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LENTEN EPISTLE
BY HIS EMINENCE VALENTIN, ARCHBISHOP OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR,
TO PASTORS, MONASTICS AND ALL SPIRITUAL CHILDREN OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." (Mt. 5: 7)

"He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." (Jas. 2:13)

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (Jas. 2: 26)

Very important days for every Christian are beginning, the days of the Great Lent. Will they lead us to the open doors of repentance, the cleansing of sin, to the straight path leading to the radiant Resurrection of Christ and the inheritance of the Kingdom, which the Lord promised to those who love Him? Or we will remain friends of the world, and therefore enemies of God? Will we approach Him or separate from Him? Will we continue to say spiteful things and hate or we will restrain our tongues and cleanse our hands from filthy works? Will we subdue ourselves to the will of God about us and chase the devil and his filthy servants or will we continue in our self-will, hard-heartedness and duplicity, opposing our nothingness to the Will of the All-powerful? How long will we test the Lord's mercy and the Lord's long patience?

Man longs for liberty and worldly delights. Was not this the liberty to oppose the Creator that once upon a time the snake-tempter made known to our forefathers in paradise when he gave them to taste the forbidden fruit? Is not this the liberty which gave birth to quarrels, murders, jealousy and treason which have happened throughout human history? "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts" (Jm. 4: 2-3).

Why is not there the slightest relief for our worn out Homeland? The century has ended, the millennium has ended and yet the Passion Week of troubled times continues. There is no end to the physical and mental suffering and it is a very rare heart that does not constrict in expectation of new and harsher ones. But is it not that by these sufferings the Lord in His great mercy is calling us to come to our senses? If there is no end of misfortunes, it means there is no end of terrible sin which spreads throughout our Homeland.

And this sin is before our own eyes; it is visible and obvious, and many, who consider themselves Orthodox speak of it, even loudly... But no one wants to repent of it. This sin damages church life in which false teaching rules. Our endless miseries are a testimony to and the result of the continued persecution of the Truth. Is this persecution really already over? And is it possible that the general lack of love which took root and like a dark cloud settled over Russia is over with, as was predicted by the One, Who is Love Himself? However, the Passion Week of hard times may suddenly end for us not with the joyous Resurrection of Christ, but with the coming of the stern Judge-Christ.

The divine words which will thunder over us on the Last Judgment are not hidden from us: "And then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared to you from foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was stranger, and ye took Me in: naked and ye clothed Me: I was sick and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me... Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me... Then shall he say unto them on the left hand: Depart from Me, ye cursed. Into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto Me". (Mt. 25: 34-36: 40-41, 45).

But, not being afraid of the Lord's words, but frightened by crafty human words, the unfortunate traitors run from the right side to the left, for which there will thunder the everlasting sentence.

Why has the tiny Church Abroad been an unshakable stronghold? Because she was fulfilling the Lord's command of Love. During Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret, the path of the Church Abroad was filled with the kind of love to which the ever memorable First Hierarchs and their children called the world, trying to address their conscience that it is impossible to eat, drink and sleep in peace in presence of the great sufferer – the persecuted Russia. For the Church Abroad it was not the image alone, Christ Himself looked by the eyes of sufferers. The Divine Sufferer was crucified not in one of the little ones, but in the big multitude of Russian People. You know, all this happened at a time when the majority was looking for comfort. In its Epistle to the World Conference (in Genoa, 1921) The Church Abroad issued this appeal:

"Among the multitude of nations who received the right to a voice at the Genoa conference, only the 200 million Russian people will not be represented, because it is impossible to call those there its representatives – rather, its enslavers... Where was it ever heard of that the sheep would be represented by their annihilators, the wolves? If the sheep as yet unmauled by the wolves were to be asked what they want to improve their welfare, there would be a unanimous cry: take the wolves from us. This the sheep would say if they could talk; the same is true of the Russian people who have been beaten and terrorized to a point where they cannot raise their voices and are denied the physical possibility of being heard by enlightened Europe and the whole world.

Peoples of Europe! Nations of the World! Have pity upon our kind, open hearted, noble hearted Russian people, who have fallen into hands of criminals. Do not support these against your children and grandchildren..." (ROCOR, Vol. I, p. 31-32)

This was the appeal of the Church Abroad. And the world...? The world behaved like the merciless priest and the Levite in the parable of the merciful Samaritan, who would not help the one who suffered at the hands of a gang of robbers. And inside Russia there are its own merciless priests and Levites who gave false testimony that nothing bad is

happening in Russia, no one is torn to pieces, there are no persecutions, but just the opposite – everything is fine.

This is exactly what the world wanted to hear, not wishing its comfort disturbed. The Church Abroad did not accept these rules, and tried to awaken its conscience. There were efforts to force her to be silent; she was threatened; she was insulted; her pleas for help were called political by those heartless people who themselves knew nothing but politics. But the Russian Church Abroad fearlessly did her duty, as a true instrument of Christ's loving heart.

"When we pray for forgiveness of the sins, asking for future enlightenment, let everyone of us take upon himself the load of his brother, so that united by faith and love, we, all of us, when the Lord will open the doors for us, we may enter our home as the unified flock of the Only Shepherd with the sacrificial wish to serve our own homeland and welfare of our people.

"May God bless every work and podvig [struggle] for the benefit of the Church and the blessed by Him construction of the Russian State," written and signed by Metropolitan Anthony in the Epistle from the historic Council Abroad in 1921 held in Sremski Karlovtsi" (ROCOR, vol.I)

Does the union, after an 80 year wait, proceed in this manner? Does not now, the Church Abroad, which always was on the side of persecuted, who mercifully tried to relieve their suffering, does not she now unite with those, who were indifferent at the Cross of the Divine Sufferer or were casting a lot for His garment? What does this share with the partaker of Christ's sufferings, of the faithful and unfaithful? Is the Church Abroad uniting with the Moscow Patriarchate in order to, according to Metropolitan Anthony's testament, "take upon itself the load of its brother"? Is it possible that the suffering brother will feel better because the spiritual leaders of the Russian Diaspora will joyfully celebrate on the secular paths and will hug Communists or bashfully cast down their eyes before them? Will they help in this way the "construction of the Russian State"... or will they through their treason, their friendship with heretics evoke the grave anger of God and double the suffering? Is this a merciful love?

Those who turn away from the suffering brother do not pay attention to the example of a more pitiful sufferer, from whom it is impossible to part – this is he who is doomed himself to everlasting sufferings, to torments and never ceasing shame. For a minute of power, for a minute of worldly goods, he paid with everlasting suffering and led others behind him... "Judas!... Judas!" -- with such words some time ago our emigrants to America met one of the Soviet metropolitans. "Hosanna" is heard today in the speeches and epistles of the hierarchs from Abroad.

This is the humiliating role to which the current leadership dooms the Church Abroad! And all this should be the other way round. She should not be caught as a small bird, but she was to gather under her wings the dispersed children; it is not she who should go as a beggar with an outstretched hand to "world orthodoxy", but she was herself meant to give drink to the thirsty and feed the hungry from the riches of the immortal table, according to the example of the ever memorable First Hierarchs: Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret. Eternal memory and our humble gratitude to His Grace Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) who until the very end of his life tirelessly continued their podvig of love.

"The Church Abroad as ever continues to keep faith with the Russian Mother Church and has taken upon herself the lofty and at the same time difficult responsibility of the mission to preserve all the basics, traditions and grandeur of Russian Orthodoxy and Russian Orthodox Church and freely and openly speaks out all around the world in the name of the enslaved Mother Church and the exhausted captive Russians and other peoples in Russia.

"The truthfulness of the Church Abroad to the Russian Mother Church consists in fact that she always remained in the bosom of the Russian Church, but definitely and categorically never submitted and will submit to the uncanonical Soviet Patriarchate" (ROCOR, vol. 1, p. 38)

This is how the Church Abroad spoke when she indeed remained in the bosom of the Russian Church, and stayed in the Truth and Love.

The Patriarchate, without repenting and even more, without bringing forth the fruits of repentance, although outwardly no longer Soviet, has not ceased being uncanonical. The Church Abroad, uniting with her, herself exits from the Russian Church, shifts from the right side to the left, to the side of the merciless and cruel.

One of the witnesses to this is the harsh action of the hierarchs of the Synod of the Church Abroad in the 1994 toward the Russian faithful who trusted them.

Can one have any doubt, in the light of the latest events, that already several years ago the Synod of the Church Abroad was planning this unification with the Moscow Patriarchate and this in particular was the reason for persecution of the Russian Church, whose believers, clergy and episcopate were obstacles to this unification. This was the only "proof" of the crime. Therefore, they tried not only to get rid of the Russian Church, but also slander her every way possible.

Those who made the most effort to slander the Russian Church – we now see leading the movement toward unification with the Moscow Patriarchate. Is it not that the foreign leader of this movement beforehand put all his efforts into splitting the Church Abroad and the Russian Church? And here, among us, a certain person split away from the Russian Church, under the pretext of his faithfulness to the Church Abroad, when he said that "one should prefer the faithfulness to the 'living hierarchs', and not the Fathers of the Church, who long ago departed to another world." Now it is obvious that this person has gathered up for himself the dioceses from Siberia to Petersburg and Moscow, to hand them over to the Moscow Patriarchate as a trophy.

Why then, when we see where the action of these persons is leading, can we continue to believe in their slanders?

From the very beginning of this approach there was a hidden mistake. The true Russian Church Abroad, although never intending to unite with the uncanonical Patriarchy, never confessed herself to be "the only true one". She confessed

herself as remaining in the bosom of the Russian Church, together with the Catacomb Church, which she respected and the Church of Martyrs and Confessors. Did anyone listen to her voice? There are many imitations the Catacomb Church, but nevertheless, there are still quite a few of her confessors living now, who are the glory and the cream of the Russian Church. For them the concept "of joining the Moscow Patriarchate" is equivalent to "leaving the Church". Why then do some fathers and children of the Church Abroad despise these witnesses of the Truth and Love and consider them as non-existent? Do they thus behave according to Truth and Love? Is their strange behavior toward their brothers in faith (if only they indeed are not hypocritically faithful to the Russian Church) -- not a benefit to the enemies of God's Church, who rush to split Her apart, don't they add water to the mill of the dark powers and their servants? All this has already happened in the history of the Church.

"Among the highest hierarchs of the ROCOR there happened to be some ambitious hungry persons, who led by the dark powers and ailing with inexplicable ambition, who in violation not only of the church's, but of common human moral standards, departed from the Church Abroad, who broke apart her unity and betrayed their Mother -- the Great Martyr Russian Church, and at the time of her most terrible perils.

"They have disturbed her unity at a time of approaching terrible confusion in Russia -- the announcement of the Declaration by Metropolitan Sergius, when the much-suffering Russian Church was exhausted, in pain and drowning in the martyric blood of her faithful sons.

"Instead of moral support, instead of comforting, devoted filial words and attention, they either committed the deed of Cain, joining in free will the uncanonical Soviet Patriarchy, which entered into collaboration with the godless, criminal power, foreign to Russian and ecclesiastical-religious interests and in this way, together with the Patriarchy, participated in the bloody persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church and Her servants; or, in imitation of Pilate, who washed his hands, they joined the jurisdiction of another Local Church..." (ROCOR, vol. I, p.40).

Let us apply all our efforts not to obtain for ourselves a condemnatory sentence, not for a nearing of the end, but for the much suffering Russian land to still gain a time to shine with the joyous Pascha of Christ, as a promise of the endless, never aging Pascha in the Heavenly Kingdom.

With much love,
Valentin, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir

2001, in the God preserved city of Suzdal

STATEMENT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA
January 26/February 8, 2001

We, the Synod of Bishops having assembled in regular session, found it necessary to **bear witness again to our inner unity and unshakable stand in the truth of the Church.** [emphasis in all that follows by "Ch. N."]. We are alarmed by the discord which has grown in **certain parts** of our ecclesiastical organism. In connection with this, we affirm that **all of us, the members of the Synod of Bishops, presided over by our President, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly, unanimously stand by the decisions and statements adopted at the Council of Bishops, and we cannot agree with any attempt to introduce a spirit of doubt and disagreement into our midst.**

Over the course of eighty years, **we have sensed that our responsibility lies before the fullness of the Church of Russia, both abroad and in our much suffering homeland. Our decisions and thoughts are always guided by this twofold responsibility.**

It is not due to any worthiness on our part that we have inherited all the richness of the Church of Russia, yet we strive to preserve it and pass it on. **And now also we continue to occupy the steadfast positions of our confession of the Faith before the whole world, and we therefore naturally rejoice when we perceive positive changes occurring among our much suffering Russian People.**

The Constitution of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia itself defines our existence with and binds our activities to a responsibility before the entire Church of Russia. In our time, when open persecution has ceased, our relations require interpretation and healthy assessment. With this aim in mind, the Council of Bishops convened in the year 2000, set up **several committees** to study the paths of the Church of Russia, past and future. Such a step **is not an innovation; rather it is organic, and consequently is an extension of our former path.**

Reminding all the faithful children of our Church that it is essential not to submit to the attempts of the enemy of our salvation to rend the seamless garment of the Church, we call upon you all henceforth to stand firmly in the truth of the Church and to preserve the unity of love.

Signed: Metropolitan Vitaly , President of the Synod;

Members of the Synod: Archbishop Laurus, Archbishop Mark, Archbishop Alipy, Bishop Gabriel, Bishop Kyrill.

The above statement of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR – in its deceitfulness and shamelessness has no equal in the whole history of the Church Abroad!

Once again we hear of "an inner unity and unshakable stand in the truth of the Church", although the decisions adopted by the Council did not express **certain parts** of the Church Abroad, but resulted in an endless stream of individual, but mainly collective protests from a whole number of dioceses in Russia and abroad. Not one of these appeals was honored with any answer on part of the Synod, although some of them were signed by respected and well known clergy and active members. This is a method typical of the Moscow Patriarchate, already borrowed by the Church Abroad!

From this statement we also learn of the creation of **several committees** to study "the path of the Church of Russia, past and future".

The announcement of the Synod of Bishops regarding "our responsibility(ies) before the fullness of the Church of Russia, both abroad and in the much suffering homeland" by mentioning the "Constitution of the ROCOR", at best relies upon the very short memory of the Russians abroad.

This "Constitution" (Statute), which was adapted in 1964, nowhere and not with a single word, mentions a responsibility of the Church Abroad before the TOTAL Russian Church! This statement is a bold and unveiled lie.

During all the 80 years of the existence of the ROCOR not one of her First Hierarchs of blessed memory ever dared to mention in any statement that they were responsible for the whole Russian Church. They felt responsibility only for that entrusted to them by Divine Providence – the Church Abroad.

The post-Conciliar Epistle by Metropolitan Vitaly made some people (who still try to hold onto the straw of hope that the ROCOR has not yet perished) believe that he is a sort of symbol for the faithful zealots, who were disturbed by the last Council's decision. Yet this latest Synod statement, signed by the Metropolitan, should have demonstrated to them that this illusion must fade away.

Shortly before the last Synod meeting persistent rumors circulated that the Metropolitan would be retired at the next session. From circles close to him it became known that he was aware that he would be asked to retire, but nevertheless insisted that under no conditions would he obey such a request. The fact that the session lasted for three days instead of the customary day and a half – already showed that the meetings were rather rough.

Was not the signature of Metropolitan Vitaly under this shameful statement sort of a "payment" to keep his nominal position as First Hierarch of the ROCOR?

It seems that in an effort to quiet the general unrest with talk and persuasion, the Synod has sent two extremely loyal archpriests to Europe: Archpriest George Larin and Archpriest Steven Pavlenko. They visited France, Switzerland and paid a visit to Bishop Barnabas.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

We received a copy of the following document:

To: His Eminence The Most Eminent Vitaly,
Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York, The First Hierarchy of the ROCOR
(and) To the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.
cc: to all the ruling Hierarchs of ROCOR.

Most Eminent Vladyko Vitaly!
Beloved Brothers in the Lord!

On October 13/26, 2000, the Sacred Sobor of our Church adapted an Appeal to the Serbian Patriarch Pavle which contained a request to [the latter, that he] "participate in [bringing about] the desired drawing together" over the long term, and the "spiritual merger between the two separated parts of the Russian Church – that [part] which is within the Homeland and that [part] which has found itself abroad".

In this way was a document adopted which could be viewed as being an official declaration of the new course of ROCOR – of a course of [ROCOR's] passing "under the omofo" of "the Moscow Patriarchate".

Without embarking upon an analysis of this letter's ecclesiological essence, I accept full responsibility in declaring that my Orthodox conscience does not permit me to be reconciled with the very thought of any possibility of our uniting with those who are guilty of apostasy. To say nothing of the fact that the Appeal was addressed to the leader of a religious organization that has fallen into the ecumenistic heresy which was condemned in council by ROCOR in 1983, that anathema subsequently being confirmed in 1998. In other words, we find ourselves beseeching heretics to assist us in throwing ourselves into the embrace of apostates.

Is this not [a form of] delusion?!

Or, perhaps, the Lord, due to our sins, has deprived us all reason?!

Having permitted myself [to commit] an unforgivable blunder by [signing the aforementioned] most shameful document, I sincerely repent [of having done so], and hereby disavow [my signature upon] it.

By God's Mercy, humble Veniamin [Benjamin], Bishop of Chernomoriye [The Black Sea region] and Kuban --
(signature)
Yekaterinodar, 21/01-2/02, 2001".

One hopes that this courageous example of His Grace Benjamin will inspire also other hierarchs of the ROCOR to follow him. It is a pity that Bishop Benjamin at the same time did not disavow his signing of the treacherous Council Epistle. Nevertheless, a prostration is due him for his honest and passionate statement.

Shortly afterwards, another document was published, a statement made by Bishop Agathangel, also addressed to Metropolitan Vitaly with copies to all hierarchs:

30/01-2/12, 2001, #10 (84)

To His Eminence, the Most-Eminent Vitaly,
First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad
cc: the members of the ROCOR Bishops' Sobor

Your Eminence, Your Graces!

The Epistle to Serbian Patriarch Pavle that was adopted by our Synod of Bishops completely contradicts other conciliar documents also adopted by us. On the one hand, we condemn ecumenism and rightly declare that it is an obstacle to rapprochement with the Moscow Patriarchate, while on the other we direct the aforementioned epistle to the representative of a Church which has sunk more deeply in said heresy [ecumenism] than even Moscow ([the truth of] which [statement] is supported by many facts).

While fully upholding the former acts of our Sobors which condemned the heresy of ecumenism, I consider it my duty to join myself to the declaration of Vladyka Veniamin and [likewise] remove my signature from the letter to the Serbian Patriarch.

Your humble partner in prayer Bishop Agathangel

The statement by Bishop Agathangel acknowledges the more sincere and passionate declaration of Bishop Benjamin.

At the same time there was also published another document, signed by Bishop Barnabas:

Cannes, Jan. 30/Feb. 12, 2001

The Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs, Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom.

An Open Letter to the Editors of "Vestnik" [The Herald]

the official organ of the German Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

Copies: to His Eminence, Metropolitan Vitaly, the First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, To their Graces,

the Archbishops and Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Dear Members of the Editorial Staff [of "Vestnik"]:

Kindly permit me to address you through this letter.

In the Russian language edition of issue # 5-6 of "Vestnik", for the year 2000, you published some of the documents that have been ratified at the last [ROCOR] Bishops' Sobor. Which took place in October of the year past.

You erroneously published my name on page 4, beneath the "Epistle of the Bishops' Sobor..." of October 14/27 – which, in actual fact I **had not signed as a matter of principle**. In course of the sessions of the Bishops' Sobor I stated openly that I viewed – and, to this day I continue to view – as being unacceptable the appending of my signature to an "Epistle" directly opposed to the entire confessional service, "in a strange land," of the Russian [Orthodox] Church Abroad.

Recently, our brother-bishop, Evtikhii, reproached me on this account, [doing so] completely without cause and [without] due-consideration [of the matter].

Let me remind you that – according to the "Regulations concerning the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad" – holding a distinctive personal opinion is the privilege of a Bishop who takes part only in sessions of *the Synod of Bishops* (see section 3, paragraph 23), but not [in those of a Sobor].

I venture to bring to the attention of your Editorial Office that this is not the first case of the "Vestnik" misinforming its readership.

For instance, in "Vestnik" # 6, 1994, pp. 3-5, there are no names whatsoever listed beneath the "Epistle of the 1994 ROCOR Bishops' Sobor" and the photograph of those [hierarchs] who participated in it, as though all the participants had ratified and signed it.

But I hereby inform you that this was not so!

The Epistle, proclaiming a "*living and vital exchange*" – "*in the course of fair and impartial dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate, sans prejudices or mutual reproaches*" – again, **for reasons of principle** — went unsigned both by His Grace Archbishop Antony (Sinkewicz) of Los Angeles and your obedient servant. All the hierarchs who took part in the Sobor were notified of this fact in writing, by responses to the 6 questions that had been posed by our First Hierarchy, concerning the potential for negotiation with the MP. But "the Sobor resolves issues... by majority opinion" (section 2, paragraph 7 of the aforementioned "Regulations") , i.e. by simple majority.

Dear associates;

Permit me to take advantage of this open letter, and – through the instrumentality of your wonderful "Vestnik" – to inform our First Hierarchy, Metropolitan Vitaly, and all the right reverend archbishops and bishops of our Church, of the official withdrawal of my signature, which – through carelessness and inattention – I affixed to the October 13/26, 2000 Bishops' Sobor Appeal "to His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle of Serbia".

Incidentally, for some strange reason, your publication completely "failed to notice" the said Appeal amidst the statements that were ratified by the Bishops' Sobor, and did not print it in the aforementioned issue!

Initially, several of the Hierarchs and myself thought this Appeal to be merely a polite expression of gratitude to the present Serbian Patriarch for the reception which had been accorded to His Grace, Archbishop Mark, by the believing faithful of Serbia. In the final analysis, an entirely different Appeal was read at the Sobor – one having nothing in common with said supposed expression of gratitude.

Wherefore, fatherlike, I entreat and petition you to inform your readers of the errors that have been noted in your publications, and to publish this letter in the pages of your respected widely read "Vestnik" of the German Diocese.

I remain one who wishes you well in your labors and endeavors,

Bishop Barnabas of Cannes

Will the Synod now suspend all three of these hierarchs for not bearing witness to the "inner unity and unshakable stand in the truth of the Church"?

RESPONSES TO THE OCTOBER ROCOR COUNCIL OF BISHOPS CONTINUE

On January 21/February 3, 2001 Priest Andrew Kencis published on the Internet an English version of the excellent letter by Archpriest Constantine Fedoroff addressed to Metropolitan Vitaly regarding the treacherous Council of ROCOR Bishops in October of last year.

By committing to paper his letter of 6 pages to the Metropolitan in which Fr. Fedoroff describes the traditional path of the Church Abroad and reflects upon the treacherous decisions of the Council of Bishops regarding Sergianism and the MP, Fr. Constantine appeals to the faithful to support the Metropolitan's stand and give him their moral support. One might guess that he was urged to do this by the Metropolitan's post Counciliar epistle in which he stressed his faithfulness to the former principles of the Church Abroad.

Yet, from a very reliable source in Switzerland, it became known that Archpriest Constantine Fedoroff was suspended by an ukase signed by the Metropolitan himself. A temporary confessor for the Lesna Convent was appointed, the former Chief of Jerusalem Ecclesiastical Mission Archimandrite Theodosius (Clare), who sold to the RF/MP property which belongs to the Palestine Society and which included on its land the Zacheas fig tree!

Unfortunately, the very latest statement of the Synod of Bishops signed by Metropolitan Vitaly demonstrates that he is

unable to withstand any pressure from the aggressive influence of the conspirators.

In connection with publication in our "Church News" # 10 (92) of two ukases by Bishop Evtikhy suspending 3 clergy in St. Petersburg, we received the explanation of Archimandrite Alexis (Makrinov), because of our questions about the unreturned "communion cloth [antimins], received from the heretical bishop".

Fr. Alexis informs us that "fortunately we have never served with communion cloths "consecrated" by Evtikhy. We serve on a communion cloth consecrated by Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory, under whom Evtikhy probably would not be even an junior deacon, and also on communion cloths given by Metropolitan Vitaly in 1992, which we consider to belong to the holy and true Orthodox ROCOR at that time when she was not disgraced by present leaders".

As a result of two ukases from Bishop Evtikhy suspending the three clergy, they reacted with the following document:
"To Bishop Evtikhy (Kourochkin), Provisional administrator of St. Petersburg and North-Russian diocese.

ANNOUNCEMENT

After careful examination of the documents adapted by the last Council of Bishops which took place in last October of the current year, under which is your signature, we, the undersigned clergy of the St. Petersburg and the North-Russian diocese of the ROCOR inform you of the following:

From the above mentioned documents it follows indisputably that your intentions are to systematically work toward unification (unia) with the Moscow Patriarchal false church, infected with the heresy of ecumenism. From the Holy Scripture and Orthodox Tradition we know that the Lord judges not only works, but also intentions. When you affixed your signature under the documents of the Council of Bishops of ROCOR of the year 2000 and confessed the heretical Moscow Patriarchate to be "the Church", you publicly and openly expressed your wish to enter in unity with ecumenists, participated in their heresy, offered it to the faithful as true Orthodox teaching and in this way fell under the anathema of the Council of Bishops of the year 1983.

As a result of the above and wishing to wall of ourselves and flock entrusted to us by God from heresy and in accord with the conditions mentioned in the 15th canon of the First and Second Councils of Constantinople, starting with November 11/24, 2000 we do separate ourselves from you.

Archimandrite Alexis (Makrinov), Hieromonk Barsanouphy (Kapralov), Priest Paul Simakov".

In response to our note about the three St. Petersburg fathers in which it was stated by us that they "left the Church Abroad due to the fall of their episcopate into the heresy" Fr. Alexis writes: "unfortunately this is not the first time that we have to state that we are not walking out of and exiting from the ROCOR, but do so only from those who committed this "October" putsch, who obviously, as has been documented, are carrying out a secret plan over several decades of selecting pro-Moscow and pro-ecumenicist clergy and raised a weakened flock – all those Anthony Bartosheviches, Mark Arndts we proclaim to be the enemies of our Church – the true Russian Church – Catacomb and Abroad."

Unfortunately, in this case it is hard to follow the father archimandrite's logic: why does he select as a traitor only one living member of the Council? After all, ALL the members of the Council, excluding only Bishop Barnabas, signed the ill-starred Epistle and he also signed the treacherous letter to Serbian Patriarch, just a few days ago annulling his signature.

There is also another reaction to the decisions of the Council. This is also from three clergymen from the St. Petersburg diocese who remained in the bosom of the ROCOR. In the publication "Herald of the Russian Line" # 3 (2000) they published an article entitled "SCHISMATICS ARE UNACCEPTABLE":

"Even now we must fulfill our historic mission of standing for the Truth, until all who have been redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are convinced of it." -- From the Epistle of the Council of ROCOR Bishops.

After the recently convened Council of Bishops of the ROCOR, in a number of parishes of our Church, in particular in St. Petersburg and the North-Russian Diocese, some sad events occurred. In particular, a group of priests of our Church, unhappy with the decisions of the last Council of Bishops of ROCOR, separated themselves and created a self-appointed "Diocesan Council of St. Petersburg and North Russian Diocese." Some lay people of our diocese also discontinued communion with the ROCOR.

In connection with this we, the priests and clergymen of St. Petersburg Diocese of ROCOR, want to declare, that we do not recognize the so called "Diocesan Council" created by the group which has separated itself and we do not approve of their actions, which result in schism. As we have been in the bosom of the Orthodox Church Abroad, so we remain. We also admonish all the members of our Church not to be scandalized by the latest events and plead for a resolution by deliberation of the problems which face our Church on its way toward its Church-wide council.

There is no doubt, that the ROCOR, which used to be a beacon of Orthodoxy and preserver and living bearer of Orthodox Tradition, faces new and serious problems. Documents adopted at the last Council of Bishops are an effort to solve them. The problems connected with the relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate and so-called "global Orthodoxy" should be discussed in full, as we believe only at a Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, a Council that would take into consideration the opinions of parishes abroad and in Russia, their clergy and laity.

In no way do we approve of those who are "zealous not according to reason", who at the present difficult moment for our Church act without thinking, without the necessary good sense and patience. At the same time we believe that a

number of documents adopted by the Council of Bishops, as well as tendencies which were outlined in them, should be the subject of deliberations by the whole Church. The majority of us came to the ROCOR from the Moscow Patriarchate in the nineties and we know of the situation in the MP not from rumors, and besides, we live in Russia. Therefore, especially in connection with the aforementioned events in our diocese, we consider it necessary to express our opinions regarding the problems which are raised by the documents from the Council of Bishops. As opposed to the group which separated itself from our Church, we do not affirm that the Moscow Patriarchate will never be able to rid itself of the consequences of her captivity by the Soviet government during the years of the Communist rule. Everything is in God's hands. No one can pre-decide the result of the struggle which now is going on in Russia, but all the more this puts a responsibility upon us. Not in the least does salvation depend also upon the ROCOR, which all these years has preserved the genuine confession in conditions of freedom. Thus would the miracle of resurrection be genuine and not a pitiful caricature of true resurrection.

Today, the canonization of the Holy New Martyrs and Imperial Martyrs has happened in the MP (although partial and with serious distortions). This is why we believe the behavior of those who separated from the Church is incorrect. Christians are distinguished not only by love to their neighbors, but also by love for their enemies. As we see from the lives of the saints, love toward enemies in the first place consists in witnessing the truth, despite the temptations of this world.

The ROCOR will preserve her faithful and multiply, if it remains truthful to the cause of salvation not only of her parishioners, but also of the Russian people, even of the whole world. The "podvig (feat) of Russianness" which has been spoken of lately on several occasions, consists, as we believe, not only in the preservation and development of the centuries' old traditions of the Russian Church of sanctity and culture. This podvig presumes a responsibility for all the Russian Orthodox, including those who belong to the MP. The politics of "populism," which is fostered by the leaders of the MP, is a new distortion of true Christianity. This political agenda today (and the ideology behind it) is a continuation and development of "Sergianism", a metamorphosis of the very same illness. We think one should today speak particularly of it aloud. Other problems, such as the heresy of ecumenism and "Sergianism" per se, although definitely important, are but secondary in comparison with the main position of the MP of claiming to be the "national' Church.

And indeed, in the "nation" (we have in mind a wide circle, including unbelievers and "the elect") there are always those who stand for ecumenism, and those who are against it. Therefore we see that the MP is ready to simultaneously participate in the ecumenist common sin yet also deny and even condemn ecumenism. The very same is valid also for "Sergianism" (understood as a dependence of the Church on secular authorities). Verbally the MP simultaneously will affirm her independence (because there are some who support such dependence) and at the same time will listen to every word of the authorities and follow it (not only because it is profitable, but also because throughout the "nation" it is acceptable and the government is "elected by the people").

So, the practice and ideology of a transformation of the MP into the "nation-wide" Church should be condemned. The Church can and should lead the people, liberate Russia from the darkness in which she was during the Communist period, but this can happen only after the Church in Russia has been resurrected. The mission of the ROCOR, including her parishes in Russia, we believe in this respect to be enormously important and answerable.

Therefore, when today there are deliberations about the possibility of restoring liturgical communion with the MP, when because raising this matter started the pot boiling and some hotheads, unable to bear the weight of responsibility, fall into judgment of our Church and live for schism. We want to declare that we remain truthful to our vocation to stand in the truth and for the salvation of our much suffering country. We call upon all children of our Church to think over the problems raised, not to hurry into a rapprochement with the MP, but also not to deny the witness of Christ to those who belong to the MP. This is how we understand the ultimate meaning of the "Epistle" of the Council of Bishops addressed to us.

The rector of the Holy New Martyr St. Elisabeth Community – Archpriest Vladimir Savitsky, Hieromonk Valentin (Salomakha), Deacon Nicolas Savchenko, Reader George Benevich".

This article, published by these clergymen, demonstrates that despite being with the ROCOR for some 10 years they have not come to understand her principles and traditions. Otherwise we would not read what is a real "Russian salad" of contradictory thoughts.

The most important problems, "such as ecumenism and Sergianism" per se, although definitely important, are secondary in comparison with the main goal of the MP to become the 'national Church', we are told by the authors of this intricate composition! It is very strange to hear from a respected archpriest that heresy in the Church might be a secondary matter. For what is a secondary question for him and his co-signers, indeed is the prime one. Besides, these clergy do not distinguish between a difference of disagreement on matters of principle, of faith and relations with personal enemies!

The newspapers in Russia continue to react to the Council's Epistle. Thus the newspaper "Segodnia" ("Today") of January 6th in discussing the results of the Council and the possibility of a rapprochement between the MP and the ROCOR writes that "...for the Russian intelligentsia of Brezhnev's period, the clergy of ROCOR seemed to be an attractive alternative to the hierarchs of the official Church. All the more was it a shock in March 1992, when the first Administrator of the ROCOR parishes in Russia, Bishop Barnabas (Prokofiev) organized the first press conference in Moscow and next to him sat Dimitry Vasiliev, the chief of the odious national patriotic front "Pamiat" (Memory) who became the closest

associate of the vладыka from abroad. After that the possibility for expanding the ROCOR in Russia had not a chance..."

Following this report it is stated that "more and more of 'the zarubezhniki' (those abroad) step forward to unite with the ROC. Already in the foreseeable future a schism within the Church Abroad cannot be excluded, dividing them into fundamentalists and 'moderates', wherein the latter will be in the majority. Among the episcopate the 'fundamentalists' in the ROCOR are barely supported by the 90 year old Metropolitan Vitaly and the above mentioned Bishop Barnabas" (emphasized by "Ch. N."). At the last Council of Bishops, in 2000, the critics of the MP were substantially quieted by the canonization of the New Martyrs received with 'sympathetic good will' and it was proclaimed that the council welcomed "substantive steps toward the healing of Church life in Russia".

REPRISAL OF ARCHBISHOP BARNABAS AGAINST THOSE WHO DISAGREE

Through the Internet there were published two of ukases of Ambrose, Archbishop of Western Europe, suspending of Priest Nicholas Semenoff.

#115/B.A./W

St. Seraphim of Sarov, Jan. 2/15, 2001

By fax and registered letter

Brussels

To: Priest Nicholas Semenoff

Church Warden Peter Kotchubey

Parishioners of the Memorial Church of the Much Suffering Job,

UKASE

I was privately informed about the notice to attend the extraordinary general parish meeting of A.S.B.I. on January 20th last.

The call for this meeting is not valid according to ecclesiastical and civil regulations, in particular, because the last meeting decided to call a new meeting on January 24th, with different agenda, the preparation of which I should have been informed about, but was not.

Therefore I take the following measures:

Meeting scheduled for January 20th is annulled;

Meeting scheduled for January 24th is transferred to another later date;

Priest N. Semenoff is suspended;

Church Warden P.V. Kotchubey is dismissed;

Temporarily the church services are suspended;

The pastoral care is entrusted to Priest Steven Weerts;

Keys from the church are to be given to Fr. Steven;

Fr. Nicholas, immediately after receiving this ukase by fax, is to send a copy of it to all addresses of persons

Who received a notice about the extraordinary meeting to be held on January 20th ;

The copy of this order is to be posted on the church's door;

All the addressed persons mentioned in this ukase are to be informed that the disobedience to these orders will

Bring them under the ecclesiastical punishment:

May the Lord help us all!

(Signature) Bishop Ambrose

Copy personally to Priest Steven Weerts

(diocesan seal)

Because of this illiterate and outrageous ukase of the suspension of the rector of the Memorial Church by Archbishop Ambrose and suspension of services just days before the Feast of the Epiphany – about 150 parishioner were deprived of attending this major church feast and thus received no Holy Water!

If it were not certain that this ukase was issued by a ROCOR bishop, one could easily think it came from the Moscow Patriarchate!

And here is another Ukase by Archbishop Ambrose, in no way any better than the previous one:

#115-2/B.A./W

St. Seraphim of Sarov, 2/15 January 2001

UKASE

For an arbitrary alteration in ecclesiastical hierarchical subordination, disobedience to ecclesiastical and conciliar ukases and misappropriation of the rector's position, Priest Nicholas Semenoff is SUSPENDED from performing services. While retaining the right to receive Holy Communion in the priestly manner, Fr. N. Semenoff has no right to perform any actions connected to his priestly rank, in particular, in church service, pastoral or office aspects. Besides fulfillment of the points 7, 8 and 9 of the decision regarding the enclosed Ukase #115/BA/W and a report to Fr. Steven about the current pastoral affairs, Fr. Nicholas is to abstain from using any church or parish means and property, exclusive of his January salary and temporary use of the church-parish for living. Also, while this ukase is in effect, Fr. Nicholas is to not wear his pectoral clergyman's cross.

Fr. Nicholas is advised that in case of his disobedience to this ukase, he will finally deprive himself of the priestly rank.
May the Lord help him!
Bishop Ambrose

Without any doubt, Archbishop Ambrose has never held in his hands the "Statute of the ROCOR", otherwise he would not publish such an outrageous and illiterate ukase disregarding his own rights and even ordinary Russian grammar!

In the 5th section (concerning dioceses and diocesan bishops) in paragraph 47, point 26, it is stated that the bishop "is rector of his cathedral church". In the footnote to paragraph 49, it is stated that "the residence of a diocesan bishop has to be in the diocesan city, in which is the cathedral of the diocese"

There is no doubt that Archbishop Ambrose bears the title of Bishop of Geneva and not of Brussels and therefore his pretense to being rector of the Memorial Church in Brussels has no grounds.

Any rector of the parish has the right to appoint a date for a parish meeting at a time he feels is necessary and no blessing of the bishop for this is required. He has the right only to confirm or not to confirm the minutes of the meeting.

But regarding the fashionable new practice of the Church Abroad of defrocking a priest by a single bishop's resolution after a suspended priest "did deprive himself of priestly rank" – it would be proper to suggest our hierarchs to take a look at the "Rudder" of the Ecumenical Councils. According to them a bishop is judged by at least 12 bishops, and a priest (according

to Canon 29 of the Council of Carthage) by six bishops plus the 7th – his own. Defrocking without investigation and judgment is not provided for by the canons. This is a new invention of our hierarchy over the last decade, which testifies to their canonical illiteracy!

Fr. Nicholas Semenoff has a wife and four children. Let us hope that his parishioners will make sure that he is not thrown out on the street with his family!

A LETTER AT "THE GORGEOUS DISTANCE" AND SAD STATISTICS

by Archpriest Michael Ardov

As is well known, the ambiguous (if not to say a treacherous) "Epistle by the Council of ROCOR Bishops to the beloved children of the Church in the fatherland and in the Diaspora" provoked a storm among the clergy and laity to whom it was addressed. It seems that the bishops who signed this letter did not expect such a stormy reaction, and a month after the conclusion of the Council, the First Hierarchy of ROCOR, Metropolitan Vitaly addressed the flock with his own epistle. This is a weak effort to smooth out the conciliar document, and in contradiction to obvious facts, to convince the "faithful children" the "Church Abroad has not changed her path".

To the credit of Metropolitan Vitaly – for a number of years, practically on his own, he has tried to stop the sliding of the Church Abroad into the abyss of ecumenism and to prevent the suicidal union of his jurisdiction with the Moscow Patriarchate. But there is a considerable defect: for all his life he looked at Russia in the "gorgeous distance" (this expression I have borrowed from Gogol). The Communists have long ago departed from the political scene, the Soviet government officially does not exist, but Metropolitan still never took the opportunity to visit his homeland. This is the reason which can explain why Vladyka Vitaly has illusory fantasies about contemporary Russian life. We read in his epistle:

"The Moscow Patriarchate was in total agreement with the Bolsheviks in USSR, who destroyed hundreds of thousands of faithful. Despite all this it was clear that it is impossible to separate the Russian people from Christ's Church. Pascha will remain forever as the main holiday. Red dyed eggs, kulich and cheese pascha decorate the paschal tables and even the state owned bakeries sell kulich under the name of rich bread".

But here is last year's magazine # 1 "Religio". It is a typical Patriarchal publication, which starts with the address by the so-called Patriarch Alexis II. Such magazines and newspapers have a tendency to exaggerate the role of the Church in the life of contemporary Russian society but there is no reason to suspect their malevolency. One of the articles published in "Religio" is in symphony with the Metropolitan's epistle: "Pascha – one of the most beloved holidays for Russians". Sadly the published figures shatter the First Hierarchy of the Church Abroad's illusions: the bright Resurrection of Christ by no means is the major holiday of our people. Also kulich on the "paschal tables" in no way testifies to the adherence of those feasting to the Orthodox Church. Judge for yourself. Here is a text from this publication:

The all-Russian Center for Research of the Common Opinion took an opinion poll about which holiday is preferred by Russian citizens. Of those questioned 81% named the most beloved holiday to be New Years. Then follow: ones own birthday or that of a girl/boy friend – 37%; the Day of Victory – 34%, March 8th – 23%; Christmas – 16%; November 7th -- 6%; May 1st – 5%; Russian Independence day – 2%; the Day of Constitution – 1%.

To the question: "Are you going to celebrate Pascha?" --- 84% answered positively. At the same time, only 5% were planning to go to the Midnight Service; 2% strictly observed Great Lent; 10% -- partially; 4% planned to fast during the Holy week, and 82% did not plan to fast at all. For the majority of Russian people – Pascha is only a national cultural holiday, with the keeping of certain traditions: for example the majority will color eggs (72%), 42% will bake kulich and 21% will buy them; 14% will bless their kulich in the church and 13% will make cheese Pascha.

Archpriest Fr. Nicholas (Secretary to Archbishop Valentin) sent us the following information:

According to a decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church on January 8/21, 2001, minutes # 10:

1. Bishop Hilarion of Sukhodolsk was renamed to Bishop of Smeliansk.
2. Abbot Geronty (Ryndenko) was consecrated to the vacant Sukhodolsk See, after elevation to archimandrite.
3. A clergyman of St. Xenia of Petersburg Church Abbot Jacob (Antonov) on the parish feast was elevated by Archbishop Valentine to the rank of archimandrite.
4. On December 22/Jan. 4th in the church of "The Joy of All Who Sorrow" was performed the right of nomination of Archimandrite Geronty (Ryndenko) to Bishop of Sukhodolsk. The nomination was performed by Valentin, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir, Theodore, Archbishop of Borisovo and Sanino and Hilarion, Bishop of Smeliansk.
5. On the day of the parish feast of St. Xenia of Petersburg, the above mentioned bishops on January 24/February 6th in the city of Sukhodolsk consecrated Archimandrite Geronty (Ryndenko) for Bishop of Sukhodolsk.

Bishop Geronty (Ryndenko) was born May 4th, 1946, in the village of Smirnovka, in the Sumsk Region in Ukraine. He has a higher education. From 1965 to 1968 he served in the army. In 1995 he was tonsured and ordained deacon and hierodeacon by Archbishop Lazarus (Zhurbenko). After Archbishop Lazarus was suspended by the Church Abroad, Hieromonk Geronty and several other clergy appealed to Archbishop Valentine to be accepted into his jurisdiction. After receiving a blessing to build a church, Hieromonk Geronty and Priest Appolon Antonov in the shortest time built a church.

6. On January 23/February 5, after the vigil service Priest Alexander (Smitchenko) was tonsured with the monastic name of Artemy, in honor of the Great Martyr Artemy. All the services were conducted in a festive and prayerful atmosphere by bishops with whom the local clergy concelebrated; also present were the Dean of the Caucasus, Mitered Archpriest George Novakovsky, also the Rector of St. Peter and Paul Church, (a town house of Suzdal Diocese) in village Sovietka, Hieromonk Artemy, Protodeacon Constantine and others.

At the same time we received copies of letters to the Synod of Bishops from their Graces Bishop Timothy of Orenburg and Hilarion of Smeliansk.

Bishop Timothy of Orenburg writes:

I request the following propositions be considered:

1. Due to his enormous work for the good of the Russian Church and in honor of 2000 years of Christianity His Eminence Archbishop Valentin be elevated to the rank of Metropolitan and be termed the future First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church if this does not contradict the canons and the Ukase of Patriarch Tikhon of Nov. 7/20, 1920 # 362.
2. Having no doubts that the Prelate Philaret (Voznesensky) is glorified by God, the Russian Orthodox Church must glorify this ever-memorable hierarch among the saints. With this act we will show to the true Orthodox Christians in the homeland and abroad the position of our Church.

Regarding the first point of letter by His Grace Bishop Timothy of Orenburg there is no doubt that this proposal in no way contradicts the canons or the decision of Patriarch Tikhon # 362. It can be misinterpreted only by some spiteful critics, who protest the very principle of the existence of the Russian Orthodox Church independent from the Moscow Patriarchate.

The second paragraph of the Patriarchal regulation speaks of the possibility that the activity of the Supreme Church Administration will cease to exist and then, the senior bishop "immediately enters in connection with the bishops of neighboring dioceses which are in similar conditions to form a Provisional Superior Church Administration, or a Metropolitan region or what ever else".

The third paragraph states: "The care to organize a Superior Church Administration for the whole group of dioceses who happened to be in the same situation, as is ordered in paragraph two, consists of indispensable duty of the senior Bishop in the rank of the group" (emphasized by "Ch. N.")

There is no doubt that now in Russia, where there are a number of dioceses which do not recognize the authority of the heretical Moscow Patriarchate, the need for a general administrative center, headed by the senior bishop with the rank of metropolitan – is a must.

A letter of Catacomb Bishop Hilarion states: "...I am very happy for the labors and decisions and all that was done by joint efforts on this council by the laborers of the Church.

Everything is fine: the glorification of the Diveyevo women and awards to clergy, and the shining and just appeal by Vlydyka Valentin in his Christmas word to those abroad... But there remained unfulfilled the most important thing – the restoration of the ecclesiastical administration of the ROAC – the Metropolitanate...

Indeed, it is now obvious and visible that those Abroad have lost the power of Divine Grace and the gravity of a good procession along the path of genuine Orthodoxy, as is clear from the decisions of the last Council of the year 2000. From that time on, the ROCOR has ceased to exist as the bearer of Orthodoxy, together with her hierarchs and leadership, who signed their desired rapprochement – that is, the switch to the path of the Moscow Patriarchate and because of that

became a sort of political-religious organization, which is looking for the way out of this bewitched situation.

Therefore, the Russian A[utonomous] Free Orthodox Church immediately needs a First Hierarch – a metropolitan, in order to restore the f u l n e s of ecclesiastical leadership.... All of us know that Divine Providence from the beginning chose Vladyka Valentin to be the instrument to restore in Russia the True Church of Christ and that he suffered much for making this step in fulfillment of the Providential Will... And now, despite his weakness from physical ailments, he has to carry out his ecclesiastical destiny to the end, as appointed by Divine Providence”.

FOLLOWING THE REPOSE OF JERUSALEM'S PATRIARCH DIODOROS I

As we briefly mentioned in our December's issue 9 (91 -- on December 6/19th of the last year the Jerusalem Patriarch Diodoros I passed away. For quite some time he had very stormy relations with the local Arabic population to the degree that some two years ago Arabs held several vociferous demonstrations against him. He was accused by them of selling to Israel real estate belonging to Arabs. The demonstrators yelled: "The Greeks didn't bring anything here from Greece!"

In addition, he was also accused of buying votes during the struggle for the Patriarchal throne.

But just recently, there was revealed a much more serious problem which started some two years ago.

According to the agency Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc. in the December issue of "Orthodox News", Patriarch Diodoros took to the grave a problem which will have to be solved by his successor/s.

The matter concerns the loss of \$16,000,000 supposedly received by the Patriarch from a Jewish charitable organization "Jewish National Fund" for the extension of a lease of a 107 acre property in the Western part of Jerusalem. The 99 year lease was to expire in 2051, but Israel didn't want to wait for 50 more years of the lease and offered a new lease – for 999 years!

It was believed that Patriarch Diodoros received these 16 million dollars and an additional 4 million were spent in payments to financial advisers, commissions and lawyers. When this affair became public knowledge, the Patriarch immediately declared that his signature on this document was forged and sued the participants. The Israeli police have already undertaken an investigation of the affair, but until it is resolved, no facts are available.

At the same time, the Jewish daily paper "Ma'ariv" reported that the police investigation revealed that the funds have been deposited in the name of the Patriarch and police were supposedly checking if this money was held in escrow. In another words, the Patriarch did not physically receive this money. But shortly before his repose, the Patriarch removed a key protagonist and this made it even harder to continue the investigation.

The selection of a new Patriarch is also proving very difficult. During the Palestinian uprisings, Patriarch very openly supported the Palestinians, although he also had good relations with Israeli government. He became one of the leading political figures in the Holy Land, as the head of the most ancient Church uniting under his authority also all sorts of heretics who call themselves Christians.

Now, with his repose, the political struggle in the Near East becomes more intense. The Patriarch is to be elected from among the 22 members the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher, but he must be acceptable to Israel, Greece and Jordan. The Moscow Patriarchate is also extremely interested in this election.

Archimandrite Theophilos, the head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Jerusalem Patriarchate announced that he has already informed all three governments of the process of election. Now the Synod is waiting for the responses of these governments, although, according to regulations, the Jordanian government is the only one which has the right to disapprove of the elected candidate. But at present, due to the new circumstances, even the Palestinian government has to approve the patriarchal candidate.

It is assumed, that the main candidate is Metropolitan Timothy, a former Moscow Patriarchate exchange student. He also has very good relations with Jerusalem's Mayor E. Olmert. Another candidate is Metropolitan Ireneos, an enthusiastic supporter of the Palestinian nationalists. At the same time, the Greek government is concerned that the new Patriarch be a native Greek and therefore very generously supports the Patriarchate from Athens and Moscow does the very same regarding her candidate.

It seems that now the ancient piety of Jerusalem has degenerated into the depravity and political machinations of the Holy Sepulcher Brotherhood which is actually the entire body of the episcopate and clergy of the Jerusalem Church.

ONE READS AND CANNOT BELIEVE ONE'S EYES!

A newspaper "Vremia MN" of January 17, 2001, published a short article signed INTERFAX, entitled "Snow Maiden is good, even if unbaptized". Despite the absurdity of this article, we publish this curiosity in full because one of the participants in it is Maximilian, Bishop of Vologda and Ustiug.

"The Orthodox Church recognized a Russian Morozko [Grandfather Frost] and will participate in the realization of the project 'Great Ustiug – birthplace of Grandfather Frost' because in his biography his baptism will be mentioned, the Bishop of Vologda and Ustiug, Maximilian, announced to reporters. 'If in this project Grandfather Morozko will be presented as a pagan god, we can not accept him' said the Bishop. Bishop Maximilian noted that the matter is not about 'immediately bring Moroz into the church and dunking him in the baptismal font. It will be sufficient for us if in the project's documents his Orthodoxy will be noted' said he (Emphasis by "CH. N.").

The project 'Velikii Ustiug – birthplace of Grandfather Frost' was proposed in 1999. At the same time Morozko was given a symbolic passport. In 2000 the Federal Fund made a grant of 2 million rubles to realize the project."

It would be interesting to know what portion of these 2 millions the bishops of Moscow Patriarchate received as a payment for this blasphemous slander of the Orthodox Church!

Also what does this comedy present: a proof of "the rebirth of the Russian people" (in which the Council of ROCOR bishops believes) or the total spiritual degeneration of the lay people and hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate?

STRUGGLE OF THE GREEK AMERICAN ARCHDIOCESE FOR INDEPENDENCE

The bulletin of the agency Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc. of December 9 reported a very serious disagreement between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Archdiocese in the USA, which for rather a long time has made no secret of wanting to separate from the Patriarchate and gain autonomy status from her. At present, the Greek Archdiocese is headed by Archbishop Demetrios.

It is no secret that the wealthy American Archdiocese provides a substantial amount of the finances the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Besides, at present there are no more than 3,000 Orthodox people in Turkey, while in America there is Greek flock of some 2 ½ million.

In an effort to gain independence, an Archdiocese committee drafted a new charter which was presented to Bartholomew for approval. In the new draft the Ecumenical Patriarchate would only approve one of the three candidates for the Archbishopate selected from among its own bishops by the diocese and also appoint and install new bishops for its vacant sees independently of the Patriarchate.

The correspondents of the newspaper "The National Herald" learned from patriarchal sources that "the Phanar is very concerned that if the proposed charter comes into the public domain there will be a great deal of pressure on the Phanar to ratify the charter as is, something which the Patriarchate is not willing to do -- which is the reason it is trying to stall and buy as much time as possible".

The members of the Committee of American Bishops went with the proposal to the Phanar to meet with Bartholomew. At the meeting Bartholomew declared that "the Mother Church has ministered for many years the Archdiocese in America... Don't rush. In time you will get what you want". By the way, he also had a laugh at the expense of "three year long terrible rule" of Archbishop Spyridon, who was (for a change) a reasonably correct New Calendar Bishop.

It seems that at times discussions were very heated because the patriarchal committee several times pleaded with the participants by all means not to speak to the press. As a result they issued an official press release.

"Today, on December 1st, a meeting took place at the Patriarchate between the 12 members delegation of the Archdiocese of America headed by Archbishop Demetrios and committee of the Ecumenical Patriarchate presided by Metropolitan Chysostomos of Ephesus. The topic of the discussing was the revision of the constitutional charter of the Archdiocese of America.

"The exchange of opinions as well as the discussion of the issue was very informative and took place in brotherly fashion in a constructive effort to serve the spiritual needs of the faithful people of the Archdiocese in America as well as to maintain the unity of the canonical bond between the Archdiocese of America and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We have decided that the meeting will resume again on February 20 to 22 here in Phanar".

This is a very typical tone of a press release in cases of substantial differences in views on both sides after the stormy discussions and in the hope for agreement in the near future.

It seems that Archbishop Demetrios is very careful to avoid any possibility of influence upon Greeks in the USA from the homeland.

From an internet post by reader Constantine Wright of February 2nd, a New York based Federation of Greek Associations invited Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens to be master of ceremonies for the Greek independence parade on March 25th. Archbishop Demetrios replied that "special reasons indicated a need for not realizing the visit to New York".

A BIT MORE ABOUT THE MONASTIC MUSICAL TROUPE

An internet bulletin from one of the MP parishes, Today's News reports that finally the Greek Orthodox Church took measures against the monastic musical troupe about which we published information in our issue 10 (92).

According to this information, Archimandrite Nectarios informed his archbishops that he is retiring from the position of abbot (but not from the Greek Church) and at the same time is changing the status of his community from a monastery to a "brotherhood", to remove it from a direct supervision of hierarchy.

The Athens Synod issued a statement in which they called the monks behavior "unseemly". "(This behavior) is not consistent with the long Orthodox monastic tradition nor in line with the modesty and distinction that characterizes the Orthodox monastic ideal". Yet, Archimandrite Nectarios believes that the displeasure of the Synod is a wish "to control us financially and otherwise... I will not betray my monks. They have worked their fingers to the bone to make this barren land a monastery".

Archimandrite Nectarios is extremely sad that this move of the Synod was initiated by Archbishop Christodoulos, who in

the beginning was very supportive of his group.

EPISCOPALIAN EUCHARISTIC PRACTICES AND THE RISK OF INFECTION

The bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of January 17th reports that the Episcopalians are very concerned about being infected by some sort of disease when receiving "communion" from a common chalice. Therefore, many have begun to avoid taking communion. The Anglican (Episcopalian) Church in Canada published scientific research on this matter in a booklet written by the cardiologist Dr. David Gould entitled "Eucharistic Practice and the Risk of Infection". In some churches they commune under two species: wine and bread. Some people, afraid of infection, dip the host into wine. The Doctor claims that this technique to avoid infection is much worse than to drink from a common cup, because hands are covered with all sorts of germs and the hosts dipped by hand into wine is more dangerous than just drinking.

The Anglican Priest Dan Ash said that "the study was a response to a fair bit of concern here and there throughout the church about safety of the common cup and that largely arose through fear of aids".

Dr. Gould reports that this is by far not the first time there has been such concern over this. As early as 1917 people began to worry because of an influenza epidemic, but the first such concern was registered already in the 16th century. He writes: "It is a myth that the mouth is more dangerous than the hand. Medically we know that hands are much worse transmitters of infection than lips. Our mothers always told us to wash our hands before eating because our hands pick up germs".

Therefore, Dr. Gould defends the ancient manner of communion from the cup and believes that there is no way one can be infected in this manner. But he also warned that those who have aids should restrain themselves from communion from the cup, because not only might they infect others, but because of their own weak immune system they can easily become a prey to infection. He also believes that communion only in the form of bread is still less dangerous and priests should warn the faithful to abstain from communion when they have a bad cold or influenza. The risk of infection is lessened when the cup is wiped by the cloth.

One must think that these precautionary measures are the result of the fact that the majority of Episcopalians (and Roman Catholics as well) – long ago ceased to believe that communion is of the true Body and Blood of Christ!