of them (it seems that the bishop of Sinai was absent) did not abstain from concelebrating with heretics of all manner and colors and that now, according to the plain and straightforward meaning of the Apostolic Canons 10, 11, 45, 46 and a whole number of other Ecumenical Councils on the same subject, - must be deposed from their rank and excommunicated!

Actually, after the first falling away from Orthodoxy in Bethlehem and Jerusalem during Christmas period, there followed a second one, which without beating about the bush one can term a completed union with the Rome.

Against the background of such a hopeless and mass treason of Orthodoxy on the part of the hierarchy of all the autocephalous and autonomous Churches, there also have been encouraging manifestations against this apostasy. Thus, according to a witness from Toronto, Canada (where there are many Old Calendar Greeks) there was organized an Ecumenical prayer service with various heretics. The Greek bishops: Metropolitan Sotirios and his assistant Bishop Chrysostomos, both from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, came to the St. George Church in Toronto. Metropolitan Sotirios greeted the parishioners with the millennium and started a short prayer with troparia to St. George. When the service reached the point of a reading from the Gospel, young people from various places of the church started to shout "anaxios" ("unworthy") and "prodoti" ("traitor"). These shouts were supported by the elderly parishioners and scared many, especially a woman priestess.

Then all the "Orthodox" clergy and heretics, headed by their hierarchs left the church in a hurry and were met with shouts outside the church by more upset people. Then the traitors went to an Anglican church across the street. The people did not disperse and waited for them to come out and again started to accuse them.

From the Anglican church they went in a long procession to another heretical church. The leader was a woman priestess. The zealots of Orthodoxy went along step by step with this procession and unceasingly accompanied them with their shouts of disgust. They left only after all the heretics departed.

One could only wish we had more of such zealous defenders of Orthodoxy!

TODAY'S IMAGE OF HELL

One of America's very influential magazines "U.S. News and World Report" in the issue of January 31 published a large article entitled "Hell hath No Fury." This article was provoked mainly by another, published in the magazine "La Civiltà Cattolica," a Jesuit publication with close ties to the Vatican and by a recent declaration made by the Pope during his regular reception in Vatican. At that time the Pope said that "rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God." Then speaking of being abandoned by God, the Pope defining his thought said that the Bible "uses symbolic language" which "figuratively portrays in a 'pool of fire' those who exclude themselves from book of life, thus meeting with a 'second death'...." The Pope said that hell is "not a punishment imposed externally by God" but "the thought of hell must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom!"

The more conservative critics of the Pope declared that while he tried to pour water on hell's fire, he undermined the historical Biblical teaching and pulled down the traditional church teachings of the struggle against evil. A professor of a Baptist Theological seminary in Denver, Douglas Groothuis said that "separation from God may seem like freedom from a domineering spouse or parent. Why fear that?"

Defending the Pope's position a Catholic priest Stephan Happel, an interim dean of religious studies in the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. said that "the Pope is telling us that we can recover some measured intelligent understanding of hell that makes sense for the 21st century."

But, as it stated in the article about the hell, "this figurative view of hell fits neatly with a recent shift of public opinion." A poll made by "U.S. News & World Report" shows that at present more and more Americans believe in the existence of hell than in 1950 or even 10 years ago. But most of them believe that hell is simply "a state of suffering" but not a real place. However, even among those Americans who believe that hell is not a figurative place of suffering, they are sure they will not be there. It seems this is influenced by the ideas of Origen who thought that at the end all will be saved, including the demons. This way of thinking is supported by the idea that God is supreme Love and He never could make anybody suffer, at least not for eternity.

Then the magazine quotes various writers and with their words examines the development of the Church's teaching about hell and views it from the point of view of the "Christian-Judaic tradition."

The author of the article, Warren Kohen, gives the details of the understanding of the hell from point of view of non-Christian religions.

As we know, in Judaism there was a doctrine of hell from Biblical times but at present, with beginning of 18th century, it was significantly lost when a renowned German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (a Jew himself) introduced the idea that the existence of hell is not compatible with divine love. Also the very famous Rabbi Maimonides of the 12th century thought that the Biblical tradition regarding hell should be understood in figurative manner. At any rate, at present, the correct understanding of existence of the hell remains only among the most orthodox Jewish circles: the contemporary Jews have lost it.

Muslims believe that hell presents a huge crater over which there is a bridge. All those whom Allah does not accept fall in and there suffer unspeakably in a seven-layer fiery lake.

Hindus believe that souls on the way to reincarnation have to pass through 21 hells in which the defective karma (predestination) burns away. When it is burned away the soul is ready to be reincarnated into a higher level in a future life. But those who are blessed with a not too bad a karma might be reincarnated into an animal, while people with very bad karma reincarnate into inanimate objects.

Buddhists as well as Hindus believe in a whole number of hells as a place of purifying period in order to reach a blissful nirvana.

Tibetan Buddhism speaks of 8 cold hells for not too sinful people who are judged by the grades.

There is also a contemporary theory of "annihilation." It was invented by representatives of the Western denominations: from evangelicals to Anglicans. According to them the eternal sufferings of souls (it seems that the body is excluded) are based on a pagan philosophy and therefore will be simply destroyed by God. "How can Christian possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness as to inflict everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been?"

NOW IS THE TIME FOR A THIRD TEMPLE

Such was a title given to an article published in the Russian Jewish newspaper "Novoye Russkoye Slovo" ("New Russian Word") on January 3rd which gave details of the festive dedication of a new menorah, an exact copy of the one which was in the ancient temple at the time of Christ. All the information about the original golden menorah was the scrupulous work of the Jerusalem's Temple Institute. When the research work was done, the menorah was molded by the specialists.

The newspaper describes the difficulties of performing this task, because it had to be made from one piece of bronze and then it had to be gilded, again, in a very special manner. The new menorah is kept in a specially made glass case and weighs 700 kg. It is 1 m 80 cm tall and 42 kg of gold were used to gild it.

The unveiling of the menorah was done by two Rabbis, one of them a director of the Temple Institute, Ariel. The Ceremony was attended by deputies of the Knesset, the Ukrainian Ambassador in Israel Dmitry Markov and multitude of various rabbis and civil workers. The recreation of temple's menorah was financed by the head of united Jewish community in Ukraine, Vadim Rabonovich.

According to information published about the Jerusalem Institute, it long ago collected replicas made from blueprints produced from ancient records including vestments for the priests, woven by the Australian aborigines in one piece and dyed by natural dyes as it was in the ancient temple. As a former curator of this museum said: if the "Moshiach" were to come tomorrow, he could immediately conduct a service just using all its exhibitions. It seems that the new menorah is the latest donation to this museum and the matter is held up only by the absence of the temple itself which at present can not be built solely because of the political situation since there is more than enough of the needed money stored for the day when it will be required.

A NEW CATHOLIC TRICK IN RUSSIA

According to the newspaper "Radonezh" # 13-14 (93) 1999 the governments of Russia and Poland signed a new agreement about abolishing the agreement of 1965 which prohibited dual citizenship. Thus, as of now every Pole and a Russian are allowed to have dual citizenship.

As the newspaper reported, "the agreement foresees 'a free voluntarism' in choosing citizenship by Russians who live in Poland and by Poles who live in Russia. Until now, a Pole who wanted to become a Russian citizen had to renounce his Polish citizenship and vice versa.

The initiators of this agreement on dual citizenship were Poles. No doubt they are the once who are profiting, being convinced Catholics, of whom there are some 200,000 in Russia. This agreement allows Catholic priests all the rights of Russian citizens, participation in its political life and, most importantly, to practice unlimited Catholic propaganda.

A NEW HEAD OF CATHOLIC MONASTIC ORDER OF M. THERESA WORSHIPS IDOLS

According to the newspaper "The Christian News" of January 24th, a Catholic nun, Sister Nirmala, elected as a prioress of the Missionaries of Charity, founded by the famous Roman Catholic Mother Theresa who died in 1997, is a Hindu converted to Roman Catholicism. According to the newspaper, she never renounced her Hindu religion and while continuing to be a "Christian" keeps worshipping her Hindu gods.

The Hindu newspaper "The Deccan Herald," from which the Lutheran newspaper in America gave quotes, reports that she was baptized in 1958 and she is 63 years old. In an interview given by her after the election to prioress of this order, she said: "Looking at myself I feel afraid whether I will be able to bear the responsibility, but looking at God I think I can."

Coming from a religious Hindu Brahmin family and becoming a "Catholic" she has no right to pray in pagan Hindu temples, which the Brahmin is prohibited from entering, therefore she has to pray at the doors of the temple. She believes that "all gods are equal and she worships them equally."

It is noteworthy that the world renown Roman Catholic M. Theresa, who is to be canonized by the Catholics also believed that all people are God's people and therefore she never tried to convert Hindus to Christianity.

NEW VALUABLE BOOKS

In the 1998 # 6 (73) issue of "Church News" we announced the publication of a very valuable book on Ecumenism and church liberalism, under title "Merzost Zapusteniya." This book has recently been published in English translation under the title "Ecumenism, a Path to Perdition." The book can be ordered from the author at this address: Ludmilla Perepiolkina; Tanhuankatu 48 c 26; Finland. The price of the book (including shipping) is \$10. It is available at wholesale for \$8. Since the Finnish banks do not accept personal checks, the money may be sent to this account : Merita Bank LTD; SWIFT. address MRITFIHH; ACCOUNT # 204662 - 15955.

Also in Russian a book was published edited by G. Soldatov "St. Alexander (Hotovitzky). - A missionary period of the Orthodox Church in America, V. I (1896-1909) . Documents letters, articles and poetry of the saint. The book has 241 pages and costs \$15.00. It can be ordered from the publisher at : AARDM PRESS, 3217 - 32 Ave. NE. Minneapolis, Minn. 55418.

The new Martyr Alexander served as a priest in the Christ the Saviour Church in Moscow and was killed by the atheists in 1937. The book is richly illustrated and has a color photograph of this missionary new martyr of our times.