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FROM LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA

Following a telephone conversation with His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly, the editor and publisher of "Church News" on May 13/314, 2000, at Vladyka's order received the following document, printed under the letterhead of the President of ROCOR:

"Your Grace, dear Vladyka!

We should not remain indifferent to the recent events in the Serbian Church. As everybody knows, the Moscow Patriarch came to Yugoslavia and concelebrated with the Serbian Patriarch Paul.

In spite of the fact that we have not issued yet a resolution on the Synod level, common sense should suggest to us to be very careful regarding relations with the Serbian Church.

As of now, we should not invite them to participate in our services, while restricting ourselves to simple silence, without any reproaches, even if they are justified. In another words, silently to separate ourselves spiritually from them. In inevitable cases of social encounters, then to inform them of our perplexity and disagreement.

Your sincere well-wisher,

METROPOLITAN VITALY

July 18/31, 1999"

During the conversation, Metropolitan Vitaly related that this written directive was sent by him to the dioceses of ROCOR as well as their clergy, yet we are not aware that this letter-decree was ever published in the official press of ROCOR or as a Synod of Bishops ukase.

TWO EPISTLES

The bulletin "Vertograd Inform" (published in Russia) in the issue #4 (61) has printed quotations from an epistle by Benjamin, Bishop of Chernomorsk and Kuban, under ROCOR jurisdiction. This information seemed to us amusing to such extent that we have taken the liberty of copying it from "Vertograd-Inform," disregarding it's rather belated information.

"His Grace, Benjamin Bishop of Chernomorsk and Kuban, on Dec. 13, 1999 came forward with an epistle to the clergy and laity of his diocese regarding the matter of television. The text of this document was published in the February issue of the newspaper 'Svecha Pokayaniya' ('The Candle of Repentance') -- a publication of Volgograd's community of the True Orthodox Church (ROCOR jurisdiction) in honor of the Holy Imperial Martyrs.

Bishop Benjamin, motivated by the extreme decline of piety among contemporary believing people and his wish to shield 'our parishioners from the militant soul destructive influences of the external world,' felt it necessary to write an epistle against 'one of the instruments of Satan most dangerous to the soul.'

'Television produces the strongest corruptive, seductive immoral pressure upon a person, weakens him and enslaves his willpower,' remarks Bishop Benjamin. 'People, without noticing it turn into slaves of television. With the constant watching of television, especially the so-called "serials", a psychological dependence forms similar to that on alcohol and drugs. In this manner, television is a mortal poison for the soul.'

In the epistle he stresses especially the destructive influence of television on children, from whom the television 'takes away childhood, turns babies prematurely into people of old age -- deprives children of their childhood and purity!' Having personal experience with television, Vladyka believes that 'children will consider Christianity as forbidding, and develop an overt or implicit opposition to it.' By carelessly turning on television we ourselves prepare them to accept antichrist!

Bishop Benjamin declares the struggle against the television to be 'the first task of an Orthodox pastor.' The epistle says priests should urge their flock 'to decide to throw out or at least to sell their televisions.'

At the end of his epistle, Bishop Benjamin cites a 'story from life': 'A little Christian girl saw on the screen the following picture: a television box was sprinkled with holy water; immediately like splashes from a puddle demons jumped out of it. After a few minutes, they freely returned to it. They comfortably seated themselves like musicians with trumpets, balalaikas and other instruments and started a demonic concert.'

The ruling Bishop of Chernomorsk-Kuban diocese ordered his clergy to 'exhort their parishioners to totally refuse to use their televisions' and refuse Holy Communion to all those who 'will not promise to part with television' " (underlined by "Ch N").

This unusual epistle by Bishop Benjamin totally overlooks a number of quite educational and good programs, as for example nature programs. The matter is not so much in mind-destructive programs as in lack of knowledge how as to use this device. For some reason, Bishop Benjamin seems in no way concerned with the contemporary press that in the same manner may destroy souls.

A knife exists for the purpose of cutting. But one can also kill people with a knife. Does it mean we have to refuse to have this object in our homes?

It is quite doubtful that Bishop Benjamin's flock will refuse to use their televisions (undoubtedly that will include also some of his clergy) and one can expect that the believers of majority of his parishes will either simply stop going to Holy Communion or, what is even more likely, will keep it secret from one another, that they have a television at home!

It seems that Bishop Benjamin by turning back the wheel of contemporary technology seriously believes he can turn his 20th century flock into people of the fifth century.

Such a poorly thought out decree usually results only in a total loss of respect for the diocesan administration!

The second epistle belongs to Evtikhy, Bishop of Ishima and Siberia. It is addressed to the clergy and flock "before the holiday of Radonitsa," the first commemoration of the deceased at the cemetery after Pascha. In it His Grace appeals to his flock not to turn the bright Paschal feast into an excuse for drunkenness. "It is understood," says the epistle, "that permission for a drinking parties on Pascha is a treacherous perversion: the spiritual feast is turned into social dirt with the smell of alcohol, vomit, drunken quarrel, fights, perversion, family grief and social disaster.

Especially cynical are drinking parties over the remains of the deceased at the cemetery. The souls of the departed languish from the weight of their sins: the souls of the departed hope for relief from suffering through the prayers of their relatives who have the possibility to pray to God that they rest in peace, who can give alms for sake of the souls of those whose bodies decay and souls suffer because of unfulfilled debts of good deeds. And here come the long awaited relatives, but not for prayer or alms giving, no! -- they come to fill their stomachs, bringing with them vodka and appetizers -- nothing is left for alms giving, but a bit of change from the bottle and food left-overs -- they cloud their minds with alcoholic vapors and mutter the nonsense of their fantasies, mad superstitions with rituals which were left by no one, they littered the grave with food remnants... What did they leave for the souls of the deceased? Heavy tobacco smoke, cursing, mixed with the murky tears and wine. They did not show mercy, but left shit [sic]!

In concluding his epistle, Bishop Evtikhy appeals to "all clergymen, all teachers to help return to the spirituality which is proper to the holidays. No indulging the blemishes and weaknesses of friends. Spiritual fathers, Orthodox brothers and sisters. Do pass by the drunken gatherings at the cemetery. Finally, it is enough to cover something dirty with the sacred.

And to the clergy of the Ishim-Siberia diocese of the ROCOR, I order: when visiting the cemeteries on the holiday of Radonitsa, not to serve any commemorative services at those graves at which vodka is served."

While fully approving of the correctness of the regulation issued by the Right Reverend Bishop Evtikhy not to serve any memorial services at graves where alcoholic beverages are served, the editors can not help but wonder at the vulgar language used by the Bishop in his official appeal to the clergy and the flock.

A BIT MORE ON THE "EXCAVATIONS" AT THE "JUDGEMENT GATE"

In the last issue of the Church News, #4(86) we reported on the extremely sad condition of the "Russian Excavations" in Jerusalem, belonging to the Orthodox Palestine Society in Jerusalem and of measures taken to save the St. Alexander Nevsky Church and what adjoins it, "The Judgement Gate."

As long ago as mid-January 2000, the municipal administration of Jerusalem found the building to be in such condition that it was necessary to discontinue services in the church and, obviously, forbid admission of pilgrims to these sacred sites.

Unfortunately, interference in the restoration by the representative of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Mark, seems to have been "successful" for him: the process of restoration was stopped.

Archbishop Mark let the President of the OPS, Bishop Anthony (Grabbe), know through a member of this Society that "In the Holy Land all church agents, those on the official level and others, recognize just me as a legal representative of the Church Abroad, as an observer and administrator of the convents, churches and all the properties. Neither Konizer, nor anybody else will do anything for the Sergius residence (The Excavations) without my consent. They completely heed my opinion. So far, I will not agree to anything!... nothing will happen without my consent..."

A few days ago the President of the OPS of Holy Land, Bishop Anthony (Grabbe) received the following final warning from the Jerusalem municipal office, dated May 31, 2000:

"We address you because you have not taken into consideration the information made in accord with the law for aid in Jerusalem (re: dangerous buildings) from 1980 which was forwarded to you on Jan. 12, 2000.

If this is indeed so, and you have not fulfilled the directives of the mayor, which are written in the above notification and you have not done any work nor have completed all the work from that period in accord with this notification and the following paragraphs:

1. Immediately to close the 2 rooms of the church until repairs to the ceiling are completed in order to prevent a collapse.
2. The ceiling of the church should be strengthened by reducing the fragility of the plaster and checking the metal beams.
3. Work should be done under the supervision of a licensed engineer, accredited by the municipality

This is a final warning and there will be no other because, if the above mentioned work will not be done within 30 days from receipt this notification, we will be forced to take over this place by court decision and put a fence around it.

(Underlined by "Ch N")

Signed: Bahabod Rav, Director of Dept. for Dangerous Buildings"

As we have reported previously, the Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR over a period of 14 years, while taking collections on Palm Sunday for the support of buildings and monasteries in the Holy Land (and that also includes the "Excavations) not only never forwarded any funds for support of this church, but even the pilgrims from New York City, headed by Archbishop Laurus, when they visited the Excavations, took bundles of candles and never paid for them! The attitude of the Synod of Bishops toward this Holy Place is beyond comprehension.

Those Orthodox people who treasure "Excavations" and the "Judgement gate" there over which Our Lord stepped when going to Golgotha may send their donations to the following addresses:
Orthodox Palestine Society; P.O. Box 991; Jerusalem, Israel
or: 5612 Sylvan Ave. Riverdale, NY 10471.

A SECOND RESPONSE TO PRIEST LEONID KALININ

In the last issue of "Church News" we published a reply to the MP priest Leonid Kalinin, signed by the editor of this publication. There has been no reaction to this on the part of Rev. Kalinin. Now we have received a response by Abbess Juliana to the attack of Fr. Kalinin. This is the priest (from the capital) who so heartlessly and rudely referred in his letter to the abbess who suffered at the hands of his ecclesiastical administration. It reads:

"Dear Rev. Leonid Kalinin! Christ is in our midst!

When I was growing up in the Gorneye Convent, my venerable spiritual father, Vladyka Anthony (Sinkevich) of blessed memory, impressed upon my soul two spiritual maxims which have always guided my life. With your kind permission, I will share these with you.

I had not intended to write to you but your letter betrayed such a troubled mind that the spirit of Christian compassion moves me to correct some, if not all, of your mistaken impressions concerning conditions in the Holy Land. As Vladyka Anthony taught me, we must always choose obedience to God rather than man when faced with an apparent conflict. It was for this reason that I felt obliged to protect the best of my ability both Convent of Eleon and, immediately afterward our monastery at Hebron during the armed seizure of the later. In this I was guided more by the consistent attitude of our Holy Synod of Bishops during the past 70 years than by a questionable command received in very mysterious circumstances at practically the last minute. Later events amply justified my attempt even though brute force and long-planned duplicity caused it to fall.

The second maxim will explain my silence up till now; I was taught to humbly endure unjust accusations, provocation's and slanders. And not only to endure, but pity and pray for those who did such evils, that God would save them and they would not perish on my account. However, because it was during the 5 years of my abbacy in Eleon Convent that you made your visit in 1995, many have urged me to write a response to your letter. It is hoped that I am in position to refute most, if not all, of your complaints regarding the Holy Sites under the protection of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia during the past decades when neither Russian pilgrims nor financial support came to help us in this responsibility.

In spite of the lack of Russian monks for many years, it has been possible, by God's help, to keep the Church and monastery at Hebron it at least a livable condition. Several times we were able to have Divine Services in which pilgrims participated. We also provided food and other supplies. Periodically groups of Sisters would give the Church and Monastery a thorough cleaning and make small repairs. There seemed little else we could do to keep a visible Orthodox presence alive under the circumstances.

Regarding the "horrific abandonment" at the Convent of Eleon on the Mt. of Olives; everyone who has ever visited there is aware that the entrance to the outer gates lies through a very narrow and cluttered passageway in the midst of a typical small Arab market. This alley does not belong to the Convent and we do not have the responsibility for it.

By contrast, the area inside the Convent property is very large, clean and beautiful. The many olive trees, flower gardens and all the walkways are carefully kept, as are the various buildings. The Convent kitchen was modernized, a bakery built to promote income, and various restorations and improvements were made in all areas between 1992 and 1997. The three Churches, "Ascension", "St. Philaret the Almsgiver" and the Chapel of "The Beheading of St. John the Baptist" are lovingly cared for and in them all the traditional Divine Services have continued throughout the years until now, with all possible dignity and splendor. I have never heard of any criticism or complaints from the crowds of pilgrims who joined us in the Divine Liturgies and other services and shared our trapeza on all the traditional Feast Days. It was always the custom to welcome pilgrims of all faiths and we rejoiced when at last Russian pilgrims began coming to the Holy Land after so many years! It is very strange and sad that during your pilgrimage you failed to present yourself and companions to the welcoming clergy and the abbess as is customary. Rather you based your impressions on the chance encounter with two Rumanian women who spoke no Russian! On the whole it would seem to be a case of "Seeing what you WANT to see, instead of what is actually there!" Right? In any case, I am truly sorry that from a visit to such a holy place where so many have found Divine peace and joy, you have carried away only disappointment and contempt.

As for Jericho, what a beautiful, calm and prayerful treasure, so lovingly care for through all these years! It is deeply painful to even imagine armed soldiers, supposedly Orthodox clergy and even bulldozers causing such cruel havoc in such a serene and holy place!

The other holy site mentioned by you, the Convent of St. Mary Magdalene at Gethsemane, seems to be the only property spared from general "neglect and devastation" reported by you. One must wonder how you account for this? Can it be that this Convent enjoys a special paternal solicitude denied the other monastic properties? For obvious reasons this peculiar situation seems to me to plead for fervent prayer on behalf of the innocent that they be not deceived and lost.

Finally, I rejoice in the mercy of God Who has allowed me to return to the care of our young orphans, remote from scenes of ecclesiastical betrayal and eager preparations for the capitol of antichrist. I consider that our Holy Synod of Bishops has, though sorrowfully, acknowledged the impossibility of unification between the Holy Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate until the passing of the present generation of Soviet corrupted hierarchs.

Meanwhile, dear Father Leonid, there still remains a little time for repentance in our Lord Jesus Christ, through prayers of the Holy Russian Martyrs, and our own prayers offered in love and pity for the much-suffering people of a Holy Russia we still remember here!

With love in Christ, Very Rev. Abbess Juliana (Probably better known to you as the "Hebron Nun"?)

A LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF "CHURCH NEWS"

In the third issue of your publication (March, 2000) some erroneous information was published: I have in mind an article entitled "Yakunin & Co Restore the Renovationists." In this article it was stated that among the organizers was present Z. A. Krakhmalnikova, but this is in no way correct.

Although Z. A. Krakhmalnikova was present at the press-conference arranged by the "neo-renovationists" not only she was not in agreement with them, but strongly protested their adventure.

As I can understand, "Church News" in this case quoted information from the "Political News Agency." We should remember that the journalists who work for such companies are ignorant and have no idea of any religious distinctions. It seems that the correspondent who was attending Yarunin's press conference noticed Zoya Krakhmalnikova and, without a second thought, considered her to be a member of the "organizing team" of this odious "movement."

Archpriest Michael Ardov

FROM LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN AUTONOMOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Rt. Rev. Viktor, Bishop of Daugavpils and Latvia, on May 16, 2000, filed a formal protest with the Latvian Minister for the Foreign Affairs, Mr. Marek Seglins, regarding the actions of city police department.

Bishop Viktor pointed out that "the religious freedom of believers is guaranteed by the 35th paragraph of SATVERSME LR and the Convention of the Rights of Man on religious freedom which was ratified by the Latvian government. This permits any person to freely exercise a religious cult, to own canonical buildings for church services, conduct special prayers, memorial services, processions around the church and other religious ceremonies and rites.

Therefore, the actions of Daugavpils police evoke bewilderment and worry about who on April 30 termed a festive Easter service, of which an essential part is the church procession of believers around the church building on private property, as nothing but an unauthorized demonstration or a parade, and the priests are under administrative sanction.

This legal absurdity forces one to have doubts: is this due to the legal illiteracy of the police or an intentional provocation in order to frighten the believers who are basically elderly people of 65 to 67 years.

Whatever the cases, it creates in the people a condition of vulnerability and fear even to pray, which in no way supports the image of Latvia as a democratic state."

Three Latvian newspapers in Russian ("Now," "Million" and "Latgal's Gazette") published nearly identical information. As it happened, in the streets of Daugavpils (formerly Dvinsk) an unauthorized demonstration of some 300 workers was held which, according to a law passed in 1997, is a violation punishable by a fine of 50 lats or 15 days of jail. Yet the spokesman for the local police said at a press conference that according to a decision made on May 8, "It was decided not to bring the factory workers to court. But the religious community headed by V. Kontuzorovs (Bishop Viktor), which on April 29th had a procession, was less lucky. Since the community even now is still not registered, this action is considered to be unauthorized. Material regarding this has been forwarded to the court" (Newspaper "Seichas" ("Now") of May 11, 2000).

According to information received from the bishop's office, the court hearing took place in Daugavpils on May 26. In connection with this Bishop Viktor and his assistant Fr. Philaret had to travel to Riga. As a result, the government found a ridiculous way out of the situation it itself had created: the Paschal church procession was equated with October/May 1st demonstrations, the workers' parades. But they also gave verbal notice: if something like it happens again, there will be severe sanctions.

During the Paschal period Ridiger-"Drozdov" awarded Valentin Andreyev (the complainant about Bishop Viktor's diocese) with the order of St. Sergius 3rd grade "taking into account his labors in the Daugavpils deanery."

It is unheard of to read or hear of such an persecution of the Church just for disagreeing with the politics of the Moscow Patriarchate.

A CRAFTY PLAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE

The bulletin "Cornerstone EditionsCorp" of May 17 published in an article by M.B. Petrovsky entitled "Russian Archeology in the Holy Land" some information about the work of Russian scientists in the Holy Land.

On the first page there is a rather detailed history of the church in the "Russian Excavations" with the largest sacred property in the Holy Land -- the Judgement gate -- the threshold over which our Lord stepped when going to His Crucifixion. This building belongs to the Orthodox Palestine Society and at present the Moscow Patriarchate has no access to it.

While serving as Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Archimandrite Antonin (Kapoustin) not only purchased real-estate for the Russian Church, but he happened to be also a very well educated archeologist, who began the excavations on the Mt. of Olives. Through his labors a valuable museum was established in which at present the Moscow Patriarchate has an unhealthy interest under the guise of "Orthodox Palestine Historical Society," which was created by the USSR some time after the end of the Second World War.

Since the museum is under the protection of the ROCOR, this fictitious society (the original one came to an end during the Revolution in 1917) developed a very crafty plan: to lure all the exhibits of this museum to Russia in order to have them displayed with cooperation of... the Hermitage State Museum. As the article states, "Within the framework of the completion of the present plan, later there might be established a goal of studying the museum, at one time created by Archimandrite Antonin (Kapoustin), and in agreement with the Ecclesiastical Mission of the Russian Church Abroad, to organize the exhibits of this museum, maybe on the pattern of the Hermitage. It should be noted that the themes of the archeological and numismatic collections of Archimandrite Antonin (Kapoustin) are already being developed in the Hermitage." (underlined by "Ch. N.").

This, even in the Russian original a, perhaps deliberately, slightly confusing sentence, is translated into English to the best of our ability.

Should not this admission about the plans of MP be taken as sort of a notice to the ROCOR? If such an "agreement" does in fact take place (and who knows if it hasn't happened already?), will we be informed of it by the administrator of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, Archbishop Mark?

THE NEXT LIE OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE

The bulletin "Vertograd Inform" in the issue #4 (61) published extracts from the minutes of the meeting of the Synod of the MP of April 20, in which it is stated: "Based upon the report of the President of the Foreign Relations Department of the MP, Metropolitan Cyril, blessing was given to accept into the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church the Orthodox community of Alexander Nevsky Parish in Copenhagen and the newly established community of St. Nicholas in Arrhus (Denmark) at their own request. Priest Alexander Gorbunovis appointed as rector of St. Alexander Nevsky parish, an employee of the FRD who is commissioned to minister St. Nicholas parish in Arrhus."

This information created such disquiet in Denmark and also other places, that Archbishop Mark was commissioned to deny these rumors, originating from the MP via the Internet. As previously, the rector of the St. Alexander Church remains Priest Serge Plekhanov and only a small group went over to the MP.

A BIT MORE REGARDING THE STATEMENT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF ROCOR TO THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE

Newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" ("Russian Herald") in issue # 17-18 published some decrees of the meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the MP held on April 19-20. In one of them it was noted that: "There were deliberations regarding the spread through the mass media of the statement by the so-called Synod of Bishops 'of the Russian Church Abroad' to the Russian Orthodox people. Resting its hope upon the unlimited mercy of God and His All-good and Salvific Providence toward all those who remain in stubborn schism and oppose church unification and continue to abuse the loyalty of the Russian people for their church administration and their homeland at present and in the past, the Holy Synod appeals for a quest for canonical unity with the Russian Orthodox Church of all Orthodox believers in diaspora, who bind their church life with the religious ideals of Russia, but who, due to various reasons, remain outside canonical relations with the Mother Church. It was stressed that during the most recent decades the Moscow Patriarchate has repeatedly expressed good will toward reinstating, as soon as possible in the canonical unity of the bosom of the Mother-Church, those willing hierarchs, clergy, monastics and laity within the structure of the 'Russian Church Abroad.' Unfortunately, this has not given the appropriate understanding by its administration."

No matter how poorly the Statement of Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR was written, it so disturbed the notorious "Administration" of the Moscow Patriarchate that it felt it necessary to react with this special decree of its Synod.

The appeals for "church unity" on part of the MP in principle are welcome, but above all this can be achieved not through compromises and rejection by the ROCOR of the Truth established by the Ecumenical Councils -- the dogma of the oneness of the Church (denied by participation of the MP in the WCC) or through violation of canon law (for example the 30th Apostolic Canon and a number of others). No one abroad ever heard that the ROCOR has "abused" its "homeland now and in the past." This "past" of our homeland was the atheistic USSR and is it not amazing that the MP even now cannot separate itself from Sergianist values: that the "joys" of the Soviet government should be the "joys" of the Church and an attack on the USSR is considered to be an attack on the Church? The brutal takeovers and efforts to seize the church properties of the ROCOR (even those which were built abroad) undoubtedly do not testify to any "motherly" love of the MP for the ROCOR!

THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND GOVERNMENT ARE UNANIMOUS TOWARD CATHOLICS

From time to time, bowing to pressure from a significant anti-Catholic movement among the believing Russian people, the Moscow Patriarchate sometimes makes hesitant anti-Catholic statements. But everything ends up in the statements of the head of the Moscow Patriarchate, Ridiger-Drozdov, that lie in the way of unity with these heretics are not dogmatic differences, but mainly "complications with the Orthodox Church in Ukraine" where Uniates seize more and more Orthodox churches and the Catholic missionaries zealously work on Russian territory and especially in such distant provinces as Siberia.

Yet, all of this did not prevent Ridiger from sending congratulations to the Pope on his 80th birthday in which, as it is quoted by the "Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc.:" "I express the hope that the problems existing between our Churches can be successfully overcome through joint efforts and that the new millennium will become time for healing the rifts and divisions between the Churches of the East and the West.

May God in His mercy and generosity, grant Your Holiness everything needed for life and piety and favor you with many years in which to continue and multiply your work in the field of Christian witness to the resurrection of Christ." (Underlined by "Ch. N.")

Shortly after the celebrations of the Pope's birthday, President Putin visited the Vatican. "The New York Times" of June 7 reported that Putin did not invite the Pope to visit Russia, as did Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Nevertheless while in Milan, Putin declared that "We do not want in any way to harm the discussion in progress between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic. We must proceed with caution and not do harm in attempting to do good."

The Vatican spokesman Navarro-Valls said that the Pope was "very pleased" with the meeting and especially that Putin, just at the start of his political career, has already paid him a visit. The newspaper expressed the hope that Putin will be able in a private conversation to persuade Ridiger to invite the Pope to Russia. As is known now, Putin and Ridiger have had long term friendly relations.

The agency ITAR-TASS in an internet report of May 19, stated that Ridiger has no objections to meeting with the Pope, but he believes that beforehand "some problems have to be resolved which present an obstacle to our relationship. Yet, according to information in another statement on the Internet of June 6, the Moscow Patriarchate was pleased that Putin did not invite the Pope to Russia and the Patriarchate's spokesman Vsevolod Chaplin said that Putin deserves respect for "a wise and moderate position."

MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE REQUIRES SUBSCRIPTIONS TO ITS MAGAZINE

The newspaper "Russkaya Mysl" ("Russian Mind") in issue # 4312 reported that unexpectedly it happened to get (rather belatedly) but nevertheless interesting material. The newspaper published a letter of Ambrose, Archbishop of Ivanovo and Kineshima of July 1998 with the following order:

"To the reverend rectors of monasteries and parishes and all clergymen of Ivanovo Diocese.

According to the decree of the Holy Synod of April 9, 1998 it is necessary for every clergyman of the Moscow Patriarchate to subscribe to the magazine 'Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.' The subscription fee is 144 rubles. In connection with that I bless the father rectors to annually withhold this amount from their own salary as well as from subordinate clergy (from everyone) and forward this sum to the Diocesan Administration earmarked 'for the JMP'. Since the results of these subscriptions will be reported to His Holiness the Patriarch himself, the clergymen who ignores this letter will never again will be granted any rewards. Also to the rectors who have a library in their monastery or church, I point out the necessity of having in them at least one set of the JMP, including the years 1996 and 1997."

A citizen of Ivanovo, Edward Mikhailov (probably the person who supplied the newspaper with this "pearl" of the Moscow hierarchy) adds in commentary to this letter: "This charming fantasy, unfortunately, happened to be very distant from reality. The Diocesan clergy, as usual, ignored this circular and the sets of the JMP never reached Ivanovo."

ALEXIS (RIDIGER -"DROZDOV") LIFTS SUSPENSION OF KOCHETKOV & CO.

The newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" ("Russian Herald") reported that the head of the Moscow Patriarchate Alexis (Ridiger-"Drozdo") has lifted the suspension of MP priest George Kochetkov and his 12 immediate collaborators.

The group established by Kochetkov for quite some time not only promoted purely renovationist practices, but also was widely spreading his own heretical ideas.

The "Nezavisimaya Gazeta Religii" ("Independent Newspaper of Religions") put up on the Internet several articles devoted to Kochetkov and his group. The most important is the article by Archpriest Valentin Asmus, who lists a number of dogmatic heresies of Kochetkov. In particular, Rev. Asmus writes that "When explaining the origin of human beings, he departs from Biblical teaching about the creation of the first couple and for some reason applies the Platonic myth of 'androgyn'. According to Kochetkov, man was created as a dual personality, from the beginning he contains not only light, but also darkness. Thus, the responsibility for the fall is laid upon the Creator."

According to Archpriest Asmus' article Kochetkov has Nestorian tendencies and also rejects the teaching of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition about the everlasting sufferings of sinners, "calling such teachings, in Berdayev's manner, 'sadistic'. In this way he falls under the anathemas of the Fifth and the following Ecumenical Councils against Origenism."

Kochetkov fully shares the Protestant-Ecumenist "branch" theory of the church: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. According to this heretical teaching no one of these "branches" has the fullness of Truth. But when they all unite, there will occur a new "Pentecost." All those who happened to visit this Kochatkov's spiritual den and see the books displayed for sale will have no doubt that this is a hothouse for a number of heresies.

Kochetkov opened St. Philaret Academy and attached a catechetical school and theological courses. In 1999 this school received a government license from the catechetical department. According to Kochetkov himself, as reported in an interview given to Maxim Shevchenko, it was given to him "directly with the blessing of supreme administration". About a thousand students participate annually in this heretical center in person and by correspondence course.

This is even more surprising since the 'supreme administration' lifted the suspension upon Kochetkov and his collaborators in April of 2000, which was imposed not so much for his heretical teachings as for beating up in the sanctuary a priest newly appointed to this parish who revolted against the innovations of Kochetkov during the Divine Liturgy. Kochetkov & Co. vigorously denied having beaten up the priest, which occurred in 1997. At that time, this priest's pectoral cross and vestments were ripped off and he was beaten so severely that he had to be hospitalized.

It seems that under the pressure of some still Orthodox clergy and lay people the "supreme administration" had to take some measures regarding Kochetkov and his heretical teachings, especially, after he published several books which upset them.

From an interview given by Deputy Abbot of the Sretensky Monastery Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkounov) to Maxim Shevchenko we learn of a transparent "decision of His Holiness Patriarch to form an independent and competent committee which will try to examine the published works of Fr. George. It will not be concerned about what he said to somebody, but what is in print and published in substantial numbers. The establishment of such a committee gathered steam from the time that it became obvious that the writings of Fr. George are not personal theological opinions, but are something that pretends to create revolutionary changes in the Church with convocations of its own unauthorized councils, the ordination of presbyters, the publication of textbooks, the establishment of theological schools and so on and so on. It seems that his writings are to be put under serious and unbiased analysis. If some points which disagree with the Orthodox teachings of the Holy Fathers are discovered, then most certainly the opinion of the committee will be made known to Fr. George. Either he will acknowledge the critique, or he will present an argument, and maybe he will succeed in persuading his opponents that they do not quite understand something. At any rate, there will begin a constructive period in this history, and not hostilities with phelonions being ripped off unfortunate priests...."

In the event this "transparent decision" of Ridiger does indeed take place, Archimandrite Arseny states that "he knows" that such a committee will include teachers from the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy and St. Tikhon's Institute.

This interview by Archimandrite Tikhon astonishes one with his total absence of zeal for the purity of Orthodoxy. It is absolutely indifferent to him if parishes become "liberal or conservative" -- the main thing is that they remain Orthodox and "truthful to Christ and His Church." He does not give any practical clues how to solve the problem of how it is possible to be "liberal" as Kochetkov understands it and at the same time remain faithful to Christ and His Church.

GLORIFICATION OF SERBIAN NEW-MARTYRS

Priest Fr. Stephen Zaremba, from the Information Service of the Serbian Orthodox Church on May 22, 2000, stated on the Internet that on Sunday, May 21, in the church of St. Sava on Vrchar (a Belgrade suburb) the glorification of the Serbian New Martyrs was performed. One can guess that the church in Vrchar was chosen for this celebration because it was where the Turks martyred many Orthodox Serbs. It is also the place where Turks burned the relics of St. Sava.

In a Liturgy presided over by Patriarch Pavle all the Serbian Bishops (some 25 hierarchs) concelebrated with a multitude of priests and deacons.

The rite of glorification began after the small entrance. Two bishops held up the icon of a particular saint, while a choir of seminarians sang troparia and then there a brief account of his martyr's podvig. Then the bishop would bring the icon to the Patriarch, who stood on the solia and he would bless the faithful with the icon.

In such a manner there were canonized: Hieromartyr Peter, Metropolitan Ioaniky of Crna Gora, Metropolitan Dositey of Zagreb, Bishop Sava of Gorni Karlovac, Bishop Platon of Banja-Luka, Hieromartyr Branko, Hieromartyr George, Abbot Rafail and Martyr Vukashin.

In this announcement some brief information was provided about every one of these martyrs, who mainly suffered at the hands of Catholic Croats. The murder in 1941 of Hieromartyr George by the Croat Ustashi is absolutely outrageous. "He was tied to a tree and then they cut off his ears, nose, tongue and beard with the skin. After this they plucked out his eyes. Finally, one of the Ustashi cut open his chest and abdomen and, taking out his intestines, wrapped them around his neck"!

SCHISM IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ESTONIA

According to the NYC Russian language newspaper "Novoye Russkoye Slovo" ("New Russian Word") of May 4, a serious conflict developed between the Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates which lasted for several years.

Shortly after the Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the independent republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, in particular in Estonia, the Orthodox parishes there placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. When the Baltic countries were captured by the Communists in 1940, all these parishes were forced to cut off their relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and become members of the Moscow Patriarchate.

After the fall of Communism and second establishment of the independent Baltic republics, in Estonia the "Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church" was registered as part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Some of the MP parishes under Bishop Kornelios also claimed the same name, but cannot be registered since according to local law in this country there can not simultaneously exist two churches with the same name.

In 1996, an agreement was reached between the Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates such that on the territory of Estonia the parishes of both Patriarchates will function on an equal basis. Yet, according to the newspaper article, Bishop Stephen of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is in no way willing to adhere to the agreement. The problem lies in seniority. The Ecumenical Patriarchate insists that the Moscow Patriarchate established itself only in 1940. As is typical of the MP, the issue has nothing to do with the canons, but only with property. Some of the parishes faithful to the MP are being closed by priests appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

At present, there is a revision of the law in preparation. It is projected that according to the new law property will belong not to the Church, but to the parishes. Under such situation the MP would win, since the majority of the parishes belong to her.

SWEDISH LUTHERANS OMIT "ANTI-SEMITIC" PHRASES FROM THEIR PRAYER BOOKS

According to the bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of May 3, the Swedish Lutheran Church has decided to delete from its service books all texts that might be offensive to Jews or considered to be "anti-Semitic."

These changes were made after five years of negotiations by a specially established committee of Lutherans and Jews formed to study the problems of their relationship. This committee condemned some expressions of Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran church, about the Jews.

A report made by this committee entitled "The Ways of God: An Inter-Faith document of Dialogue" will be studied for a year and then a final decision will be made whether the Swedish Church will accept the committee's decision as her official resolution. In this report it is already stated that: "anti-Semitism has occurred both in words and in deeds on several occasions in the history of the church. This contradicts the teaching of the Holy Scriptures that all humankind is equal in the face of God" (?!).

Although it is expected that the matter of anti-Semitism is going to be discussed for a whole year, the changes in the texts of Lutheran services are already taking place. In particular, an Easter prayer in which Jews are accused of the crucifixion of the Saviour is already omitted from the service books. Also deleted is a hymn which says that "you hold the love of God in contempt and laugh at the suffering of Jesus."

In Sweden there are 8 million inhabitants and less than 20,000 Jews.

The Swedish dialogue with the Jews (as is true with the Christians in any country) has inevitably resulted in the rejection of historical facts and the basics of Christian doctrine.

Contemporary "Christians" (including the "Orthodox") a long time ago renounced the necessity of preaching Christianity to the Jews and pagans and adopted the technique of "dialogue" -- which in principle seeks opportunities by means of compromises to sell their own religious convictions as profitably as possible

AN ANGLICAN BISHOP ON JUDAISM

The bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of May 17 reported that there is in England a Council of Christian and Jews, headed by Bishop Richard Harries of Oxford. He also publishes articles in the magazine "Manna", which is published by the Sternberg Center for Judaism, the London Center of Reform Judaism.

This Anglican Bishop expressed the opinion that for the people who can not accept Christianity as their "spiritual home" -- Judaism might be a way out. So he declared: "Looking at people's spiritual needs, I see a category of people who are natural monotheists and who simply cannot believe Christian claims about Jesus, but who would love to have a spiritual home. Whilst New Age religions offer some spiritual insights, Judaism offers a tradition, a way of believing and behaving that has been tried and tested for nearly 4,000 years."

Speaking about himself, this "Christian Bishop" said that for him personally the faith in Jesus Christ is basic and that "without belief in the Incarnation, I might not even be able to believe in God" but, nevertheless "Judaism had offered a remarkable witness to God" in the Holocaust and throughout the ages.

When asked which "spiritual home" he prefers for himself: Jewish or Muslim, Harries evasively replied that "Both are monotheistic religions, and Islam has won converts in the West. I cannot say that one is more natural home than the other."

To the question if he sees a conflict in promoting Jewish propaganda along side existing Christian "evangelism", the British Bishop declared that "Christianity is not the only missionary religion. We live in a pluralistic and consumer society. I don't see why Judaism shouldn't offer what it has."

ABOUT THE FATIMA "PROPHECIES"

For some 83 years in a row the Roman Catholics have insistently said repeatedly to trusting people that on May 13, 1917 in a little Portuguese town the Holy Virgin appeared to three shepherd children of the dos Santos family and related to them future events of the Universe. In the beginning, the story was that the children immediately informed the Pope of those revelations. Supposedly the Theotokos told these children that if people will not stop insulting her Divine Son, there will be a horrible war and "in order to prevent it I will appear to pray for the dedication of Russia to my immaculate heart and for penitential communion on the first day of the month. If they will listen to me, Russia will be converted and peace will come." It is self-evident, that this meant Russia was to convert to Roman Catholicism!

It is noteworthy that the Popes waited quite some time before "dedicating Russia" to the heart of the Theotokos after they were informed by Lucia, although she had several more "visions" regarding Russia. The latest one, upon insistence of her spiritual directors was repeated in 1940. Only in 1942 Pope Pious XII did dedicate to the Holy Virgin all of humanity, but not Russia. And only after 10 more years had passed was Russia "dedicated to the heart" of Theotokos, but not by "all the world's bishops," as supposedly was related by Lucia, but by the Pope personally. ("New Papal Encyclical," Coll. Works of Archpriest George Grabbe, Vol. II, p. 230-231). By the way, the brother and sister of Lucia died very shortly after all these "visions" from gripe.

Such was the very first version of these Catholic fantasies. Yet, according to the bulletin Ecumenical Press International of May 31, now the version of those fantasy-visions has changed. Children in the beginning saw hell and "salvation", then the spread of Communism and finally, Vatican just recently opened the very last third "vision" on the occasion of the 80th birthday of the Pope. It happened to be a vision of a body in a white cassock falling to the ground and with it the Theotokos predicted the assassination of the Pope. Supposedly it was fulfilled in 1981, when indeed an attempt was made to kill the Pope. According to the Vatican, the texts of all of those visions (with commentaries) will be published in the near future. One must surmise this will be when the Vatican and the still living Lucia (by now 93 years old) will together compose those "secrets." It was also reported that the visions occurred over 5 months in a row, each on the 13th day of the month. Probably this composition will be a rather lengthy one!

On May 13, 2000 the Pope went for two days to Fatima in order to perform the "beatification" of Francis and Jacinta, the two children who with Lucia, who has become a Carmelite nun, supposedly saw the Holy Virgin. Beatification by the Catholics is a rite which precludes canonization, and therefore, they are officially proclaimed as "blessed."

For this occasion 650,000 pilgrims came. The canonization is on hold until there would be found the 2 required miracles to promote the children to sainthood. So far one has already been found.

It would be interesting to find out what is the status in the Roman Catholic Church of the still living participant of those "visions" -- Lucia?

A DIALOGUE ON CELEBRATING PASCHA TOGETHER WITH HERETICS

The Greek Archdiocese newspaper "Orthodox Observer" of May 31 reported information about the current dialogue of the "Orthodox" with the Protestants regarding a common date for celebrating Pascha, which is endorsed by the joint committee.

The dialogue was initiated by the so-called Standing Conference of the Canonical Bishops in USA. The ROCOR time ago participated in the SCOBA meetings, but in 1965 ceased when the representatives of the MP started to participate and it was deemed inappropriate to sit at the same table with them.

The participants of this dialogue were studying the matter "Toward a common date for Easter." A representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Metropolitan Maximos, represented the "Orthodox" and the Lutherans were represented by Bishop McCoid of Pennsylvania. Among the participating "Orthodox" is mentioned a Serbian Metropolitan Christopher and several clergy and lay people, also the rector of the Greek cathedral in NYC.

The ecumenist declaration made during March of 1997 in the Assembly of the WCC in Aleppo (Syria) which has become known as "the Aleppo Statement" was accepted as an initial position.

Now the participants of this "dialogue" in the seventh paragraph declared that "We strongly affirm the basic principles of the Aleppo Statement and urge its careful and pastorally sensitive study..." "Our Orthodox-Lutheran Ecumenical dialogue in the USA endorses the statement's call to study during the period leading to Easter/Pascha, 2001."

The members of this committee also agreed that the Aleppo Statement "is faithful to the Nicene norms" and that the "common witness to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the central mystery of the Christian faith."

However, the traitors to Orthodoxy still insist that the date of the "Easter/Pascha" should continue to follow the Jewish Passover and there must not be a fixed date for it.

One of the representatives of the "Orthodox" group said that "We pledge to one another, and to our ecumenical partners, that we will continue to seek reconciliation between Christians in this manner. Our dialogue therefore urges our churches to give the Aleppo Statement serious attention."

While fooling around from Jerusalem, as the place of Christianity's birth, with supposedly exact astronomical calculations of lunar periods, the Aleppo ecumenists developed their own paschalia, which, as they claim, does not contradict Nicene Council's regulations.

The agency the Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc. adds that Metropolitan Maximos believes that considerable time will pass before Orthodox will celebrate Pascha with heretics, because many still remember the schism which occurred after the acceptance of the Gregorian calendar and that many bishops fear this will create another one. However, Metropolitan Maximos states that he is very happy that at least a part of Orthodox celebrate Christmas together with the Westerners. That, "what unites Christians is much more important than what divides us. I would rather see us being united in the number one celebration of our church calendar, which is Easter."

However, what is remarkable is that no matter how the Western heretics and the "Orthodox" calculate the Paschal date, not one of them takes into consideration that for almost 17 centuries now exactly on the Orthodox Holy Saturday, the Holy Fire appears at the Lord's Sepulchre! What need is there to search for another date to celebrate Pascha?

A NEW PRODUCTION OF CHRIST'S PASSION IN OBERAMMERGAU

Every 10 years in the little town of Oberammergau in Bavaria there is put on a stage production of Christ's passion in commemoration of the end of a plague in 1633. Some 2000 inhabitants of this town, who carefully learn their roles by heart, participate in these productions. The main actors are chosen not only for their ability to act, but the administrators also try to make sure that none have a bad reputation. So the role of the Theotokos is usually given to a pious maiden with a blameless reputation.

These productions are attended by some 500,000 tourists from around the world and they bring in about 30 million dollars. This year the production began on May 21. Each of them lasts for 6 hours with no intermissions.

However, beginning in 1850 the text of this mystery play has gradually been changed. The most significant changes were made at the end of the Second World War. One can say, that each one of them, at the demand of the Jews, has changed more and more. At the behest of the rabbis and Jewish secular organizations, everything that only might be unacceptable to the Jews has been deleted from the text, for example, the scene in which 250 actors participated and who yelled "Let His blood be upon us and our children."

According to the newspaper "The Christian News" of May 29, a Christian-Jewish Committee has asked that the whole production be overhauled so as to positively reflect the relationship between Christians and Jews and at the same time would be satisfactory to the audience.

Rabbi Rudin writes that in spite of the positive changes which have been made, unfortunately, this did not happen this year because "the text remains deeply flawed and still contains anti-Jewish elements." Yet the "rewrite of the text" went so far that for the first time Jesus Christ was referred in this play as Rabbi and not Christ. Also, the actor who portrays Christ during the Last Supper says some prayer in Hebrew. And in spite of all this the Jews continually call for and demand changes of the ancient text of this Christian play.

Being familiar with Jewish demands, one can believe that they will stop only when in this historical play about their part in the crucifixion of Christ there will not remain even His Name and they themselves will be presented to us in the role of the noble benefactors of humanity!