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**EPISTLE FROM HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN VITALY, FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROCOR
(Unofficial translation)**

Venerable Archpastors!

Beloved Fathers, Brothers and Sisters!

It is with the aim of preserving peace and unity among us that I address you again as the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. I believe that it is my duty to voice my opinion about the situation that has resulted from the Council of Bishops that took place in October 2000.

While I recognize the Council of Bishops as the supreme ruling body of our Church, to whom I, as the First Hierarch, am also subordinated, I wish to remind [all] that no Church authority can lay claim to infallibility in matters of Truth. History is replete with examples of entire Local Churches being infected with heresies and other spiritual ailments for very long periods of time and this being reflected in conciliar decisions. In such cases subsequent councils had to revoke incorrect decisions of preceding councils.

It is with great sadness that we now see the turmoil and temptation among our clergy and laity that have been caused by the Epistle and decisions of the Council of Bishops of the ROCA.

It is also with much regret that we have to admit that some of our bishops now have taken it upon themselves to embark upon a new course for our Church and that this new course is at odds with the one which was handed down to us by our predecessors.

While I cannot on my own correct that which was done, neither can I further remain silent when I see how the consequences of our mistakes are disturbing the spiritual life of our flock and causing disruption. I find it imperative to convene a new Council as soon as possible which will have to critically assess the main decisions and documents which were adopted and which will have the legal right to annul some of our decisions.

After much consideration we have concluded that some of the decisions of our Council were mistaken – in particular those which reflected an attempt to come closer to the world ecumenist community globally and to engage in unwarranted contact with the Moscow Patriarchate in particular. This has been, in particular, reflected in the following documents and statements of the Council:

The so-called "Social Doctrine" of the Moscow Patriarchate is a purely Roman-Catholic conceptualization which is foreign to the Orthodox Church and which, regardless of possibly well-meaning intentions, holds nothing profitable for the Orthodox Christian. This Doctrine does not reflect any repentance for past mistakes and in no way does it cross out the treacherous Declaration of 1927.

The "glorification" of the Holy New Martyrs by the Moscow Patriarchate, which was conceded under pressure from pious people and which was accompanied by numerous humiliating disclaimers which totally deny the eschatological significance of the Tsar, cannot be a cause of joy or consolation for us. We all know that the Holy Imperial Martyrs suffered precisely for their royal service. Their slaying was part of a wider program to destroy the God-established Orthodox state. With its compromises and lies about the Imperial Martyrs and with its refusal to recognize the spiritual feat (podvig) of the Tsar's servants, the Moscow Patriarchate deliberately draws its flock away from the correct spiritual understanding of the crime committed. The Moscow Patriarchate, which participated in the persecution of the Confessors, now, without any repentance, glorifies them! It is impossible to characterize this in any other way than as "spiritual cynicism" which is completely unacceptable in the Church. We must also note that this same seal of deception lies upon the "glorification" of the New Martyrs in which the Patriarchate shamefully ignored the martyr Metropolitan Joseph pf Petrograd.

We do not share the belief of some of our brothers about the "spiritual revival" which allegedly is taking place in Russia. According to the information we are receiving, what is happening in Russia is not a "spiritual revival" but only a "gilding of golden cupolas" of churches that, according to St. Ambrose of Optino, it will be impermissible to attend. In this context, we pray and we endeavor to spiritually strengthen those of our small communities that, regardless of the corrupt post-Soviet laws and numerous difficulties they must face, remain steadfastly in our Church.

The creation of a Commission "on Unity" with the Moscow Patriarchate has to be unequivocally denounced as a mistake of the Council of Bishops. There can be no such Committee as there is no object for its work.

The Serbian Church received us as homeless refugees in 1920 and, following the 39th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, recognized the canonical status of our Russian Church. For this we will always remain deeply thankful and in debt to her. But following the Second World War, the Church that continued to exist under the Communist rule of Tito could no longer be considered to be the same Church as the Church of His Holiness Patriarch Varnava that had offered sanctuary to the Russian refugees. Her submission to worldly rulers and the participation in the inter-faith Ecumenist movement does not allow us to ask to remain in communion with the Serbian Patriarchate, currently headed by Patriarch Pavle.

It saddens us to recognize that in our times, when the course of apostasy has reached new heights of destructiveness, the Council's Epistle did not call upon the faithful to triple their vigilance of this course; we are also pained to admit that recent new nominations to the cathedras of Western-European and Russian dioceses resulted in so much distress and troubles.

Our pastors and our pious flock have always stood side by side with their Bishops. This was the strength of the Russian Orthodox Church. Pastors are not simply irresponsible implementers of the orders of their higher Church hierarchy, but

they are in the first ranks of the servants of Christ and His children. They are not bureaucrats who can be directed only by orders and who can be held in submission with threats. They are servants of our Lord, as we all are. They are our life-force and we must protect them as the apple of our eye and never let them fall into despair and leave into schism, so we do not share with them this terrible responsibility.

I, as the fourth First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, am following the same direction as the blessed Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and my closest predecessor the Metropolitan Philaret, whose incorrupt relics were found in 1998, which is a sign from Above of the truthfulness of the path he followed all his life. I therefore appeal to you all to remain patient and to avoid any hasty conclusions or actions. We are living in difficult times. And the enemy of our salvation is always ready to catch us in his nets. I therefore appeal again to you "fear not little flock (Luke 12: 32) our Lord is with us! And if our Lord is with us, who is against us? Do not forget that the most frightening thing for us is to abandon the Truth, that is, to abandon Christ".

June 22nd, 2001 Metropolitan Vitaly, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad
St. Cyril of Antioch

In handwriting: "I ask all priests to read this Epistle from the ambo and to distribute it among their parishioners."

This excellent Epistle of the First Hierarch (which under present conditions should be considered as his testament to the flock still faithful to the historical course of the ROCOR) provoked immediate reactions.

Only three days after the Epistle was published, the Deputy Secretary of the Synod sent from Florida the following:

Statement from the Chancery of the Synod of Bishops
13/26 June, 2001 Martyr Aquilina, Martyr Antonina

On 10/23 June 2001, I discovered a text on the Internet entitled "An Encyclical Epistle" of His Eminence, Metropolitan Vitaly, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Since I am a permanent member of our Synod, Deputy Secretary of the Synod and a hierarch who knows our Metropolitan well, and since I have had the honor to live with him for many years under the same roof at the Synod Residence, I am able to state with full authority:

The Metropolitan did not compose the text of the "Encyclical Epistle". Besides its language and style, the following serves as proof of this:

- a) Our Vladyka writes Russian in old orthography and has always stressed his disdain for the new orthography;
- b) At one of recent sessions of the Synod of Bishops, Vladyka Metropolitan assured the members of the Synod that he would not address the flock with epistles without prior discussion with the members of the Synod;
- c) The "Encyclical Epistle" contains contradictions. At the beginning of the Epistle the Metropolitan maintains that he is a subject to the directives of the Council of Bishops, while at the end of the Epistle he, for all practical purposes, abrogates all the decisions of the most recent Council of Bishops.

From the foregoing it follows that the First Hierarch signed a document written by someone else, possibly under pressure from a group of clergymen led by Bishop Barnabas, forgetting that they were suspended from serving, and also that the Metropolitan is unaware of the meaning of this "Epistle."

I do not intend to comment here on this document, but intend rather to inform our God-loving flock that this Epistle will be studied and discussed in the most serious manner at the next session of the Synod of Bishops. I also wish to remind the authors of this Epistle, who have palmed this document off on the Metropolitan, that, according to the Constitution of our Church, the Council of Bishops is the highest administrative organ.

Bishop Gabriel, Deputy Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

It is interesting to note that in the Internet version of the Russian original of this statement, such words as First Hierarch, Metropolitan or Bishops (Barnabas) are not capitalized!!

In order to calm Bishop Gabriel's concerns regarding the authenticity of the Metropolitan's Epistle, which originally was written in new orthography, we have just received a copy of the same Epistle, written on the old orthography and under the letterhead of the Synod of Bishops. Perhaps the Deputy Secretary will eventually recognize the document signed by the President of the Synod of Bishops as authentic?

Only two days passed after the official Internet publication of the Statement by Bishop Gabriel, when it was followed by a letter from Mark, Archbishop of Berlin and Germany, who on June 12th wrote to him: "I believe that in general this text is acceptable. But in the beginning I would include the 'so-called Encyclical Epistle'." He made numerous other suggestions to Bishop Gabriel and from this letter it is quite obvious that prior to publication there was an exchange of opinions about Metropolitan's Epistle between the two Hierarchs.

On the same date there was published a Statement by Ambrose, Bishop of Geneva and Western Europe which is very similar in style and content with that of Bishop Gabriel.

This hierarch published the following:

Statement to the Clergy and Flock of the Western Europe Diocese

"#289/BAW

June 15/28, 2001

Martyrs Vitus, Modest and Kriscenty

Among our flock there rumors are abroad which create unrest within our Church, unverified information and even texts of dubious origin, which nevertheless carry the signature of our First Hierarch and which refer to decisions which are beyond his personal competence.

It is each pastor's duty according to his means to struggle against these pernicious attitudes and to fence off their flock from all sorts of temptations.

Due to hierarchical structure of the Church, information that directly concerns our Diocese has to be issued exclusively from the lawful hierarch installed by the supreme Ecclesiastical Powers.

The statements or decisions that are being spread by the suspended clerics who created a schism, or parishioners deceived by them, are to be considered as false and invalid. And those who promote these fictitious documents become accomplices in a crime against the Church of Christ.

On the other side of this statement (in Russian and French) signed by Bishop Ambrose, was printed the statement signed by Bishop Gabriel!

STATEMENT BY HIS GRACE BARNABAS, BISHOP OF CANNES

Bishop Barnabas feels it is necessary to express his deep bewilderment in connection with unbelievable, contradictory rumors that come from various sides. They either question the authenticity of the Epistle of the Most Rev. Metropolitan VITALY, or insist that Bishop Barnabas by fraud and coercion obtained a signature from the First Hierarch.

In connection with these next ill-intentioned enemies of our Holy Church, Bishop Barnabas considers it is his duty, in order to console the faithful children of the Church, to commit to paper the following:

A group of faithful clergymen was PERSONALLY INVITED BY VLADYKA MATROPOLITAN in order to discuss the catastrophic situation into which the Church Abroad was put after the last Council in October. Under such circumstances every person of sound mind is able to understand the insidiousness of those who impudently insist that the signature was obtained by intrigue and under pressure. In other words, they accuse others of what they themselves are guilty of and not for the first time!

The meeting was held in Mansonville (Canada) and lasted for three days. Besides the exchange of opinions at the dinner table, there were five working meetings, each lasting two hours. Besides Vladyka Metropolitan there were five clergy present: Bishop Barnabas, Archimandrite Sergius, Archpriest Sergius Petrov, Priest Nikita Orlov and Protodeacon Herman Ivanoff-Trinadzaty. Each one considers himself honored by the trust shown them by the First Hierarch. Vladyka Metropolitan participated most actively in the discussion of the text. At the start of work the Metropolitan presented a draft that was thoroughly discussed, changed added to, in particular by the Metropolitan himself. Altogether, the text of the Epistle was read at least SEVEN TIMES, every paragraph being carefully studied and separately confirmed. Any one present at the meeting in Mansonville can verify the authenticity of the above.

That the Epistle expresses the true mind of the First Hierarch, and what he believed and confessed during his conscious life, is witnessed to not only by his signature, but also by a hand written note, which was put in at his own initiative. In this way it is shameful that some hierarchs, even the youngest in age and ordination had the rudeness to openly contradict a wish of the aged First Hierarch, whose jubilee the whole Church is prepared to celebrate.

A supposedly "weighty argument" that the text is written in new orthography looks just as laughable. Let everyone be consoled; there was a text in the old orthography, but due to technical reasons could not be presented to the Metropolitan for signature and yet, he nevertheless did not refuse to sign his Epistle in new orthography. But what cleverness – to emphasize nonsense in order to divert the mind from what is important. When reading all those who stir up trouble – one wonders: how is it that no one recalls the Metropolitan's pre-conciliar Epistle (which was totally ignored by the Council) as well as also his post-conciliar Epistle, which one may say, by force was not brought to the notice of the flock. By his Circular Epistle Vladyka Metropolitan solemnly testifies that by now five bishops have renounced this shameful Epistle. Honor and glory to them. But what are the others waiting for? Let their hierarchical consciences answer this

There may be irresponsible voices that say that Vladyka Metropolitan had no right to express his mind in the Epistle. No matter how strange, but it is not the first time one hears such absurd reasoning. Actually, according to the "Statutes of the ROCOR" (so to say, the constitution of our Church) the First Hierarch has wide prerogatives, and this should surprise no one. Alas, the First Hierarch is elected "for life" (part 4, par. 33); he "summons Councils" (par. 37 B); he "addresses the whole ROCOR with archpastoral epistles" (par. 37 ZH); he gives brotherly directions to hierarchs regarding their personal life as well as fulfillment of their pastoral duties" (37-L); he accepts the complaints about bishops and gives them proper response" (par. 37-O). These are just some of the First Hierarch's prerogatives, which is good to remember since during the recent years some have gotten used to the idea that the entire role of the First Hierarch is to sign the papers presented to him, including the most outrageous and absurd ones, as happened with the letter to Arafat.

Among other, it is to be noted that, "The First Hierarch has a right of protest in cases when he believes that the decisions of the Synod of Bishops do not correspond with welfare and usefulness to the Church" (4-38). Seeing what

gross violations of the ecclesiastical legal procedures have been allowed, this paragraph was used by the Metropolitan as loving father and archpastors, when he realized how criminally he had been deceived, when he put his signature to the Synod Ukase, which suspended, one may say, the very best of the Western-European diocesan clergy. Also, it has to be stressed that no fraud or pressure were applied to the First Hierarch —one needed only to present him with the certain evidence, which for a period of seven months this same clergy have in vain tried to present to him. After realizing in what disgraceful acts he himself was involved, Vladyka Metropolitan immediately composed an Ukase that annulled the unjust suspensions.

Alas, this is what must be made known to everyone who is concerned about the "Mansonville events". Every participant of this memorable meeting has a feeling of duty fulfilled before the Holy Church and before the beloved and respected Metropolitan Vitaly. May the Lord grant to everyone such a clean conscience in this matter.

HE WHO HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR (Mt. XI: 15)

June 23/ July 7, 2001

Feast of the Vladimir Icon of the Theotokos

Bishop Barnabas

UKASE

June 7/20, 2001

Holy Martyr Theodot of Ancyra

Based upon the right of the First Hierarch to protest against decisions of the Synod of Bishops as not corresponding with the welfare and usefulness to the Church (Statute of the ROCOR III-38) after becoming acquainted with the details of the unrest in the Western-European Diocese, in connection with gross violations of regulations of ecclesiastical court procedures,

I REVOKE the Ukase # 11/35/38/30 of April 12/25, 2001,
by which His Grace Bishop Barnabas was suspended and brought to a trial.
He is to receive a copy of this ukase. Metropolitan Vitaly

The ukase we received by fax was handwritten and also printed on an English language letterhead of the Canadian Diocese; it had the Metropolitan's signature and the seal of the Canadian Diocese. This document has an embarrassing misprint: it should refer to part IV, paragraph 38 and not part III.

An identical ukase signed by the First Hierarch of the Church Abroad and of the same date was issued regarding Archpriests Michel de Kastelbjac, Benjamin Joukoff, Paul Puarie, Radu Apostolesku and Priests Nicholas Semenoff, Quenten de Kastebaljak, Nicholas Apostolesku and Protodeacons Serge Vsevolzhsky and Herman Ivanoff-Trinadzaty.

It is self-evident that the Metropolitan's Ukases will carry no weight with the Synod of Bishops, especially after he published his Circular Epistle.

All this documentation, starting with the first days of the criminal October 2000 Council, from Circular Epistle of the First Hierarch in 2001 and to the latest of his ukases to Bishop Barnabas and Western Europe Diocese clergy quite obviously demonstrates how, led by an arrogant group of hierarchs who seized power at the Council of Bishops, the ROCOR has been brought into an abyss of dogmatic, canonical and administrative absurdities, and to put it more properly: criminal acts.

A JUBILEE "JUDAS KISS" IN THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

On Tuesday June 27/July 10, 2001, there was a meeting of the Synod of Bishops, summoned, as was widely announced, to honor the 50th jubilee of the archpastoral ministry as well as the 60th anniversary in the priesthood of the fourth First Hierarch of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Vitaly. This is an extremely rare jubilee: during the entire history of the Russian Church Abroad only 4 such episcopal jubilees (including Metropolitans Anastassy and Vitaly) occurred. Due to the jubilee and also the visible unrest within the Church, the Synod meeting was expanded. Present at the meeting were: **Laurus**, Archbishop of Syracuse and Trinity, **Alipy**, Archbishop of Chicago and Detroit, **Mark**, Archbishop of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain, **Hilarion**, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia and New Zealand, **Cyril**, Bishop of Western America and San Francisco, **Ambrose**, Bishop of Geneva and Western Europe, **Evtikhy**, Bishop of Ishima and Siberia, **Alexander** Bishop Buenos Aires and South America, **Gabriel**, Bishop of Manhattan, **Michael**, Bishop of Toronto.

The Monastery Press in Canada published the very depressing details of the Synod meeting. Evidently, (probably to have witnesses to whatever would transpire) the Metropolitan went to the meeting hall accompanied by two clergymen: Archimandrite Sergius and Priest Nikita Orlov. Both were immediately stopped at the entrance door and the Metropolitan proceeded in alone. The minute the doors of the hall were closed, the bishops present began to yell at the Metropolitan and abuse him for his Circular Epistle. Bishop Gabriel was heard to shout: "How could you dare to publish the Epistle without it's being checked by me?"

Then the bishops demanded that the First Hierarch go into retirement. Metropolitan responded that this requires a council of bishops, but received the answer that *there was no need for that*. Archimandrite Sergius, who heard the yelling of those in the meeting, was very much upset by the rudeness of the bishops toward the First Hierarch, the President of the Synod and Council.

After letting the bishops present yell for some time, the Metropolitan told them he would see them at the next Council and would then retire, since he has begun to realize he has nothing in common with them and left the hall after announcing the end of the meeting.

Nevertheless the meeting continued even after the President left. At the end of the meeting, the miraculous Icon of Kursk, instead of being returned to the Metropolitan (as is usual), was taken by Bishop Michael of Toronto to his cell. When Metropolitan found out about it, he decided to get the Icon himself. He met Archbishop Laurus in the corridor, who said that they believed the Metropolitan was resting and did not want to disturb him. Noting the opposition, Metropolitan went to Bishop Michael's room and took the Icon himself.

One of the witnesses of this disgraceful scene testified that not one of the hierarchs who stood nearby offered to carry the very heavy icon for the aged First Hierarch, despite knowing he had an injured shoulder.

At the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul all the hierarchs "assumed masks" of proper behavior. Due to the First Hierarch's jubilee, 8 bishops, 20 priests and a number of deacons and altar boys concelebrated at the Liturgy and thanksgiving moleben. The cathedral was full of people among whom were also several priests who arrived for the moleben after serving in their parishes. Archbishop Laurus, who presided over the services, politely congratulated the Metropolitan, as if nothing had happened two days before.

In the Synod courtyard a tent was set up with round tables for snacks and later a choice of two entrees. In the middle of the dinner congratulatory speeches for the Metropolitan started. Protodeacon Nicholas Mokhov read an address to the Metropolitan signed by all the bishops present, except Bishop Ambrose, who was nevertheless present at the table. The text of this address shamelessly spoke of their love and respect for the First Hierarch!

One prominent archpriest of the Eastern American diocese, renown for his sharp criticism of Metropolitan on other occasions, this time assured him of his respect and love. This provoked some ironic remarks by his co-pastors, aware of his criticism. A very good speech was made by Protopresbyter Valery Lukianov, who pointed out the Metropolitan's merits in saving thousands of people from being handed over to the sadist Stalin and which serves as an example of his energy and love for monasticism. At the same time he pointed out the present unrest following the last council of bishops and urged a council of clergy and laity be called.

Metropolitan received from the Synod cathedral a very large icon of St. Nicholas. There were also some greetings from various parishes. But they had to be restricted at a certain point so as not to tire the First Hierarch.

Responding to the greetings, Metropolitan in a short speech thanked the guests present and said that when in his youth he studied in a French college, he especially appreciated the Russian culture which is so tightly intertwined with Orthodoxy and asked that all strive not to lose it.

In the courtyard a book was offered for sale, containing the Metropolitan's biography, a collection of articles, his statements and memories of his friends and collaborators. Those who bought the book started to ask Metropolitan to autograph it, but this had to be interrupted too (until a more suitable time) because it was already well after 4 PM.

Undoubtedly, the organizer of this celebration, a clergyman of the cathedral, Fr. Andrew Sommers, demonstrated his ability for organization and this day had such a festive character that it is to his special credit.

To all those who knew about the outrageous behavior of the "brethren," who just a day or two before participated in the Synod meetings and with one accord abused the Metropolitan, and now, as if nothing happened, were honoring him -- their hypocrisy was the height of cynicism and no different than the kiss of Judas the Traitor!

REVOLUTION IN THE ROCOR RIGHT AFTER THE JUBILEE OF METROPOLITAN VITALY

Just two days before celebrating the jubilee of the First Hierarch, the expanded Synod of Bishops (called under the pretext of honoring the Metropolitan) published a couple of documents that we reprint below. All the documents are written on Synod letterhead and are signed by all participants of the meeting, including the Metropolitan himself.

ACT

On June 27th/July 10th the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia h e a r d:

The announcement by the First Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly of his retirement. His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly directed that this announcement be entered into the minutes, which was done.

R e s o l v e d: To acknowledge the announcement of Metropolitan Vitaly in connection wherewith the Synod of Bishops decides:

1. To confirm, in connection with the retirement of Metropolitan, the decision of the Council of Bishops of 2000 concerning the appointment of Archbishop Laurus as Deputy First Hierarch, and entrust to him the conduct of all administrative functions of the governance of the Church until the Council of Bishops of 2001.
2. To commemorate the name of Archbishop Laurus at all divine services directly after that of the First Hierarch: "...and our Lord, the Most Reverend Laurus, Archbishop of Syracuse and Trinity, Deputy of the First Hierarch".
3. Any official documents issued from the Synod without the signature of the Deputy of the First Hierarch, Archbishop Laurus, are invalid.
4. To convoke the Council of Bishops in October, 2001, with the principle objective of electing a new First Hierarch.
5. To entrust, on basis of the resolution of the Council of Bishops of 2000, the governing of the Diocese of Eastern America to His Grace Bishop Gabriel and of Canada to His Grace Bishop Michael

Signatures: Metropolitan Vitaly, President of the Synod of Bishops; Archbishop Laurus, Archbishop Alipy, Archbishop Mark, Archbishop Hilarion, Bishop Kirill, Bishop Michael, Bishop Evtikhy, Bishop Alexander, Bishop Ambrose and Deputy Secretary Bishop Gabriel

All other documents have the same signatures.

DECISION
of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
of June 27th/July 10th, 2001

June 27th/July 10th 2001, h e a r d:

The verbal announcement of the President of the Synod of Bishops, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly that, due to his advanced age and ailing health, he is retiring. His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly directed that this announcement be entered into the minutes, which was done. In connection with this, it is necessary in the near future to convoke the Council of Bishops in order to assure succession of the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The council of Bishops is also to take all possible measures to overcome the ecclesiastical discord that lately emerged within our Church and to restore ecclesiastical peace.

After thorough discussion of this matter r e s o l v e d:

1. To convoke the Council of Bishops on October 10/23, 2001 in New York from October 10/23 to October 18/31.
2. To inform all the hierarchs of the ROCOR – the members of the Council of Bishops about it.
3. To establish a pre-conciliar committee, co-chaired by Archbishop Alipy and Bishop Gabriel; members: Protopresbyter Valery Lukianov and Archpriest George Larin.
4. In order to cover the expenses arising from the convocation of the Council, to distribute as usual the costs among the dioceses in USA and Canada
5. To address the flock with an Epistle about the forthcoming Council of Bishops and the most important task which is before them and to ask the flock for material and spiritual support

To circulate an ukase to all the members of the Council of Bishops, Diocesan Administrations and to announce it in the ecclesiastical press.

All eleven signatures follow.

EPISTLE
of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia to:
all faithful children in the Homeland and Diaspora

Faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, beloved in the Lord!

Just as the holy Apostle Paul addressed an appeal to the Christians of the Church of Corinth, so do we, the archpastors of the Russian Church Abroad, address ourselves to you: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1: 10).

From the Apostle's words it is apparent that the Holy Church of Christ found it necessary from the very beginning to warn the Christians against divisions and schism, and to call all to oneness of mind and love.

We, the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia cannot remain silent when we see part of our beloved children falling under the pernicious influence of sowers of discord. We cannot fail to note how through the wide dissemination of all manner of distortion and false interpretations – especially on websites formed for this purpose on the Internet, which are full of all manner of slander against the hierarchy of the Church Abroad – ill intentioned people are undermining the authority of the archpastors and the highest level of the administration of the Council of Bishops.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the unrest among part of our flock is not so much arising due to misunderstanding the decisions adopted at the most recent Council, but are the result of a carefully planned and organized campaign, which has as its goal an attempt to destroy the unity of our hierarchs and our Church.

Several people of bad conscience have not even been ashamed to try to enlist the respected elderly Metropolitan in the "war" they have started, unconscionably taking advantage of his advanced age and abusing his trust.

Given the complicated circumstances that have developed, we see that it is essential to convoke an extraordinary Council of Bishops, which will meet from October 10/23, 2001, in New York.

The most important act of the extraordinary Council will be the election of a new First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. This has been occasioned by the advanced age and frail health of His Eminence, Metropolitan Vitaly, who at the June 27/July 10 session of the Synod of Bishops requested that he be allowed to retire. The Synod of Bishops received the request of the Metropolitan with sympathy and understanding, and entrusted to Archbishop Laurus, the First Deputy of the First Hierarchy and the Secretary of the Synod, the temporary conduct of the administration of the ROCOR until the convocation of the extraordinary Council of Bishops.

During the pre-conciliar period, the name of the First Hierarchy, Metropolitan Vitaly, must be commemorated at the divine services as before, without change. The name of Archbishop Laurus must be commemorated in all the parishes of the ROCOR after the name of the First Hierarchy.

So, as to avoid inaccuracy and possible new false interpretation, we, the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, declare before the whole world:

1. Not one of the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia is striving for a speedy unification with the Moscow Patriarchate. No "pro-Moscow" fraction exists among us.
2. All the Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church categorically condemn the heresy of Ecumenism and Sergianism.
3. There was no "change of course" for the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia at the most recent Council of Bishops. One need only attentively examine the Epistles of preceding Councils to be convinced of this. We advise those who desire to see more extensive extracts from the past Epistles to familiarize themselves with the "Appeal of the Pastoral Conference of the Diocese of Western America and San Francisco". One ought also to familiarize oneself with the explanation of His Grace, Bishop Evtikhy, to his flock in connection with resolutions of the Council.
4. With regard to our relations with the Serbian Church, we state that the relations between it and our Church are special, conditioned upon our historical closeness to the Church of Serbia, which once took the Russian Church Abroad and multitude of Russian refugees under its loving wing and cared for us like a loving mother. Now, the Church of Serbia itself is undergoing a grievous trial because of the attacks of global powers on Kosovo and other parts of Serbia. During this difficult time, we cannot turn our back on her.

In connection with the limited participation of Serbian Church in the World Council of Churches we have more than once addressed to the Patriarch and other Serbian Bishops a statement of alarm and fraternal admonitions. One ought to note that the influence of the great theologian, Archimandrite Justin (Popovich), a strict opponent of Ecumenism, is very great among the Serbian bishops, and we hope that it will soon bear its own fruits.

5. Accusations are being made against the Synod of Bishops that it does not endure any criticism of its actions and is persecuting those who believe differently. We declare that this is a slander originating from the enemies of our Church. The Synod of Bishops is not in the least against statements of other views by the faithful children of the Church Abroad, or even suggestions that it review one or another of the decisions adopted at the most recent Council.

However, when these expressions of disagreement take the form of an open call to rebellion against the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority or incite the faithful to open schism, the Synod of Bishops is compelled to view this in a different way. When such statements are made by clergymen, who by virtue to their position have a greater influence upon the flock, and who are obligated by their oath, given by them at the time of ordination, to remain in obedience to their hierarchy, the ruling bishops are forced to act more strictly. If admonition on the part of the ruling bishop does not bring the clergyman who is acting against his hierarchy to repentance, the bishop is obliged to take more decisive measures for the defense of the flock.

Regarding the situation which has developed within part of the Diocese of Western Europe, we state that the suspension imposed upon certain clergymen is not a result of their expressing their personal opinions, but only for their determined refusal to accept the ruling bishop appointed by the Council of Bishops, which is not allowed by the Church order and canons. Moreover, before such canonical suspensions were imposed, a whole series of steps and efforts were undertaken to convince these clergymen, who are waging an open rebellion against their Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority, to reconsider and repent.

6. The statement that the Council of Bishops is supposedly trampling on the concept of collegiality [sobornost], by not taking into consideration the opinions of the "general masses", has no foundation. We, the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, always listen attentively to the voice of our faithful clergy and pious laity. However, it must be remembered that the ultimate resolution of questions within the Church falls under the authority of the Council and Synod of Bishops, and not under the authority of public opinion, which is sometimes artificially manipulated by provocateurs. The Church of Christ is not a democracy, and questions of Church life are not decided by the majority vote of the people. To make decisions under pressure of a vocal minority which is pursuing its own objectives would not be collegiality, but force.
7. With regard to the reproaches addressed to the Council of Bishops, that it allegedly accepted too rosy a picture of the Church situation in Russia, we state that all of us know well both the positive and the negative aspects of life in our much-suffering homeland. Many of us have availed ourselves of the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the situation directly, and all of us correspond with clergy and faithful in the homeland and follow developments occurring in Church life. At the most recent Council of Bishops we listened with attention to a whole series of reports on contemporary life in Russia, which expressed various points of view. We confirm the decision proclaimed at the Council of 1981, which set forth our approach to the situation in Russia: in speaking of events in much-suffering Russia, we do not draw a veil over reality, but speak the truth. We permit ourselves to speak openly of all the negative phenomena observable there. However, we do not confine ourselves exclusively to these aspects, which would be utterly unjust, but respond with joy to all the positive aspects. To view reality in our homeland through rose-colored glasses is a mistake; however, it is just as much a mistake to view Russia through dark glasses, seeing only what is negative.
8. As regards the yearning, expressed by the Council of Bishops, for unity in Orthodoxy, one must remember that the Holy Church prays "for the unity of all". This yearning for unity is a direct fulfillment of the words of the Savior,

Who in His high-priestly prayer, which was directed to God the Father prayed "that they all may be one" (Jn. 17: 21). This is also stated in the prayer for the salvation of Russia that is read at the Divine Liturgy: "that all in harmonious oneness of mind and unceasing love glorify Thy most holy name..." And in the prayer to the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, confirmed by the Council of Bishops in 1981, we quite openly express the prayerful request that "the schisms within our Church may be abolished".

The Holy Church has always yearned and striven to uproot all schism and divisions and to establish unity unconditionally – unity in the Truth, for there can be no outward unity if there is no unity in the Truth.

It is for just this kind of unity in the Truth that we are striving. Living in the Church we must be filled with the spirit of the Truth and reject even the suggestion of the spirit of falsehood.

We will now address some words to the faithful clergy and the flock in our much-suffering native land. We always feel ourselves to be one with you, with all believing Russian people. During these days of universal apostasy, which, through the pan-heresy of Ecumenism, has even infected most of the Local Orthodox Churches, we must stand united, that the enemy of our salvation may not use our divisions to destroy the voice of our confession in the homeland and Diaspora.

Duty bound by our conscience, we again address a tearful appeal to the clergy who have departed from obedience to their lawful hierarchy. Forsake your destructive path! May God soften your hearts and give you understanding!

In conclusion, we address again all of you, our beloved children with the appeal of the Apostle: "*I beseech you, brethren, mark those who cause the offenses... and avoid them*" (Rom. 16: 17).

Pay no attention to the various "Open Letters", "Statements", "Appeals", "Referendums" and "Pages for the Collection of Signatures" which are being disseminated on the Internet and by electronic mail by various provocateurs, who sometimes even claim that their activity has received the blessing of the First Hierarch himself. Be careful as Apostle warns: "*For those who are such... by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*" (Rom. 16: 18).

Stand fast in our Faith and in loyalty to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and its hierarchy, which God has ordained. Our Church has successfully weathered many previous trials over the eight decades of its existence, at the hands of enemies from without and enemies from within. We are certain that, with the help of God, we will also overcome those we are experiencing today.

We trust in the Lord and in the Mother of God, the guide for the Russian Diaspora through her miraculous Kursk-Root icon of the Sign, and we pray that peace and oneness of mind will again come and dwell among our faithful children.

"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 1:2)

30 June/13 July, 2001. The Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles

Signed by Metropolitan Vitaly and all present, as stated above.

This latest epistle by the Synod of Bishops of June 30/July 13, 2001, is distinguished for the very same falsity as its Statement of January 26/Feb. 8, 2000. The founder of the Jesuit Order, Ignatius Loyola himself could be jealous of its strained interpretations and juggling with facts!

On the second page of the Russian original of the epistle we read that at the meeting of the Synod on June 27/July 10, Metropolitan Vitaly "requested that he be allowed to retire. The Synod of Bishops received the request of the Metropolitan with sympathy and understanding...."

How the Metropolitan "requested he be allowed to retire" we can read from the Internet information by the Monastery Press from Canada.

Then, the members of the Synod "declare before the whole world", that "No 'pro-Moscow' faction exists among us" and that "Not one of the hierarchs of the ROCOR is striving for a speedy [emphasis by "Ch. N."] unification with the MP". And how is one to explain the quite obvious action for unification with the MP of Archbishop Mark, Bishop Evtikhy and the Deputy President of the First Hierarch – Archbishop Laurus himself, who while visiting Russia preferred to stay as guest not of ROCOR priests, but the MP and who officially visited MP monasteries? Just recently he went to Solovki being there at the same time as Alexis Ridiger.

In the third paragraph we note that, "There was 'no change of course' of the ROCOR at the recent Council of Bishops". Just a week after the conclusion of the Council of 2000, at the Holy Fathers parish feast in New York, no one less than the Deputy Secretary of the Synod Bishop Gabriel and Bishop Barnabas told the editor of "Church News" (in presence of numerous distinguished guests) that the saddest decision of the Council "was that we have **erased the difference between the Church Abroad and the Church of Moscow Patriarchate**". Is this not a change of course?

In the fourth paragraph, regarding relations with the Serbian Church, we confront a lie again: there is no such thing as "limited participation of the Serbian Church in the WCC". From July 13 to 17, 2000, there was an episcopal Orthodox-Roman Catholic conference in Belgrade, convoked by the invitation of the Serbian Church (Patriarchal newspaper "Pravoslavlje" of Sept. 1. See "Ch. N." # 7 (89), 2000).

In the fifth paragraph the problem that arose in the Western Europe Diocese is grossly misrepresented. Even before the appointment of Bishop Ambrose as ruling bishop of the diocese, almost all the clergy, in a very well documented report, complained to the Synod about his pro-Ecumenist and pro-Moscow tendencies. But all their appeals were met by silence on part of the Synod. When, despite the appeals and warnings, the appointment of Bishop Ambrose took place on the Council of Bishops, the Synod received numerous petitions to revoke this decision. In the end, Bishop Barnabas and 9 clerics, disgusted by the two-faced behavior and tactics of Bishop Ambrose, refused to submit to him. The Epistle explains that, "the suspension imposed upon certain clergymen is not result of their expressing opinions, but only for their

determined refusal to accept the ruling Bishop appointed by the Council of Bishops". Then why did no one at that time "listen" to their voices?

From paragraph six we find out that the "bishops of the ROCOR always listen attentively to the voice of our faithful clergy and laity" and that decisions made "under the pressure of a vocal minority which is pursuing its own definite objectives would not be collegiality, but force".

One can speak of "vocal minorities" (basically the Western Europe Diocese) only by begging the question. Part of the clergy who originally protested, gave up and have fallen away, but even now, the suspended bishop, 7 priests and 2 protodeacons comprise nearly half of the diocesan clergy and the most prominent among them!

Can they be "manipulators" and "provocateurs"? Why is not a single one of those "provocateurs" named?

In the seventh paragraph it is stated that, "We confirm the decision proclaimed at the Council of 1981, which set forth our approach to the situation in Russia". This statement is a blunt lie: no proclamation regarding situation in Russia was made at this Council. All the minutes testify to are debates in connection with the glorification of the New Martyrs and in particular, the place of the Imperial Family among them: should their names be put at the top of the list of Martyrs or a more modest place. The late Archbishop Anthony of Geneva, who was of very leftist political convictions, especially insisted upon the latter.

Only one section of the minutes mentions a discussion (but not a "proclamation") about grace of the Moscow Patriarchate, but at that, in no way in the sense which would be favorable to the present members of the Synod.

An excerpt from the Minutes of the Council of Bishops of the ROCOR, # 3, October 8/21, 1981:

"Bishop Gregory says that in the matter of the existence of grace it is not always possible to give a final answer. The loss of the grace is a result of spiritual death, which sometimes comes not at once. Thus plants sometimes die gradually. Regarding the matter of loss of grace by the Moscow Patriarchate, it would be interesting to compare it with the state of the iconoclasts, although the sin of the Moscow Patriarchate is deeper.

"The President says that at present we cannot pronounce a decision about the grace of the Moscow Patriarchate, but we can be sure that grace lives within the true Church only, and the Moscow hierarchs went directly against Christ and His work. How can there be the grace upon them? Personally the Metropolitan believes that the Moscow Patriarchate is graceless."

In the middle of the eighth paragraph we read that "living in the Church we must be filled with the spirit of Truth **and reject even the least suggestion of spirit of falsehood**" and this is said when the authors of the Epistle are lying literally in every paragraph of this outrageous composition!

In each period of the history of the Church Abroad some unworthy hierarchs lied and created schisms, but those, actually, were individual cases. At present we are confronted with a mass lie of more than half of the episcopate of the ROCOR!

If, as the authors of the epistle claim, "there was no change of course" of the ROCOR, and the First Hierarchy is saying the same that they are saying, then why has his Epistle made them so furious?

THE REGISTRATION OF ROCOR PARISHES IN RUSSIA

Vertograd News Distribution # 85 reported that in connection with the law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" which was adopted in Russia in 1997, all the dioceses and parishes, as well as religious organizations, had to be registered with the Ministry of Justice. The time limit for registration as well as for the re-registration was several times extended and the latest was to be completed by the end of 2000. But of the five dioceses of the ROCOR in Russia, only one diocese of Ishim and Siberia was registered and in it, out of 40 parishes, only some 15 or 20 are registered. But, in general, the Ministry of Justice has registered only 37 ROCOR parishes while 65 parishes have no registration; that reduces them to "religious groups" which have no legal status and may not possess real estate.

Nevertheless, Bishop Evtikhy, who gave an interview to the Keston News Agency, tried his best to show that "it is untrue that the law is limiting our interests. When I read it, I understood that, if we want to and make an effort, we could build a church structure... first of all, because we are privileged traditional confession. In the Ministry of Justice they tell us: "Why are you concerned? You are Orthodox". And Bishop Evtikhy firmly states that in his diocese there is "no problem" with registering parishes. According to Vertograd, Bishop Evtikhy feels that ROCOR was prevented from creating a strong organization not because of the powers or the law itself, but because of "human factor within the Church" which reveals itself by the internal disagreement and if it were not for this —"we could immediately get a genuine church building". According to his opinion, the government is not at all at fault. This is one of the reasons, as he explained, why over a ten year period, the Moscow parish of the Church Abroad still has no church building!

The situation in the European part of Russia, where Bishop Michael of Toronto represents ROCOR, is in no way better. This hierarchy did everything possible to hold up the registration of the dioceses until the end of 2000. He brought the documentation needed for registration to Russia only in the late autumn, nearly at the end of the registration time. Most of the parishes lost their registrations and we know of several priests who were very concerned by the impossibility of completing this procedure. Only one parish in Riazan, which disregarded Bishop Michael's directives, started registration on its own by joining the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church and was able to retain its church building. A community

in Gatchina did the very same along with two other communities. And until now, according to Vertograd, "Four Dioceses of the ROCOR located in the territory of the European part of Russia DO NOT HAVE A SINGLE REGISTERED ORGANISATION".

Vertograd explains Bishop Michael's fiasco by "a weak orientation in Russian law, as well as the incompetence of his legal advisors", while the activity of Bishop Evtikhy probably "does not have as its goal to strengthen the legal situation of ROCOR in Russia." As it is widely known, Bishop Evtikhy is a very obedient tool in the hands of Archbishop Mark.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

After waiting for nine whole months after the conclusion of the treacherous Council of Bishops in October, 2000, Lazar, Archbishop of Odessa and Tambov (Russian True Orthodox Church within ROCOR) finally noticed the ruinous results of its decisions for the Russian people and openly protested them.

On May 22/June 4 Archbishop Lazarus published an appeal addressed to the Episcopate of the ROCOR in which he states that "My heart is filled with great sorrow over seeing a disturbance which never happened before and which appeared within our Church after the acceptance by the ROCOR's Council of Bishops of year 2000 of the 'Resolution' regarding relations with the MP and 'Letter to the Serbian Patriarch Paul' "

Then he writes that "a multitude of letters, demands, revolts and protests by clergy of my diocese, protests and appeals of the True Orthodox Christians from every continent, the Church's canons and my own hierarchical conscience do not permit me to agree with the decisions accepted at the October Council of ROCOR in 2000: the 'Resolution' and 'letter to Serbian Patriarch Paul' "

"May I permit myself to remind you, my beloved in the Lord brethren archpastors, that I have always had a negative judgment regarding these decisions and openly expressed it during our Council meetings... Now when the most alarming misgivings are fully confirmed and are obvious to all of us, the time came to correct the errors which were permitted to happen during the Council as well as after it".

The Archbishop officially declares that he is **removing his signatures** "from the 'Resolution' regarding the relationship with the MP' and from the 'Letter to Serbian Patriarch Paul' " and appeals for convocation of an extraordinary Council of Bishops.

Archbishop Lazarus also states that an illness prevented him from participating in the episcopal consultation.

The Appeal of Archbishop Lazarus is already the third renunciation within the episcopate of the ROCOR in Russia of signatures. Only Bishop Evtikhy (a convinced adherent of Archbishop Mark of Berlin and Germany) continues to defend his positions regarding the MP. Nevertheless, as is obvious from the Episcopal Consultation in Podolsk on 28 and 29 June (Vertograd Distribution # 86), the Catacomb priests received a warning about "inadmissible deviations from the collegial life of the Church, which in the future threaten their flocks with deprivation of the pastoral ministry..." "In case of refusals to present accounts of pastoral activities, the Consultation will introduce the issue of whether measures which are foreseen by the canons should be applied to them" in such cases. Vertograd also reports that the "the Consultation has ordered Bishop Vichy to suspend from services Priest-monk Joseph (Filosofov) "for disobeying resolutions of the Episcopal Consultation and the Council of Bishops" (emphasis by "Ch. N."). Another priest, Fr. Victor Usachov, (who avoids connections with his "supreme authorities") was reminded by the bishops about the necessity to present to his superiors a complete report on his pastoral activities and "the necessity to meet with the ruling bishop in order to define his status". As we can see, despite taking their signatures off the Council's resolution and the letter to the Serbian Patriarch, the very same hierarchs suspend Priest-monk Joseph from serving for his unwillingness to submit to the outrageous "resolutions of the Episcopal Consultation and the **Council of Bishops**"!

Bishops: Benjamin, Vichy, Agathangel and Michael participated in the Episcopal Consultation. Archbishop Lazarus sent it a written report.

Bishop Michael, while speaking about the work of "the Committee for Union of the Russian Church," also admitted that this Committee is "studying the basic statutes of the ROCOR." Is this not in order to revise the existing "Statutes of the ROCOR" to reconcile them with the present trend desiring a union with the MP?

Also at this Consultation we hear again a recently popular idea about "information coming from unofficial sources, which is often tendentious and does not correspond with the real situation". The very same Consultation also published the "Appeal of the Episcopal Consultation of Russian Hierarchs of the ROCOR to all the pastors and the God loving flock of the Russian ROCOR". Here again are heard appeals "to strengthen their prayers", the need to have an urgent Council of Bishops and pastoral consultation of all the parishes in Russia. And, to the "clergy who have stopped commemorating the ruling bishops and the First Hierarch during the services", Archbishop Lazarus addressed this directive: "Again and again, beware of pushing your flock into the dubious spiritual slums of schismatic jurisdictions".

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE MEETING OF ST. NICHOLAS PARISH IN MONTREAL

According to Vertograd Distribution # 85, on June 10th there was a general meeting of St. Nicholas parish in Montreal, chaired by the ruling bishop of the Canada Diocese, Michael of Toronto. The main themes of the meeting were matters concerning the decisions of the Council of ROCOR Bishops in 2000.

At this meeting, Bishop Michael very firmly defended all the resolutions of the Council. While discussion ongoing, it became known that of the 4 clergy of St. Nicholas Cathedral, 3 have joined the protest of their Canadian brethren. At the same time it became obvious that the majority of parishioners had no idea about the events during the Council and its decisions, which happened some 9 months ago. The tactic of the episcopate of the last decade – to hush up and even hide from the flock the events of the Church life -- seems have had outstanding results to the point that when one of the parishioners of the cathedral distributed a letter to be signed petitioning the bishop to “present to them the truthful information” – the majority of the parishioners accused him of “undermining trust” in the bishop and even in the Church itself!

When speaking of the actions of the Council, Bishop Michael complained that some disreputable people stole the minutes of the Council and published “the conversations the fathers held among themselves”. The main documents contradicting this are the Epistle of the Council, a letter to the Serbian Patriarch, decisions to canonize four renowned ascetics (who were canonized immediately after a Moscow Patriarchate Council, but not by the ROCOR) and a most humiliating letter to the Old Believers in which the Church Abroad indiscriminately lifted the “condemnations” which were laid upon all their numerous groups, including those who have no clergy, by the All-Russian Council in 1666-1667.

Bishop Michael expressed surprise that there might be some perplexity (of which he, supposedly, hadn't even heard) and therefore he read the entire Epistle of the Council and stressed that it was “unanimously” approved. Of course he did not mention that Bishop Barnabas and 3 Bishops in Russia revoked their signatures of the Epistle and the letter to the Serbian Patriarch.

When speaking about the Committee created by the Council considering unity of the Russian Church, Bishop Michael unexpectedly started with the history of American Metropolia and Eulogian schism! In order to distract attention from the most important issue?

Those who wanted to ask Bishop Michael some questions were given no such opportunity.

“REGARDING THE UNREST IN OUR CHURCH”

The “Herald of the German Diocese” in issue 3 for 2001 published the following article, entitled as above, and signed by “The Editors”.

The documents approved by the last Council of Bishops of the Church Abroad in October, 2000, (‘The Epistle of the Council of Bishops of the ROCOR to the beloved children of the Church in homeland and diaspora,’ the resolution of October 11/24 “Address to the Old Believers” (see “Herald of the German Diocese” # 5-6/2000 and the “Epistle to the Serbian Patriarch Paul”) have created arguments and disagreement within our Church. When quoting these documents some clergy and laity began to accuse the Council of Bishops with, supposedly, seeking a union with the Moscow Patriarchate. In Russia some clergy have published via the Internet letters with a biased evaluation of the conciliar documents and two priests in Petersburg and some parishioners and one in Moscow, which had no parish, left the Church Abroad. The Synod of Bishops examined the alleged accusations of the Council, which are in the above-mentioned letters and assert their total lack of foundation. Now clear announcements of the Synod of Bishops and some of its hierarchs (for example, Declaration of the Synod of Bishops of January 26/February 8, 2001, signed by Metropolitan Vitaly and five members of the Synod, published in the “Herald” # 1, 2001 as well as an article by Bishop Evtikhy, published in “Pravoslavnaya Rus”) disprove these groundless suspicions. Now there are well-founded researches into “the post-council disturbances” which demonstrate the groundlessness of the claims of those who oppose the Council of Bishops (for example, a “Letter from Someone Who Has Broken Away” by Deacon Nicholas Savchenko and an article by Michael Nazarov).

The activity of these “critics,” which they claim they have started in order to defend the canonical purity of the Church, consist of violations of the canons and ecclesiastical practice according to which, in cases of perplexity, one should first turn to one's diocesan bishop. Yet in the Western Europe Diocese, in particular in France and Belgium, events developed in an even more regrettable manner. Several clergymen, together with Vicar Bishop Barnabas, after refusing to submit to the diocesan Bishop Ambrose, appointed by the Council of Bishops, and presenting him with more far-fetched and groundless claims, stopped commemorating him at the divine services. This is the grossest violation of church canons. These persons continue to stagnate in their disobedience despite numerous appeals by the First Hierarchy and the Synod of Bishops (see “Herald” # 5, 2000, address from the Chancery of the Synod of Bishops # 6/47/117 signed by Archbishop Laurus) to call them to repentance and reconciliation. For refusing to commemorate and submit to their diocesan Bishop, according to conciliar regulations obligatory upon every member of the Church, **ten clergy** (see the list of names on page 20) were suspended from serving (emphasis by “Ch. N.”).

Discord within the Church is always painful and this is more so because the number of people involved in it is even greater. The main reason for this present discord is quite obvious – some of the clergy and laity in our Church have partly or even completely lost ecclesiastical regularity, have lost (or were unable) to find the true meaning of the Church -- by whom and through whom it is governed and how all her children have to live within her.

Conciliarity, which is so grossly violated nowadays, is the active spiritual source of Church life, which all her children are obligated to carefully preserve and develop. However, the present violation of conciliarity, which leads to such sad results, has its roots in the 20's of the 20th century. On one side there were extreme movements which denounced the course of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) who established “his” Moscow Patriarchate and on the other, there was

Metropolitan Sergius himself and his followers – these two extremes damaged the very essence of ecclesiology by getting too far apart in their relationships. The denunciations inevitably touched on the matter of sacramental grace and the validity of the priesthood. And regarding the relationship of the Church Abroad toward the Moscow Patriarchate after 1927 (in contradistinction to the positions of Patriarch Tikhon and his Synod and bishops in Solovki), first at a nod from the godless and later on its own, there emerged a passion for calling the Church Abroad “schismatic”. Such an aggressive position does not correspond with the reality of the Church, existing in Russia and in the Diaspora, just as denouncing the sacraments performed in the contemporary Russian Church that is governed by the Moscow Patriarchate does not correspond to reality. Those “who denounce,” as a rule, lack consistency and actually accept the priesthood, baptisms and chrismations of the other side. We are glad for this lack of an unfortunate consistency and by all means we do not demand it. It is essential to reach a final conclusion about this situation and to establish a more healthy approach (for example, in the “Herald” on several occasions the ecclesiology of Martyr-confessor Metropolitan Cyril (Smirnov) of Kazan + 1937) was pointed to, for he preserved the ecclesiastical balance in his opposition to Metropolitan Sergius even in the worst periods. “Vestnik” # 2 1998). He has been canonized in the Russian Church Abroad as well as now also in the Moscow Patriarchate.

We are grieved that such ultra-radical positions are ascribed without foundation to the whole Russian Church Abroad, not least by people in Russia who stand radically against those “abroad”. We are not going to ascribe ideologically unwise attitudes toward the Church Abroad to all Orthodox people in Russia. In general, we do not believe that the ecclesiastical reality in the whole Russian Church might be settled by such extremes. Rather, we believe that in the mystical, grace-filled life of the Russian Church we must start with collegiality in order to overcome such opposition. And finally, we believe that time has come to clear up the long existing painful questions and that in due time this will be possible to do completely. All the issues in question have to be carefully examined, while being conscious of the historical paths of Russian Orthodox ecclesiology as well as keeping the future in perspective.

Below we publish materials which reflect the positions of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the majority of her clergy with the aim, first, to appeal to all the readers of the “Herald” that they pray for peace and a quieting of the present discord and, secondly, to remind all how important ecclesiastical discipline is in order to remain within the fence of the Church, outside of which there is no salvation.

The Editors

The explanation given by the Editors of the “Herald” of the German Diocese regarding the “unrest” within the Western Europe diocese is composed with such craftiness and calculation that many questions that are affirmed by the editors are not familiar to the average person, in particular, the matter of Sergianism.

The editors were very careful not to cite any canons that state that in cases of uncertainty any questions have to be addressed to the diocesan bishop, as they claim. Such canons simply do not exist!

The opinion of the Editors that “all the issues in question have to be thoroughly examined”, and that essentially they so far consist of the Sergianism flourishing in the Moscow Patriarchate -- with Ecumenism added in 1961 – were long ago (immediately after the treacherous “declaration” of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) examined and re-examined in numerous decrees, epistles of councils and synods of the ROCOR as well as in various articles by a number of the most distinguished bishops of the Church Abroad. All these historical regulations and articles are a result of many years of meticulous study by our hierarchy of the ecclesiastical situation in Russia and every single public declaration by the Moscow Patriarchate was always met with detailed analysis which was followed also by a new directive or decision by Synod or the ROCOR Council of Bishops as required. In order to “avoid the effort” of clearing up what was made clear long, long ago, one has just to take a look in the materials which were published in 30’s and 40’s by their predecessors. Unfortunately, the laity has forgotten much of this since the “Iron Curtain” was unexpectedly lifted in 1990. But the “forgetfulness” of the episcopate in this case has to be considered a conscious transgression.

The article (recommended to their readers) by Bishop Evtikhy that approves of the Council’s Epistle – is not at all something surprising: after all he authored this outrageous Epistle!

The “Editors” of the “Herald” say nothing about the 30th Apostolic canon: “If any bishop obtain possession of a church with the aid of the temporal powers, let him be deposed and excommunicated, and all who communicate with him”. It is very doubtful that the editors of this magazine could deny the commonly known fact that the atheist Stalin created the Moscow Patriarchate and rewarded the limitless servitude of Sergius (who did not object to simultaneously serving God and the servants of the Satan) with the rank of patriarch! The secular government awarded all other patriarchs who succeeded him, who equally served God and Beliar, in the same manner. The editors of the “Herald” take no note of the treacherous collaboration of Sergius Stragorodsky with the atheists, but only feel that the “two extremes” (ROCOR and the MP) took “their opposition to extremes”.

In the matter of the acceptance of “grace” in the MP, we have an excellent explanation of the former First Hierarchy of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Philaret in his letter to Archpriest Victor Potapov of 1980. He wrote: “The Church has the authority in certain cases to employ the principle of *economia* – condescension. The hierarch St. Basil the Great said that, in order not to drive many away from the Church, it is necessary sometimes to permit condescension and not apply the church canons in all their severity. When our Church accepted Roman Catholic clergy “in their orders” without ordaining them, it acted according to this principle. And Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitzky), elucidating this issue, pointed out that the outward form – successive ordination from Apostolic times – that the Roman Catholics do have, whereas the grace,

which the Roman Catholic church has lost, is received by those uniting (themselves to the Church) from the plenitude of grace present in the Orthodox Church, at the very moment of their joining. 'The form is filled with content' said Vladyka Anthony".

Regarding the "discord" in the Western Europe diocese – the "several clergy together with the vicar Bishop Barnabas" constitute nearly half of all the diocesan clergy and at that, the most prestigious. The "far-fetched and groundless claims" about Bishop Ambrose by the prominent clergy of the diocese consist of complaints of concelebration at a wedding in the Geneva cathedral with an MP priest, his performing a wedding with a Georgian priest and, at that, on Saturday, numerous meetings with MP Metropolitan Cyril Gundiaev (KGB code name "Mikhailov"); appointment to a parish in Strasburg of an priest of Eulogy's jurisdiction (now Ecumenical Patriarchate) and permitting anybody to receive communion, including the heretical Monophysites.

Certainly, the defenders of all the resolutions of October's Council of Bishops in 2000 nowhere and in no manner mention that Bishop Barnabas immediately refused to sign the Council's Epistle and a somewhat later retracted his signature on the letter to the Serbian Patriarch Paul. After that the declaration of Bishop Benjamin was published, followed by Bishop Agathangel and after a nine-month delay Archbishop Lazarus also came forward. So, then: one bishop from Abroad and three bishops in Russia (out of four) have retracted their signatures of the most important documents.

DECLARATION TO THE MEDIA OF METROPOLITAN OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR, VALENTIN, FIRST HIERARCH OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX AUTONOMOUS CHURCH

The Vladimir Region newspaper "Prizyv" ("Call") started a dirty, slanderous campaign against our Holy Church.

Despite the fact that my unworthiness became the object of a "journalist's investigation", the true objective of this campaign is quite clear – to kindle among the people hatred for our Church, hatred of True Orthodoxy, and to urge a new wave of persecution of our clergy and faithful children of God's Church.

The newspaper "Prizyv" does not hide the only "source" of all the information which was "revealed" in course of the so-called "journalist's investigation": a certain man who has made video "evidence" of our clergymen and parishioners which supposedly accuses me of all sorts of unthinkable mortal sins. The residents of Suzdal know this man well, his associates in the past and present, what is motivating him and whose orders he obeys. To our sadness, the former Archpriest Andrew, and now Andrew Alexandrovich Osetrov, lowered himself to such dirt, who in this way is taking revenge on our Church High Administration and me personally because our ecclesiastical court defrocked him and his collaborators after he instigated a mutiny and tried to split the Church Body.

A dubious "compromat" of Andrew Osetrov, which has not a single confirmed fact, not a single document – nothing trustworthy — would not attract the attention of the newspaper "Prizyv" if it were not on the direct orders of those powers that are interested in the annihilation of our Church.

They see in our Church the main obstacle to the establishment of the religious monopoly of the Moscow Patriarchate over the souls of Orthodox citizens in Russia, in particular, the residents of the Vladimir Region.

It is revolting to sort out everything that was written by the anonymous journalists of the newspaper "Prizyv". While they, with obvious relish, savor invented "details" of "illegal actions" which supposedly occur in Suzdal, they demonstrate to the readers the sinful corruption of their own souls. I will mention several of the most obvious indications of unscrupulousness and non-professionalism of the authors of this "journalist's investigation".

The very same indications prevent any honest person from believing what was "cooked up" by the employees of "Prizyv".

First of all, the main "program" material, which re-views the content of the Osetrov videocassette "The Holy Outcasts" ("Prizyv" of June 28) does not give the names of its authors. It is not clear who is personally responsible for its content, whom the reader is to trust and to whom is he to address his legal complaints in case of disinformation.

Secondly, the article practically has no references to the sources of this information. The only source, which I have mentioned before is anonymous, is "some person". Yet, the basic guarantee for the authenticity of information can only be reference to a trustworthy source.

Thirdly, the article speaks about some "irrefutable evidence" of the "facts" which are presented there. But then why is not a single piece of this evidence cited? If such indeed exists, the editors should be very much interested to present them to the readers. But they do not do so, thinking "this will be believed anyway".

Fourthly, an important rule of journalism is violated – presentation of a conflict from the point of view of its participants. If I am the object of this "journalist's investigation" – then why did not a single journalist approach me? Even in the case of a criminal investigation, the first person to turn to is the suspect.

What became as a result of these provocative publications of "Prizyv", made in the spirit of hatred and demonstrating an obvious lack of interest of the authors to "get to the bottom of the truth"? The result was pouring hatred and enmity into the hearts of the readers, an inter-religious difference. This is not to mention that fomenting hostility contradicts the Constitution and Russian laws.

One feels like asking, does the newspaper "Prizyv" not see her goal to be the support of public propriety and agreement, but rather, in the artificial creation of a new "source of tension" in the Vladimir area? If so, this newspaper is

hostile to the interests of the government, the law and finally, their own readers, who need peace and goodness, and they are being offered new reasons for hatred. As it is, there is enough of this in this world.

And how should one classify, for example, such utterances by one of the readers of this newspaper that is published with no comment: **"Father Valentin has to be shot. Because of him it is necessary for the time being to forget about a moratorium on death sentences; let a bullet hit the back of his head and the whole thing shown on national TV"** ("Prizyv," July 5). What is this? An instigation to murder? After all, it is a fact that in 1937 the newspapers were filled with calls to shoot people without trial and investigation and some executions were made public!

In the spirit of the atheistic propaganda of past years the author of this article maliciously presents combinations of heavy and unimaginable sins of the contemporary world and sacred words, based on concepts sacred to Orthodox. Maybe, to the authors themselves who were raised on "militant atheism" and lacking in their hearts any faith, these combinations do not grate upon the ears. But is it possible that the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, who openly support these publications do not understand that this liberal manipulation with the sacred words soon will turn to strike them? The newspaper is training its readers in impious and ironical attitudes toward everything sacred, toward the clergy and the faith itself. And the Moscow Patriarchate will be the first to have to deal with readers trained in this manner.

Returning to the sickening slander of the newspaper "Prizyv" addressed to me, I consider it necessary to note the following: As a monk I am obliged to humbly bear any kind of abuse of me (which I did for three months – I was silent) remembering that "a monk who justifies himself is a abomination before God". As we Orthodox believe, the ones who unjustly say spiteful things about us gathers for us treasure in Heaven. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake... For great is your reward in the heavens" (Mt. 5: 10-11). However, as a Metropolitan and the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church I happen to be also a representative of my Church and I cannot fail to realize that this slander is directed first of all against the Church. And I have no right to tolerate this slander and abuse, because otherwise I have no right to be a child of the Church and even more a successor of the Apostles. "The zeal of Thine house" (Ps. 69: 9) which is entrusted to my care forces me to take efforts to close the ill-fated mouths of abusers and cursers of Christ's Church.

I hereby declare that the accusations that are addressed to me by the newspaper "Prizyv" are all lies, slander and insults. They are directed toward kindling inter-religious differences and therefore are an important criminal transgression. I require the editors of the newspaper "Prizyv" publish a retraction of this slander while there is still time.

In the future, as a law-abiding citizen, I will be forced to vindicate my honor and good name of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in the courts as I am obliged to do according to the laws of our country. I am sure that as a result of the legal procedure, the newspaper "Prizyv" will pay compensation for the damage done our Church in her publications. May a rightful and lawful punishment serve to the benefit of the slanderers and teach them to love truth and hate unlawfulness.

In the end, I want to remind all of the words from my last epistle to the God-loving flock of the Russian Church: " My whole life is conducted before the eyes of my brethren and flock. Any sort of information of this kind is just another step in the persecution of our Church. If at some time our persecutors manage to disorganize our Church Supreme Administration, do not be sad, remembering that the True Church "the gates of hell will not prevail", and that it was preserved during the much harsher conditions of the Soviet persecutions in the catacombs".

President of the Synod of Bishops of the ROAC

+ Valentin,

Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir

July 15, 2001
Suzdal