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CHURCH NEWS

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**DECLARATION  
OF HIS EMINENCE VALENTINE, THE METROPOLITAN OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR,  
THE FIRST HIERARCH OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX AUTONOMOUS CHURCH**

In the name of clergy and the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church, I want to express sincere sadness in connection with, in my opinion, the unjustified treatment by some members and employees of the ROCOR of the aged Metropolitan Vitaly who retired from the post of the First Hierarchy of the Church Abroad.

After completing my pastoral visit to the USA and stopping in New Jersey, I became an unwilling witness of the merciless exile of the aged Metropolitan from the Synod building. Vladyka Vitaly was literally evicted on the street without a cassock, panagia or scuffia and almost no money. Regardless of the reasons that led to his retirement, such merciless treatment of an old man, whose entire life was dedicated to the service of Christ's Holy Church, deserves a reproof.

It is especially sad and troublesome that the administration of the new First Hierarchy, Metropolitan Laurus, should begin with this treacherous act. The history of the ROCOR knows only of one precedent of the election of a new First Hierarchy while his predecessor was still living. Thus in 1964 Philaret, Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York, now numbered among the saints, became First Hierarchy. The aged Metropolitan Anastassy, who decided to retire, providentially named his successor. The Lord revealed to the venerable First Hierarchy the glorious future destiny of St. Philaret, the youngest bishop among the ROCOR episcopate, who rightfully discerned the word of Christ's Truth and guided the Church ship on the straight path of genuine Orthodoxy. The Metropolitan Anastassy installed Metropolitan Philaret himself, in this manner stating the legal and pure succession of this Church administration.

Today we observe quite a different picture. Metropolitan Laurus ascends the throne of the First Hierarchy not with celebration and according to will of his predecessor, but with scandal happening before the eyes of the whole world. The dignity of the new First Hierarchy is based upon the degradation of his predecessor, who was evicted by his lesser brethren "outside the city". In what has now happened, we see the sad anticipation of the far from bright future (and very likely even the very last period) of the historical course of the Church Abroad.

It is to be noted that Metropolitan Laurus was elected by 12 votes of the ROCOR bishops. According to statutes of election of the First Hierarchy, he may be elected by 2/3 of the ROCOR bishops whose total body at present consists of 18 hierarchs (excluding those on retirement). It means, he was elected by a "critical majority", at which every single vote was important: the vote of Bishop Agathangel, who only a month and a half ago declared at the Voronezh conference of ROCOR clergy in Russia his total support for Metropolitan Vitaly, the vote of Bishop Michael, whom Vladyka Vitaly considered to be his faithful assistant and the vote of Bishop Gabriel, who just recently openly condemned the treacherous path intended to reach a swallowing of the Church Abroad by the MP.

It seems that the ROCOR, whose fate to all of us true Orthodox Christians in Russia is far from indifferent, is entering into a period of new disorders, never before seen. The course of submission to the MP, which is incarnate in the new First Hierarchy, has completely taken over. The sacred last will of the saintly Philaret and other First Hierarchs resting in peace are trampled down and forgotten in order to please the interests of the contemporary world and a misconceived unity of mankind. It remains, while observing the ruin of the great and glorious Church Abroad, to humbly praise the Lord, for He willed to return to Russian the deposit of uncorrupted Orthodoxy, preserved by the Russians in exile and to reinstate a true hierarchy in the Russian land, which, despite all the persecutions and contrivances of the God's enemies will fulfill her salvific ministry to the end of the ages.

14/27 October, 2001

Metropolitan Valentin

**Remarks by the editors of "CH. N." with the blessing and permission of His Eminence Metropolitan Valentin**

The events, described by the Metropolitan Valentin in the above declaration happened with lightning speed. The participants transmitted the details of events at the Synod building within 24 hours through telephone and fax and the Metropolitan's declaration was made by telephone from USA to Russia. Unfortunately, this resulted in minor inaccuracies.

The false brothers have indeed persecuted Metropolitan Vitaly at the July Synod session, one can say on the eve of "celebration" of his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ministry as a hierarch. At that time they outrageously and rudely demanded his resignation.

By now the situation has slightly changed. The aged Metropolitan happened to be essential to the minds of the members of the Council in order to cover with his name their unpopular decisions and to create the impression that the forced resignation of the First Hierarchy was not at all forced and just the opposite, that the transition of power went lovingly and smoothly. Not wishing to participate in this new politicking -- Metropolitan actually fled from the Synod, while several bishops followed him and tried to persuade him to return inside the building.

Due to their long-standing wish to get rid of the Metropolitan's Secretary Mrs. Rosniansky, the Synod's administration made a very serious tactical error. Instead of firing her after the end of Council's sessions, they rushed to do it at the first moment after the election of the new Metropolitan. All this resulted in an unheard of public scandal for the Church Abroad.

Archbishop John of Western Europe, who just a short while before was named Archbishop of San Francisco, nominated the name of Metropolitan Philaret. He knew him from their work in the Near East. This move was enthusiastically supported by Archbishop Anthony (later of San Francisco) who was sent to Australia and met there with the newly ordained Bishop Philaret.



## FLEEING FROM FALSE BROTHERS or THE EVICTION

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Tuesday evening, after leaving the Metropolitan, Mrs. Rosniansky went downstairs to her office, when she remembered that she had left her purse with documents and money. But near the elevator she was approached by 6 young men (among whom there were employees of the Synod and one clergyman). They handed her an envelope and demanded that she read it immediately. It stated that she was immediately no longer employed by the Synod and is to leave promptly. She said that her pocketbook was on the Metropolitan's floor. She was told that the pocketbook would be brought downstairs. It was brought down indeed, but after the Metropolitan's passport, his medical insurance card, his and her checkbooks, as well as \$20, 000 to be deposited for Metropolitan had been removed. After that the men (including Fr. Andrew Somers, a deacon and Synod employee N. Okhotin plus three other persons) took her by the arms and escorted her outside, where there was a car waiting in which Mrs. Rosniansky went to her daughter's home. Her request to inform the Metropolitan that she was to leave was not taken into account. After arriving at her daughter's, Mrs. Rosniansky called Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff and informed him of these events.

On the morning of October 24<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff, Mr. P. Budzilovitch and Benzemanns, together with a lawyer went to the nearest police precinct and then to the Synod building, to which they were not admitted. Fr. Vladimir asked the policemen to go inside, see the Metropolitan and to inquire how he was feeling and what was going on. At that time Mrs. Rosniansky arrived and also was not permitted to see the Metropolitan.

While there were negotiations going on between the lawyers (Fr. Shishkoff's and the Synod's), the Metropolitan unexpectedly walked out. He was followed by Bishops Gabriel, Mitrophan and Hilarion who were trying to persuade the Metropolitan not to leave, but to return to the Synod building.

However, the Metropolitan definitely told the police that he wanted to leave for Canada, since he is retired and is a Canadian citizen. After being assured that this is the Metropolitan's free will, the police let him go. Fr. V. Shishkoff took the Metropolitan to his car and went to his home in New Jersey. His car was followed by Fr. Paissy's car.

Metropolitan Valentin was at that time a guest in Fr. Vladimir's home. Both Metropolitan's greeted each other and exchanged the customary greeting among the clergy, a three-fold kiss and exchange of news about the latest events in Russia and abroad. Then a lunch was served at which conversations continued discussing the above subjects.

Unfortunately it became known that the Metropolitan, while leaving the Synod in haste, just put on a rassa, but had no cassock, warm clothing, panagia nor scuffia. He was given immediately Bishop Gregory's cassock, a panagia was found in the house, Metropolitan Valentin gave him his scuffia and a coat was found for him. Mrs. Rosniansky had also no coat and that was given her too.

After the meal, the Metropolitan rested for a while, but then information came by telephone that the Synod was sending a messenger to Fr. Shishkoff's home to New Jersey and the Metropolitan urgently left.

Priest Monk Paissios drove the Metropolitan to Canada, not via Montreal, but by side roads to Mansonville, since there came other information that at the Synod's request the Metropolitan might be stopped at the border. This precaution happened to be very timely, because the lawyer informed us that, indeed, the Metropolitan was to be stopped at the border and returned to New York.

Not being a Canadian citizen, Fr. Paissy brought the Metropolitan to the border where he was met by Fr. Serge Petroff who drove him to Mansonville. He is staying there in the Transfiguration Skete that he had founded.

On the very next day after these events, Fr. V. Shishkof was served a court summons for participating in the "kidnapping" of the Metropolitan. Mrs. Rosniansky, who was accused of kidnapping and giving the Metropolitan some medications to distort his memory, received a similar document and she is exploiting his old age disability to her personal interest.

On October 16/29th there was a Communiqué from the Chancery of the Synod of Bishops about these scandalous events in which it was declared that "the members of the Council of Bishops were alarmed to learn that the persons who brought about Metropolitan Vitaly's departure from the Synod Building before the enthronement of the new Metropolitan and the conclusion of the Council of Bishops are using this to spread various provocative rumors and to draw the Metropolitan, without his realizing it, into certain schismatic actions. After this communiqué was written, new information was received which confirm the bishop's worst fears. In consequence of this the Council of Bishops has been forced to revoke the commemoration of the name of Metropolitan Vitaly at the divine services. For these reasons the Council of Bishops has considered it necessary to inform the flock of these sad and scandalous events".

During the festive vigil service on Saturday, October 27, among the Synod's parishioners an extraordinary declaration of Metropolitan Vitaly was distributed in which he "bequeathed" to Bishop Varnava "temporarily, before the election of the new First Hierarch, to carry on the duty of Deputy First Hierarch of the ROCOR, to the bishops who have preserved faithfulness to the Orthodoxy".

Unfortunately, this "extraordinary Declaration" by Metropolitan Vitaly happens to be a canonical absurdity. He twice signed his retirement decision (in July and now, when he handed his resignation to the Council of Bishops on October 5/18, 2001). In his declaration to the Council of Bishops, the Metropolitan affirmed that "I have agreed to retire and as of now will be considered the Metropolitan of the Church Abroad in retirement". According to the canons a bishop in retirement – loses all his administrative and hierarchical powers. Therefore, the appointment by him of Bishop Varnava to head anything at all in capacity of the "Deputy First Hierarch" -- is nothing else but the tragic error of the old aged Metropolitan, made under the influence of an outside will, which will lead to another schism within the Church Outside of

Russian and in Russia. However, this would not be the very first adventure of Bishop Varnava.

### **CONTINUATION OF THE "FLIGHT" OF METROPOLITAN VITALY**

The scandalous events of the perishing of the ROCOR develop at such speed that it is difficult to keep up with them.

On Thursday evening, October 19/November 1, Bishop Michael came to the Transfiguration Skete, accompanied by 8 police officers (4 American and 4 Canadian) who disrupted the church service in order to arrest Metropolitan Vitaly and Mrs. Rosniansky.

Bishop Michael felt no shame when he allowed a policewoman to enter the altar area! The aged Metropolitan was led out during the church service, seated in a police car and brought to a hospital. The police expressed their regrets to the Metropolitan whom they know for a number of years and respect, that they had to act in such a manner, but they had to do as they were ordered. The representative of the civil authorities assured Fr. Serge that the Metropolitan would have a comfortable night in the hospital, and in the morning he would undergo a psychiatric examination to determine his mental competence. According to the latest information from Canada this has already been done and the Metropolitan was declared to be of sound mind and not under any influence of any medications, which could influence his will power. Therefore he and Mrs. Rosniansky were released and are now in the Mansonville.

While in Canada, Metropolitan Vitaly, together with Bishop Varnava have already ordained Archimandrite Serge (Kindiakov) and Bishop Varnava (without adhering to any legal procedures) was defrocked by the Council of Bishops via a registered letter! It seems that there is no end of the adventures in the life of the recent existence of the ROCOR!

### **ELECTION OF NEW FIRST HIERARCH OF ROCOR**

The Council of Bishops, which opened on October 23, 2001, on the very first day of sessions, elected as First Hierarchy of the ROCOR Archbishop Laurus of Syracuse and Troitsa.

Metropolitan Vitaly, who previously in July was forced to render his retirement, did this for a second time, officially handing over his dioceses to Bishops Michael and Gabriel.

According to the information we received, Metropolitan Vitaly came to the Council's opening, handed over the declarations published below and left the meeting.

### **DECLARATION OF FIRST HIERARCH, METROPOLITAN VITALY**

"To the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

October 5/18, 2001

DECLARATION of the First Hierarchy, Metropolitan Vitaly

Recognizing the depth of the sinful fall of certain members of the Council of Bishops of our Church, in their intense, but not yet fully expressed, desire to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate, I, acknowledging my full responsibility before God, the Russian Orthodox people and my own conscience, consider it my duty to proclaim that the Council of Bishops, which will open on October 23, 2001, can only be called an assembly of irresponsible individuals.

Doubtless this Council intends to discuss questions relating to the possible unification with the false church of the Moscow Patriarchate. A few days ago I received the "Fraternal Epistle" of Patriarch Alexis, which, to my deep sorrow, elicited a joyful reaction from many clergy of our Church. They even sent an elated appeal to the Council, asking it to respond favorably to the Patriarch's letter. More than eighteen clergymen of our Church signed their appeal. And how many more of them are there that are still afraid to reveal themselves?

Seeing no other way out of the present situation and not wishing to bear responsibility for the final ruin of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which has been entrusted to my care, I declare: I consider myself the lawful successor of all the previous metropolitans of our holy Church Abroad: the first Metropolitan Anthony, then Metropolitan Anastassy; and finally, Metropolitan Philaret. I am the fourth Metropolitan of the Russian Church Abroad and until now, with God's help, I have continued to guide this holy vessel on a straight course through the menacing waves of the sea of life, avoiding reefs and shoals, and mighty whirlpools which threaten to drag ships into abyss. Unfortunately, the fateful moment came when I understood and assessed the lamentable fact that between me and other hierarchs of our Synod oneness of mind and soul no longer exists. I told them this at the last meeting of the Synod. Soon after the beginning of the first session, I left the conclave disheartened when I fully realized my isolation from the other hierarchs. On the basis of this and this alone I consented to retire and agreed to be considered the Metropolitan in retirement of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In this Church I was born, baptized and will die when the time comes.

Furthermore, I wish to proclaim for all the world to know that, as First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, I fully denounce and condemn any rapprochement whatsoever or future union with the false church of the Moscow Patriarchate. I also wish to declare that I remove my signature from the following documents, which I signed: 1) My signature on the appeal to Patriarch Paul of Serbia 2) My signature endorsing the creation of a committee for establishing relations with the Moscow Patriarchate.

On the basis of the above, I summon all Orthodox archpastors, pastors, and faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to close ranks in a single host to combat all the sinful acts of both the present Council and the Moscow Patriarchate.

I call down God's blessings on all Russian Orthodox people in the homeland and abroad who strive to follow the path,



firstly, of the holy Patriarch Tikhon, and, secondly, of my predecessors Metropolitan Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret, who now enjoy a blessed repose.

Metropolitan Vitaly, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

Metropolitan Laurus was elected on the very first meeting of the Council. 12 bishops participated in the direct elections and 6 sent in their written votes.

Archbishop Laurus got 12 votes. Archbishop Mark, Archbishop Hilarion and Bishop Benjamin received one vote each.

It is interesting to recall, that when the late Jose Munoz (the guardian of the Iveron Myrrh-gushing Icon) told Bishop Hilarion that he must feel sad going to Australia after living for so many years in New York where he got so many friends — the Bishop quickly responded: "It doesn't matter, for I will return as a Metropolitan!

It is public knowledge now that Archbishop Lazarus, Bishop Benjamin and Bishop Varnava have openly declared that they do not accept Archbishop Laurus as the First Hierarch and will instead commemorate Metropolitan Vitaly! Since Metropolitan Vitaly twice (voluntarily or involuntarily) signed his declaration of retirement — the talk about him being a First Hierarch has absolutely no canonical significance. The pretense of Bishop Varnava, based upon another declaration of Metropolitan Vitaly (even after his departure to Canada) — happens to be nothing but another of his adventures. It is only sad, that he is being followed by the Western European clergy and, according to the news we have received, also the whole Canadian diocese will follow (except 2-3 priests) who cannot stand even the name of Bishop Michael.

The Russian language Jewish newspaper "Novoye Russkoye Slovo" ("New Russian Word") on October 29<sup>th</sup> published an editorial article about the ROCOR Council of Bishops. The four columns entitled "The Russian Orthodoxy unites" is written by people obviously quite alien to the Russian Orthodox Church (not to say, hostile), but nevertheless they give much significant information about the opinion of the Moscow Patriarchate regarding the newly elected ROCOR's First Hierarch.

In bold type there is the sub-title "The Moscow Patriarchate has a realistic chance of uniting with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The Council of Bishops has elected as the new First Hierarch an active supporter of unification of the two churches".

The newspaper significantly bases her information on statements made by Archpriest Nicholas Balashov, the Secretary of the Moscow Patriarchate's Foreign Relations Department.

"The Moscow Patriarchate completely hails the appointment of the new First Hierarch. 'We would be happy to have a dialogue with him' ", said the patriarchal representative (Underlined "Ch. N").

He explained to the newspaper's editors that from the Moscow Patriarchate "glorification" the New Martyrs and the Royal Family "now all the obstacles for unification of the two churches have collapsed". However he believes that during the period of the separation of the ROCOR and the MP — "both churches accumulated a multitude of unpleasant moments in their relationship". Supposedly the problem is due to the fact that the Church Abroad condemned Sergianism and treachery, but on the other hand, the MP has reasons for blaming the Church Abroad because "the second First Hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy praised Hitler and the Nazi regime and for that he gained possession of all the parishes on the Germany's territory".

As befits the sons of lies, this Archpriest Balashov lies.

Metropolitan Anastassy never praised Hitler, and only on one occasion thanked him for the German government's considerable assistance in building the very first Orthodox cathedral in Berlin. He blessed not the politics of Hitler, but the liberation army of General Vlasov, created from the Russian prisoners of war in order to fight against communism. Almost all the churches (except the cathedral in Paris) that were built before the revolution throughout the free world (and not only in Germany) were under the jurisdiction of the ROCOR. This included also the missions in the Far and Near East.

The newspaper expresses the opinion that "as a result of the sharp change in the official politic of the ROCOR, within her there will be a schism. One of the centers of this schismatic movement might become the First Hierarch of the Russian Autonomous Church (with the center in Suzdal) Valentin (Rusantsov)"... "The center of schism might become Archbishop of Cannes, Barnabas, also a ferocious opponent of the ROC". But as Archpriest N. Balashov hopes, these schismatics will play no big role in the relationship between both churches. "Father Laurus always believed in the cooperation between our churches".

According to analysts of the newspaper "it is very doubtful the Moscow Patriarchate will unite with the ROCOR: it is more probable that one can speak about the swallowing by the Moscow of the dioceses abroad".

Then, in the words of the same Balashov it is reported that "no one plans to chase out the local priests from their churches and therefore one may presume that the conditions of swallowing will much softer than in the case of handing over of churches in Jerusalem to the ROC."

The newspaper's report concludes with the words: "The dioceses of the ROCOR are a very valuable acquisition in every respect. At present, the church outside the borders of Russia has about half a million adherents, who live in more than 30 countries".

Almost simultaneously the council of ROCOR Bishops received two appeals to unite with the MP: from the MP itself and the satellite of the MP — the OCA.

Up to the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, the MP understood that there was no use in addressing the ROCOR with any sort of appeals as a hopeless case, because she would not honor them with a response. However, during Metropolitan Vitaly's tenure, she took the risk of addressing the ROCOR with a "Jubilee Epistle" in 1987. She did not receive then a



direct response, but her "brotherly appeal to overcome the spirit of bitterness and barrier" in order to "with one mouth and one heart glorify our Lord and the Savior" was quoted in the Epistle of the Synod of Bishops to the flock on account of the preparations for celebrations of the millennium of Christianity in Russia.

Now the situation toward the MP has drastically changed. The Council of Bishops directly responds with the "Reply of the Council of the ROCOR to the fraternal Epistle of the Russian Orthodox Church".

Addressing the MP hierarchy as "Venerable archpastors, members of the Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate", the ROCOR council of Bishops thanks them "for your friendly address to our Council with its appeal to overcome divisions and we trust in the sincerity of the wishes you have expressed". Among other things, the Council writes to the MP: "By holding fast to the firm, consistent course of the Church Abroad, departure from which would be disastrous to all the Russian Orthodoxy, we do not doubt that we have made mistakes somewhere, and in our church life sins are possible. We would appreciate it if you would plainly point out to us these shortcomings for our correction. Without ceasing to hope in God's grace, 'which always heals the infirm and provides for those in need' we find it expedient to engage in constructive meeting between our representatives, which would help bring to light the substance of our division and define the mutual recognized obstacles which divide us and eventually overcome them".

The essence of the Sergianism and ecumenism very long ago were defined by the ROCOR in the most precise theological terms. Metropolitan Anastassy has left a testament warning against getting into any sort of relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate, even on a social level. The ever-memorable Metropolitan Philaret, even very categorically denounced any grace within her. It is amazing that beginning with the Council of 2000, the hierarchy of the ROCOR in its totality is not afraid of leading their flock into errors, while steadfastly insisting that it is strictly following the path of former First Hierarchs!

So then, summing up the opinions and prognoses of people totally foreign to the Church and also the hopes of the MP for the future, one may be assured that before our very eyes there has occurred the disgraceful and scandalous demise of the ROCOR, which was predicted to Metropolitan Vitaly in 1994 by Bishop Gregory (Grabbe).

The newly elected Metropolitan of the ROCOR, most probably is a transitional First Hierarch. In this manner, some time ago the Catholics elected to the papacy a sickly and old man in the person of John XXIII, which was quite openly discussed in the press. Metropolitan Laurus, 73 years old, is seriously and chronically sick. He suffered three removals of tumors in the sinus area and just recently was given a radiation treatment, because a fourth operation is impossible.

## **EPISTLE OF THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE ROCOR TO THE DIVINELY SAVED FLOCK IN THE HOMELAND**

Brethren and Sisters!

At the last Council of our Church, in October of 2000, documents were adopted which have elicited various reactions among our flock. The greater part of the faithful wholly approved of the Council's actions; but part of the flock was confused by certain assertions in the documents we adopted. These confusions were caused, firstly, by the Letter to Patriarch Paul of Serbia, and also by several clauses and statements regarding the Moscow Patriarchate.

We acknowledge that various views on the course of the Church of Russia exist among us, and it happened that these views do not always coincide. This is natural, since to define the one true path on the one hand, without falling under the process of universal apostasy, and on the other hand, without straying into sectarianism and schisms devoid of grace is a very complicated matter in our times. This, it often happens that careful correction must be applied to positions previously espoused, which are the result either of unwarranted opinions, or misinformation thought through, sometimes lie as a heavy burden on the conscience of more and more people.

The letter referred to above, which in essence was private in character, is not a declaration expressive of the general opinion of our whole Church. Also not everyone considered objectively certain things concerning the Moscow Patriarchate, in which our desire to see there positive changes turned out to be ahead of the real state of affairs.

However, even these imprudently uttered statements do not alter, yeas, and should not alter, the general course of our Church, which is founded on the Sacred Scripture and is uncompromising with regard to innovation and in the perversion of the dogmas. Notwithstanding, we have considered it necessary to make this statement.

Thus, for example, the Community on the Unity of the Church in Russia was not conceived by us as a committee on unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, but as one to raise questions concerning the fragmentation of the Church in Russia into multitude of sects, and how to halt this process and turn it around. Every right-minded Orthodox person must admit that this is not an idle question, but one which concerns us all.

No few such unjust reproaches were made during the period between the Councils. Accusations that we are uniting with unrepentant Moscow Patriarchate have dogged us already for fifteen years. However, nothing of the sort has happened yet, insomuch as this does not depend upon us, but upon the Moscow Patriarchate itself, on those processes which can bring about its return to health. And we truly desire that this healing take place as quickly as possible.

The schisms within our Church cause us immense pain and suffering, the more so because they are often brought about or provoked by false information. It is essential to resolve questions of doubt and argument in frank and open dialogue, without unwarranted bitterness and preconceived opinions, and, all the more, without outside, ill-intentioned prompters.

We call upon those who left the fold of our Church to reconsider the position in which they have placed themselves. It is not possible to watch with indifference as groups of reckless people, who call themselves Orthodox, but in fact are



stubborn in their errors, multiply in our days. While it is still not too late, we must exert all our efforts to stop this destructive process.

Every Orthodox believer must clearly understand that there is only one true Church and there is nowhere else to flee; all around there yawns only abyss of hell. For this reason one must with all one's powers avoid the temptation that our opinion is infallible; straining for the letter of law, we often risk slipping from a firm footing. In the history of the Church in later times there are only too many lamentable examples of such falls.

We call upon all of our faithful children in the homeland to cling with confidence to the Ark of the Church, and not to give in to temptations of the spirits of wickedness, which thirst for our destruction. Trusting in our Lord Jesus Christ, we hope to be able to abide forever in the Church He founded, for the purity of which the new-martyrs and confessors of Russia shed their blood.

We trust in God and His all-pure Mother,  
The hierarchs of the ROCOR (Signatures) Metropolitan Laurus, Archbishop Alipy, Archbishop Mark, Archbishop Hilarion, Bishop Kyrill, Bishop Evtikhy, Bishop Agafangel, Bishop Ambrose, Bishop Michael, Bishop Gabriel, Bishop Agapit.

Like last year's Epistle of the Council of Bishops, the present one, addressed to the flock of the ROCOR in the homeland, presumes that people there have insufficient knowledge of some details of the minutes of the previous Council and mainly, on the naiveté and trust of the Russian people.

Who, when and where did they hear that the letter (in this case written to the Serbian Patriarch Paul) signed by the entire Council of Bishops (excluding only one signature) – **“in essence was private in character, is not a declaration expressive of the general opinion of our whole Church”** ?

From this Epistle we also find out that as early as 1986 the Synod of Bishops was accused by some persons of striving to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Regarding “the committee for unity of the Russian Church” under the chairmanship of Archbishop Mark, it is sufficient to point out that of 6 members of this committee, 4 have already openly declared themselves as supporters of unification of the Church Abroad with the Moscow Patriarchate. The present Council has violated its own decision of July 26/August 8, 1983, stating that “The Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad declares again, that it can not have any relationship with the present hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate.” (Underlined by “Ch. N.”).

#### **“DEMOCRATIC” COMMUNISM OR COMMUNIST “DEMOCRACY” IN RUSSIA AND LATVIA**

Several hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church have informed Metropolitan Valentin that they cannot register their dioceses, which is an outrageous violation of the regulations of Russia's own Federal laws.

The Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church was officially registered by the Ministry of Justice and has received the civil approval of its Statutes. According to them, it is absolutely clear that the Church has right to establish new diocesan administrations, new parishes and communities. Yet in practice things have been quite different. The ROAC and her parishes are in a vicious circle, created by the former “democratized” communist system. No one puts you in jail for opening a community or the parish, but nevertheless, they prevent the Church from peacefully developing and growing by systematically forwarding the petitioners from one department to another.

So, Ambrose, Bishop of Habarovsk and Timothy, Bishop of Orenburg, presented the documentation officially approved by the Justice Ministerial, necessary to register their dioceses. They were told, that first of all, they have to present the documentation of at least 4 registered parishes. When the parish documentation was presented, it was refused, because the Diocese is not registered!

It is amazing that even (as we reported previously) the USSR system works even in Latvia, (which separated from it some time ago) – even today.

Archbishop Victor, a hierarch of the ROAC already for more than 5 years, cannot register his diocesan administration, because the Moscow Patriarchate is considered in this state to be the only representative of Russian Orthodoxy in this country. He must even be “happy” that the local authorities (not without strong protests on part of the MP) – permitted him to display an icon and the cross on the outside wall of his church building!

#### **FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROAC, METROPOLITAN VALENTIN, VISITS USA**

On October 13, Metropolitan Valentin, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church came to the USA in order to canonically accept several parishes in this country, which have left the ROCOR due to their protest against the treacherous decisions made by the Council of Bishops in 2000.

During his stay in Colorado, Metropolitan Valentin served in the monastery, established by Archimandrite Gregory (Abu-Assal) where he ordained Paul Kalomiros and Monk Peter to the diaconate, Michael Fresco to the priesthood in a parish in California and a Monk-deacon George, a priest monk for the state of Virginia.

At one of the services, following the Russian tradition, Metropolitan Valentin awarded Archimandrite Gregory with the miter.

Joanna Fillips from Portland (Oregon) has sent the Metropolitan as a gift an ostrich egg decorated with beads.

Archimandrite Gregory and the members of parishes accepted by the Metropolitan Valentin have sent a number of letters addressed to President Putin, appealing to him to stop the persecution of their First Hierarch.

From the state of Colorado, Metropolitan Valentin went to San Francisco, wishing to pray at the relics of St. John, whom he venerates very much. From there, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, he went to New Jersey, where he stopped at Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff's house as he has for 8 years now. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, he left for Russia.

During his stay in the USA, the Metropolitan was informed through the Vertograd internet journal, that the local Vladimir court has fined the newspaper "Prizyv," which has especially rudely attacked him, with a more than 10,000 ruble fine for violating the court order to cease publishing anything about the Metropolitan. According to Vertograd: "Such a decision was made by one of the Vladimir courts in response to a suit on the part of the First Hierarch of the ROAC regarding the defense of his honor, because this newspaper again published a slanderous article against him."

According to information we have received, the visit of Metropolitan Valentin to the monastery has left a strong impression upon all the non-Russians he met.