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MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The staff of "Church News" sincerely greet their readers with the Great Feast of Christ's Nativity and wish them all the very best in the approaching New Year.

Having come to the end of our 13th year of publication, we feel obliged to thank all our readers who have made it possible for us to continue our efforts to issue "Church News" through their generous donations. Many thanks to them all! As in previous years, we enclose an envelope with our return address in the hope that our readers will continue to support us.

We also ask all those who do NOT want to receive "Church News" to let us know, so we might not burden them with unwanted mail and also not waste our funds on postage.

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MOSCOW PATRIARCH PROMOTES AN OIL COMPANY

ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IGNORES JERUSALEM PATRIARCH

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE "ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA"

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN MOSCOW

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NATIVITY EPISTLE

Of His Eminence **Valentin**, Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church

Beloved in Lord archpastors, pastors, brothers and sisters, children of the Russian Orthodox Church!

On this bright and joyous day rejoice and be merry because God became man and man became like God and the angels sang a hymn of praise: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men"*.

During the holy Nativity heavenly joy overwhelms the whole Orthodox world. Our hearts glorify the newly born Divine Child Christ and the soul of every Christian rapturously repeats with the angels: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men"*!

The newly born Divine Child Christ, Whose life is an ideal and a model for all of us Orthodox Christians to follow, brought peace and love down to earth. The bright Bethlehem star, which miraculously appeared and lightened the way to the manger of the Divine Child Christ, in the dark night pointed to the place where laid the One Who had to give His life for the sake of our salvation.

Out of all the millions who lived at the time of Christ's Nativity and who were living in the darkness and under the death of paganism, only a few great wise men and a few humble shepherds were given the blessing of seeing the Son of Truth – the Messiah, incarnate of the Virgin! God the Father sent His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ to the earth at a time when there was not only natural night, but also the night of spiritual ignorance and forgetting of God.

The high priests, Pharisees and the Scribes, who supposedly were to be especially close to God and the Divine mysteries, didn't bother to learn of the great mystery of the Nativity. They didn't rejoice at the birth of the Divine Child Christ – on the contrary they became confused and together with the profane King Herod were inflamed with the same desire – to destroy the One Who was sent by God the Father from heaven in order to save fallen mankind from sin, the curse and eternal death.

As in the time before the Nativity of Christ, when all the world was oblivious of God, so it is now, when we are two millennia closer to the Second and glorious Coming of Christ to the earth. The true faith in Christ again is denied by contemporary high priests and Pharisees, and the little flock faithful to Christ is subject to persecutions. The XXth century revealed to us the great image of patience and sufferings to the end for Christ's sake. In the previous century there shone unseen the host of New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, who suffered at the hands of the godless rulers. By the mercy of God our Church received the mission of the responsibility to be the successor of the New Martyrs' Church, the Catacomb Church, the Persecuted Church, yet which is wholeheartedly faithful to Christ. And if He and His saints were persecuted, so it is necessary to persecute us also, as the Lord Himself told us in the Holy Gospel.

While recalling the XXth century with aching heart, with its unseen totalitarian and godless violence, we have to state that in the historical memory of Russia and her Orthodox people it will remain as the century of great sadness. It would not be an overstatement to say that we will call the XXth century the bloodiest in the history of mankind.

The persecutors of Christ's Church abundantly shed the blood of those who followed the Gospel commands, ardently believing in the Lord and loving Him, suffering terribly for this faith and love. Through these sufferings and witness to their faith, the persecuted Orthodox were bringing you the light of teaching and love of Christ even to those godless powers, who were implanting atheism, totalitarianism and every sort of sin.

Like the past century, the new XXIst century started with unseen ecclesiastical disturbances, and discords and schism within the Church from the wave of terrorism and wars in the world. The Evangelical prophecies about the last times are being fulfilled: nation rises against nation and blood is shed in fratricidal wars. The false pastors reject sound church teaching, and people confused by false teachings and heresies do not find the path to the church, within the salvific bulwark of the One True Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church, being a legitimate successor of the Catacomb Church, does not recognize the Renovationists and Sergianists; she anathematizes the destructive heresy of ecumenism. Come what may, we are ready to follow the legacy of the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, presided over by the saintly Tikhon, Patriarch and Confessor of Russia. The steadfastness of our Church in the Truth and her unshakability in the faith is becoming again a pretext for new persecutions of Russian Church.

But let us not fall into depression and sadness. Let us remind ourselves that the Divine Child Christ was persecuted from the very first minutes of His life on earth. As Christ had no place to

rest His head but had to rest it on the Cross, rendering His Spirit to the Father, so we will have to give ourselves to the hands of God with the words: "Forgive, O Lord, our enemies, for they do not know what they do."

Let us, on this all-blessed day of Christ's Nativity bring forth our warm prayers to the Divine Child Christ. Let us fervently beg for His help and protection, in order not to be under the power of those Scribes and Pharisees, who together with King Herod were seeking to destroy the Divine Child Christ, and those, who eventually crucified Him, screaming: "Let His blood be upon us and our children".

Let the love brought down by the Divine Child Christ strongly reign in the hearts of each Orthodox Christian and may our hearts be filled with unceasing heavenly joy in accord with our good deeds for the good of God's Church and our Fatherland.

Once more I sincerely and cordially greet my God loving flock with the most glorious feast of Divine love toward us sinners. I prayerfully wish, my beloved, that the Lord grant to the Church and the whole world the salvific peace which was announced by the angels to the shepherds, and through them to all mankind on the night of the holy Nativity.

Let us humble our hearts and bend our knees before the newborn Divine Child Christ, let us remember that eternal life begins on earth through the struggle to strengthen oneself in the faith, in love for God, God's Church, Orthodoxy, and our neighbors. Following those virtues gave spiritual strength to the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia – the pillars of Orthodox teaching in the twentieth century.

May the grace and love of the Lord Jesus Christ descend upon all of us in the coming New Year of the Lord's mercy.

With much love, Valentin, Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir

Suzdal, 2001-2002

VILE FALSIFICATION

We have received two magazines called "Suzdal Diocesan Herald" and both with # 11. One #11 is for the months of April, May and June 2001 (without the name and address of an editor); then we received #11 with the same name for the months of May—September 2001 with the recently defrocked former Archpriest Andrew Osetrov named as editor, along with his wife H. Shipoonov, former Proto-deacon D. Krasovsky and Osterov's friend A. Tsarev. The return address is that of Krasovsky.

The issue for April-June 2001, without a named editor, must be considered unofficial. And regarding the "special issue" published by the group with the defrocked A. Osetrov, we consider it our duty to warn our readers that this issue, which was put out by defrocked clergy who illegally used the letterhead of the official publication of the Suzdal Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, is nothing but a slanderous and even sordid collection of falsehoods by the clergy who were defrocked by a decision of the ecclesiastical court of the Suzdal Diocese.

In this publication of the defrocked group are forged minutes of meetings of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, minutes of a "court" with the decision to defrock the First Hierarchy of the Russian Church and copies of "witness" statements in the "case" of the then Archimandrite Valentin dating back to 1988, when the KGB successfully tried to enlist him in their service. Certainly, access to this documentation from the procurator's office and, more, its publication requires a rather close relationship with the "authorities" and their considerable interest in assisting the group.

The 40 page "Suzdal Diocesan Herald" by Osterov and Co was mailed in an envelope with the return address of the Diocesan Administration and in the name of Archbishop Theodore! The postage on the envelope received by a priest known to us amounted to almost 3,480 rubles. This is an enormous cost for someone with a moderate income in Russia. A priest in Australia received the same kind of envelope with even higher postage. It is obvious that some one had to pay to print and mail out this disgusting publication, using the ROCOR parish address roster, because Osetrov had a very small parish and his wife is unemployed with 11 children to support.

Upon checking matters with the Suzdal Diocese we found out that **Metropolitan Valentin has already filed suit against Osetrov and his "editorial colleagues"**.

Unfortunately in this disgusting publication there happened to be published the "Personal opinion of Mrs. V. Schatiloff regarding a 'memo'". It was provided to Helen Osetrov/Shipoonov to support her very well written paper concerning the teachings of the "God-name" (Imyabozhniki) heresy that was submitted to the Synod of Bishops. The clergy who were accused of spreading this heresy denied it in writing, which satisfied the Synod, and the case was closed. However, this decision did not please Osetrov and Co and they have used the heresy case for personal revenge toward the Metropolitan.

I very much regret that unexpectedly I became a victim of a provocation and my name happened to be on the pages of a not only slanderous but also very sordid publication.

In connection with the Osetrov publication I, Mrs. Anastasia G. Schatiloff, received a letter from Archbishop Theodore which states: "When it came time to issue # 12 of the 'Suzdal Diocesan Herald' I became aware that the Osetrov group had sent out their own # 11 in my name. I was informed of this by telephone. Since I did not know the contents of the details of the Osetrov self-defense, we included a short explanation only. The [latest] number was already ready to go to press when I received this Osetrov sordid vileness. When I became acquainted with it my eyes were ready to pop out over the mischievousness of their insolence. Thus in our # 12 issue we published an expanded explanation in the name of the editorial staff.

In this publication, the former priest has unmasked himself as the real author of all the newspaper's publications that were signed as being no more and no less than "journalistic investigations." It seems, that in order to give some weight to his statements, Osetrov several times mentions your name. This is, for the time being, the sad news. Other news includes this: the chapel of the Equal to the Apostles St. Pr. Vladimir is already finished. In the face of our snowfalls this appears to be a small miracle. We are purchasing some church vessels, hung a few icons in order to prepare the chapel for a lesser consecration. In the future icons need to be painted for the iconostasis.

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF LADY OF KAZAN PARISH IN NEWARK, N J

On the initiative of the Lady of Kazan parish in Newark, NJ Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff on Sunday, December 10/23rd convened an extraordinary parish meeting. There were present about 40 parishioners with voting rights.

The theme of the meeting was the change in the position and ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad after the Councils of Bishops in 2000 and 2001 and regard to the commemoration of the newly elected Metropolitan Laurus or the retired Metropolitan Vitaly, who has created a new hierarchy.

The meeting opened with a speech by the rector, who laid out before the parish members the gradual apostasy of the present hierarchy from the policies of the former First Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

After prolonged discussion and various propositions it became clear that the parishioners would insist upon commemorating Metropolitan Laurus. There were also propositions to commemorate both Metropolitans Laurus and Vitaly, the latter as "ailing", such proposals demonstrating a total canonical illiteracy. The rector offered to conduct services on the Nativity and Epiphany feasts, but on the condition that he would commemorate Metropolitan Vitaly (without any titles) as he had for the previous three weeks.

The end result of this prolonged very emotional and yet very orderly meeting (the Church Warden and several parishioners were seen to cry) was that Fr. Vladimir left the meeting and requested that he be informed of the final decision of the parish. It was delivered in about an hour and a half and the parish decided that Fr. Vladimir's arrangements were not acceptable. He has been its rector for 31 years and until recently enjoyed the love and respect of the parishioners.

Meanwhile, one of the faithful parishioners offered Fr. Vladimir his house in Staten Island, one of the New York suburbs, in which his grandfather Anatoly Bootenko in 1956 had a St. Nicholas Church.

Unfortunately, all this happened one must say on the eve of the Nativity and the Kazan parish might be without a priest, choir and reader, because Fr. Vladimir's Matushka had carried out both these duties.

At the same time, Father Vladimir has to organize a new parish in such a stressful period. It will be under the jurisdiction of the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir Valentin.

INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROAC, METROPOLITAN VALENTIN

We have received an interview given on December 2001, by the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, Valentin, Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir. This interview was given to the Internet publications "NTV.Ru" and "The world of Religions". With regret we are forced to omit some question and answers due to limitations of space. We omitted such as related to the glorification of the Imperial Family or his relationship to the political organization 'Pamyat' (Memory) or similar matters.

1. *For what reason did you leave the ROC in 1990?*

The atmosphere of betrayal, lies, corruption and a multitude of unchurchly events that permeated the air in the Moscow Patriarchate. Over the course of many years I believed that by compromising with “little evils” one avoided participation in the large-scale evil in the Sergianist lie. I tried to preserve the most important – the religious revival which started in our city, in my parish, where we tried to give the faithful the possibility of living a full ecclesiastical life. But human strength is not unlimited. When, at a meeting of the “sacred Synod” that was deliberating my “personal case”, it became utterly clear to me that the price for any ecclesiastical external success would be large-scale betrayal, I had to either betray my parishioners, giving them up them for the demands of “the well-being of God’s Church,” or to retire. I could not ignore this betrayal, I could not do it no matter what were the rationalizations; therefore I proposed that my flock join me in going to the Church Abroad. Besides, through this concrete episode that happened to me, the total untruth of the MP -- an organization that is based upon **total lies and betrayals** -- became clear to me. Beyond the lie that the Russian New Martyrs were political criminals, there was the lie that the Church in the Soviet Union was never subjected to religious persecutions, that the godless authorities are “from God”.

Therefore, when I read now the justifications of Sergianism, that it was necessary for the sake of saving the Church for the faithful, I can only feel sad and grieved. **I served in the MP for thirty years** and I saw the Sergianist system inside and out and I know that in order to “save it” it was absolutely necessary to betray. The Sergianist hierarchs have betrayed the faithful and the faithful sense it and have **left the Moscow Patriarchate**. I could not betray our faithful and, therefore, practically all those who were with me in 1990 (except for those who died, of course) remained with me and now many more have come.

2. *Did the desire to leave the ROC come only in 1990 or before? If you were prepared to leave ROC before, why then did this materialize only in 1990?*

Before 1990, actually, there was nowhere to go. The parishes of the Church Abroad were deep underground, and if there is no alternative, then one thinks that there is nowhere to go and it is possible some how to suffer a bit longer. In 1989-90, during “glasnost” and “perestroika”, thank God, the possibility of leaving the Patriarchate arose in such a manner as to preserve a legal ecclesiastical existence and, even more, to fill it with the content of grace. Therefore I believe, that my conflict with the superiors of the Patriarchate arose not by accident – the Lord simply has led us from the “house of slavery”. But since we had been **waiting for some time for it** He “pushed” us out; made it necessary to choose “either – or”.

I believe something like this did not happen to us alone. The process of the collapse of the MP enveloped all Russia. After joining the ROCOR I was appointed an Exarch to the Russian parishes and I remember well — there was not a week when parishes did not join us. There were even times that during a single week **several parishes** joined us. These parishes were in Moscow and Petersburg, in the Baltic States and Ukraine, in the Caucasus and Siberia and the Far East. In this process throughout Russia at that time we saw the beginning of the genuine repentance of the Russian people, it’s cleansing from the atheistic leprosy and its “ecclesiastical” variety: Sergianism.

Or, recall the story when Alexis II made a clearly heretical speech before the rabbis of New York, when he said that Judaism and Orthodoxy are actually the very same religion. At that time many priests of the MP ceased to commemorate him as patriarch, but then did not decide to leave. At that time a wide spread persecution of our Church began and leaving the MP meant a loss of the church and everything went back to the usual.

The Lord always calls one to Himself, to the Truth, but one also has to listen to this call.

3. *What were the reasons for your break up with the ROCOR in 1995?*

There were two main reasons. The first – the outrageous disorganization introduced into the life of the Russian Church by controversial decisions of the ROCOR Synod. It created the danger that the True Church simply would cease to exist in Russia and would remain only in the catacombs. Secondly – was the apostasy from Orthodoxy, from the uncompromising relationship toward the heresies of Ecumenism and Sergianism. Generally speaking, the controversial decisions of the Synod were the reason for this apostasy. The Synod didn’t clearly know what to do in Russia: should they minister to building up and developing of their dioceses and parishes, or have negotiations with the MP. So it wavered from one side to the other.

I have tried many times to warn my brother bishops of the destructiveness of what they were doing. The very wise elder Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) also sounded the alarm regarding the situation, but we were not only not heard, but showered with slander. Due to slander of “Pamyat” (“Memory,” a political organization) I was dismissed from the cathedral, suspended from serving and, after my departure from the ROCOR, in violation of numerous church canons “dismissed from the ranks”. I was making the same choice as in 1990: to submit to all of this, accept untruth

and in this manner to betray my flock, which at that time was not in Suzdal alone, but all over Russia — or to fulfill my duty as a bishop even if this meant formal administrative loyalty had to be disregarded. I swore to be a bishop to the Church and my duty before the Church and my flock was most important. The more so since the activity of the ROCOR was heading toward curtailing ecclesiastical life in Russia and was harming our dioceses and parishes. Therefore we, the bishops of one mind in Russia, have severed our submission to the ROCOR.

5. *Why in 1995 you were against the rapprochement of ROCOR and ROC?*

Because there is no reason for such a rapprochement. The Moscow Patriarchate is not the true Church. She ceased to be so when she accepted the heresies of Sergianism and Ecumenism, and agreed to actually apostatize from Christ. And she is only deceiving her faithful, pretending to be the True Church. The Church Abroad, on the contrary, for decades was famous for her stand in the Truth, no compromises regarding any kind of heresies and lies. What would a rapprochement of the ROCOR and MP require? Either a change of mind by the hierarchs of the MP, their request to those who preserved the Truth for instruction and teaching. Such a rapprochement we would honor. Or the apostasy of the Church Abroad from her steadfast position. This we consider to be betrayal. The first one has not happened, but the second has happened. And I, as a bishop whose duty is to watch over the Truth, in no way could support such a one-sided rapprochement.

As the events that followed showed, the "rapprochement" of ROCOR and the MP means not the cleansing of the Patriarchate, but the total capitulation of the Church Abroad, the denial of own ideals and a readiness to be swallowed up by the MP. Contemporary hierarchs of the Church Abroad honestly admit that they are afraid to remain in the minority, they are overwhelmed by the splendor of "the ecclesiastical revival" in Russia, the cathedral of Christ the Savior, and they want to participate in all of this. But I believe that over the last decade the MP had gotten even worse. Before, her heresies and sins could be justified by the persecution of the godless government. But now that she is free to cleanse herself of all of it of her own free will she has no conscious intention of doing this. The latter lie is worse than the first.

6. *How do you feel now about the rapprochement of ROCOR and the ROC?*

At present this is the rapprochement not of churches, not of the faithful, but of the Synod's hierarchical bureaucrats. Actually a leadership revolution in the ROCOR has happened. A faction of the bishops, who for many years were aspiring to power, have done all they could so that the legacy of their First Hierarchs Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and St. Philaret (+ 1985) be forgotten; that there would happen a rupture with the Russian bishops, among whom I was one. At present they have overcome the very last obstacle in the person of the aged Metropolitan Vitaly. He made many mistakes, but in general his mind was always Orthodox and this was not convenient. Now they openly laugh at him, call him "insane" and in this manner try to explain his desire to preserve strict Orthodoxy. Indeed, for the contemporary world, which the ROCOR bishops want to become an organic part of, the preservation of Orthodoxy is a kind of being "a fool for Christ's sake".

The present leaders of the ROCOR are basically "a new generation" of church bureaucrats, void of any clear ecclesiastical, religious views. Therefore, for them it is natural to blend into one structure with the same kind of bureaucrats from the MP. And the latter, in their turn, are interested in appropriating the heritage of the Church Abroad, to appropriate not only the church buildings, but also the right to the name, the relics of the saints so that this great and glorious name from the past would no longer "tempt" the flock of the MP by unmasking her untruths and the apostasy of her hierarchs. MP would like to have the right to say: "St. John of Shanghai — he is ours. And Fr. Seraphim Rose — he is also ours. And even Metropolitan Philaret, who didn't consider us to be a Church, look, he is now ours, not yours any more". And this is by people who are far from the Spirit of Truth. To them it seems that it is enough to switch the tags and omit from the books "the wrong words" in order to believe the matter is settled. But something like this will not happen. The Church of Christ cannot be conquered and after the destruction of the ROCOR the Lord will create a new vessel for the preservation of His Grace.

11. *During the summer of 2001 in the Vladimir city press a number of articles were published, directed against you and the ROAC. What do you think is the reason for this and who is behind it?*

This is not restricted to articles alone. The Vladimir prosecutor initiated a criminal case against me based upon slanderous accusations of one power hungry former priest, whom we have defrocked for his activity against the Church. The campaign in the press is only an "artillery support" to the criminal process — the aim of which is to remove me from the leadership of the Church or, simply to remove me physically.

There are several reasons for that. First of all – the visible success of our ecclesiastical growth – the addition of new parishes, including in the USA, the strengthening of the organization, the solemn glorification of St. Philaret, which demonstrated our spiritual and ideological succession from Russian Church Abroad when she was flourishing. The Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, especially after the crisis in the ROCOR, became a main source of attraction of those, who seek True Orthodoxy in Russia and in many other countries. Of course, for many this is not welcome. I do not believe that there is a governmental policy to destroy us, but it is obvious that some group there is definitely interested in the disappearance of the ROAC. It is possible that these people are connected to the MP, although the latter always denies participation in the campaign against me and talks of its lack of interest in this.

Why do the Vladimir authorities participate? Partially to settle old scores with me from Soviet times. Partially, out of arbitrariness -- there is plenty of it locally. To learn to live according to the law, to learn how to separate truth from slander – is not a simple task. It is much easier to use slanderers in one's own interest. It is possible that there're also criminal motives. As you know, Suzdal is a tourist city. At present, this sphere is in a critical state, but it will not be always so. It is possible that some one wants to take advantage of the local riches.

12. How do you explain the growing attention of the media to the ROAC in recent months?

I know that many connect it with the appearance in our Church of some kind of "high level protectors" and attribute everything to their "intrigues". I will not justify myself and say that there are no influential people in our Church. I will not for a very simple reason: for some reason, when the government officers and oligarchs protect the MP – this is considered proper, but if someone renders even small support to us, such a person has to justify himself or conceal his name. Is there anything criminal or immoral in supporting the True Church? Besides, our Church is open to all people, regardless of their social situation. In the same way, strong religious feelings are not dependent upon it; after all – every soul is by the nature Christian. It should be no surprise that people who are disappointed with the MP are turning to our Church. And among the political elite, who meet with MP hierarchs in "unofficial" surroundings, the disappointed can number as many as among the simple people.

Therefore, if some of the powerful in this world really offer us support, I am grateful to them and do hope that the Lord will reward their **good deeds**. Even more so, because such people have great reverence toward Christ's Church and have sincere faith. Therefore, they do not condition their help with any kind of demands upon the church authorities. Usually, I do not even know who and what they did for us and I try not to be involved. They helped: thank God.

The problem is not so much in this, but why the publications of our Church evoke such a response from society. Many feel and felt the untruth of the MP, but in so far as there was a feeling that the state is rolling down into an abyss, the conditions of the church affairs were accepted as "normal" – everything is bad and this is bad. But now a desire for revival has started in society, for order and truth, yet the situation in the MP remains the same – the very same lies, mercenary interests, lack of faith and cynicism on the part of hierarchs and many priests. The disparity is felt more sharply and people started looking around – if there is some other true Church, more corresponding to Orthodox ideals. The Church Abroad is going more and more down the slope into the bosom of the MP. The scandal of the violence against Metropolitan Vitaly demonstrated that over there they have lowered themselves also morally. And this is why society turned to us – we have never changed our position and didn't hide it and always declare it clearly and unequivocally.

Thank God in our Church there are enough talented and educated people who write and speak well and who are able to explain our position, they know how to find a common language with the clever secular people and therefore, their efforts bring forth fruit. For me, as a bishop it remains only to bestow upon them God's blessing and to hope that their efforts will increase those being saved in the Church.

13. In January 2001 the ROAC officially registered 65 parishes with the Ministry of Justice. How many of these parishes are in the Vladimir area and in how many other areas does the ROAC have her parishes?

First of all, consider that actually there are many more parishes. More than half of our Church consists of catacomb parishes, which nowhere are registered officially and even we, in the Synod of Bishops do not always know their locations but we also do not seek to know. We have several catacomb bishops, who know their flock, conscientiously minister to it and we have no reasons to intrude in their affairs. But catacomb parishes are a very organic and important part of our Church.

Many parishes have been added from the Church Abroad, and also from the Patriarchate during this year, so that actually there are many more. Also a number of ROAC parishes are

registered in the Justice Ministry under the name of the "Russian Orthodox Free Church", and a part still have not re-registered or didn't know how to. Therefore, it would not be an overestimation to say that the number of our parishes is many times greater than that you gave.

Naturally, the majority of our parishes are in the Vladimir region – around Suzdal, the spiritual and administrative center of our Church. The two capitals: Moscow and St. Petersburg have 2 parishes each and their buildings. Among the regions in Russia where we have parishes, I can single out Moscow, Leningrad, Tver, Kalooga, Riazan, Yaroslavl, Ivanovo, Tula, Briansk, Kirov, Rostov, Volgograd and Cheliabinsk regions, the Stavropol, Krasnodar and Khabarovsk and Karachevo-Tcherkasia provinces; our parishes and monasteries are also found in the Near Abroad: (Latvia, Ukraine, Byelorussia) and Far Abroad (Great Britain, USA).

14. *How many of these 65 parishes have their own church buildings?*

As a rule, the basic reason for registering our communities is to achieve the status of legal entities, necessary to establish real estate rights to church buildings. Therefore, a majority of the registered communities own their own churches.

SIGN OF GRACE OR SIGN OF WARNING?

Holy Trinity Monastery's magazine "Pravoslavnaya Rus" # 23 (1692) published information about a fire which occurred in the Monastery and concluded this information with following words: "This sad event happened namely during the night after the Abbot and the Dean of the Seminary His Grace Laurus, elected to be the fifth First Hierarch of the ROCOR arrived back at the monastery".

While giving the details of the fire, the reporter noted that the fire stopped at the Seminary room in which was the Iveron icon of the Mother of God that belonged to Metropolitan Philaret.

"...But the devil's attack upon our monastery didn't stop. After a while, namely at the end of November, it was revealed that the staff belonging to Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky) which was kept in his crypt and fourteen relics, which were kept in the Righteous Elders of Optina Chapel, were stolen"! (Emphasis by "Ch. N")

DOUBLE THINKING

Just recently the agency Vertograd reported that Fr. Victor Melehov returned to ROCOR. He was rector of the Russian church in Worcester, MA and after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret left the ROCOR when a systematic persecution under Metropolitan Vitaly of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston began. At that time some 20 parishes and communities left with the monastery. The weakening of the Church Abroad and of her prestige was already at that time being planned by the conspirators. For a long time the Synod sued the Worcester parish, hoping to get the nice church, but lost the court case in a rather disgraceful manner. At one of the court hearings the judge accused Metropolitan Vitaly and Bishop Hilarion, who were present in the courtroom, of lying. So, after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret and till now, Fr. Melehov was under the Greek hierarchy and even became their exarch to Russia. This lasted for 15 years. However Fr. Victor left this jurisdiction because this Greek hierarchy declared its independence from the Greeks in Athens and he approached the retired Metropolitan Vitaly with a petition to be accepted under his omophorion. Evidently, Metropolitan Vitaly didn't notice his 15 yearlong absence and certainly his own suspension and probable deposition and on December 3rd sent him the following letter:

3/20 December 2001

To Fr. Victor Melehov

Reverend Batiushka, Fr. Victor!

Sharing deeply your anxiety over the perplexity of our pastors and flock which resulted from the improper understanding and interpretation of the 7/20 Nov., 2001 Declaration of the ROCA Synod of Bishops regarding the (Cyprianite) Synod of Resistance, I hasten to assure you that it does not abrogate the execution of the Ukase dated 26 Oct/8 Nov, 2001, but merely suspends it, in view of the fact that the formal procedure for ratifying such decisions was not properly observed in this case.

Neither I -- nor our hierarchs, who signed the Declaration of 7/20 November 2001 -- harbor any illusion whatsoever regarding Metropolitan Cyprian's unorthodox doctrine of the Church, nor have we any thoughts of concelebrating with him or with his representatives. (Emphasis by "Ch. N.")

Relying upon the mercy and help of God, I trust that, as far as this matter is concerned, it finally will be properly resolved.

May our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and your flock upon the path of salvation, through the prayers of the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

A well-wisher of your salvation

+ Metropolitan Vitaly"

Thus the Ukase of Metropolitan Vitaly of October 26/November 8 reports a "discontinuing the thoughtless acceptance of the Council's decision in 1994 regarding the communion with hierarchy of Metropolitan Cyprian" and in another Ukase, which followed in less than 2 weeks, it is explained that the committee appointed to resolve this matter didn't present its conclusions and therefore "the execution of this decision is suspended". In commentaries to this letter, the Vertograd interprets this decision with: "It is obvious that the suspension of the Ukase means the return to the status quo which existed before it was signed". And in another report: "The supporters of Metropolitan Vitaly have renewed canonical communion with the Cyprianites, who professes a crypto-ecumenist teaching".

Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) very strongly opposed the positions of Metropolitan Cyprian and warned the Council that by this decision it is putting itself of danger of falling under its own anathema, which was proclaimed against the Ecumenists. (His article, published in the Russian version "Church News" # 35 (40) of 1994 was sent to all the hierarchs of the ROCOR.

It seems that Fr. Victor's request to rejoin the ROCOR under Metropolitan Vitaly was conditioned by his severance of communion with the Cyprianites, which initially was severed and then this was temporarily "suspended"!

EPISTLE BY METR. VITALY TO "ALL FAITHFUL CLERGYMEN AND FLOCK OF THE CHURCH ABROAD"

November 24th/December 7th 2001

St. Great Martyr Catherine

Beloved in Christ the faithful ministers and the flock of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad,

The supporters and adherents of the so-called self-appointed Metropolitan Laurus, who is attempting to seize power in the Church, have departed from us into a complete absence of spiritual roads.

Upon seeing the discords within our Church I have restored to myself the rights of Head of the Church. In response, the Synod with the participation of Bishops Michael and Gabriel raised against me a real persecution. I was subject to arrests by the civil authorities, without indication of sufficient reason and cause of my guilt. Exclusively, for the sake of cleansing the Church from such apostates, with my blessing and participation there were performed consecrations of new bishops: Sergius of Mansonville, Vladimir of Sacramento and Bartholomew of Grenada, who are faithful to the traditional confession of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, while following in the footsteps of Metropolitan Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret.

Apostates, headed by Archbishop Laurus are considered to be outside the Church.

I appeal to all faithful children of our Christ's Church to be firm in suffering this grief in our crafty times and steadfast in confession of our Orthodox faith.

I invoke upon all the faithful followers of Christ's Truth the blessings of God and thank all for the help and prayers for me a sinner.

+ Metropolitan Vitaly

Editor's commentary:

According to numerous and unanimous evidence, on October 23rd, 2001, Metropolitan Vitaly attended the opening of the Council of Bishops and handed it his declaration of retirement and even a sealed envelope with the name of a candidate for election as the new First Hierarch of the ROCOR. After that, on October 24th he unexpectedly left the Synod building after he found out that his secretary had been hastily relieved of her duties.

Metropolitan Vitaly "restored to himself the rights of the Head of the Church" at the beginning of November and not after he saw "discords in our Church". He created a new hierarchy in response to the extremely crude actions against him by Bishop Michael when he consecrated several illegal bishops.

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED...

We have decided to publish from time to time some of the letters of Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) which were not included in the collection of his letters published in 1998 in Moscow, but which at some time might be interesting to church going people.

This time we are publishing (with slight abridgements) his letter to Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco dated May 25th/June 7th, 1994.

"Christ is Risen, Your Eminence, dear Master!

I write in order to let you know that I will not be able to come to the Council of Bishops, as I have planned. A second cancer complication has much weakened me.

It worries me very much, because it seems to me, that Vladyka Metropolitan wants to by pass the only sensible measure, about which I have several times written to him nearly three years ago. He is under the impression that the Russian Bishops are no good and that he alone can elect the bishops for Russia. But he knows no one over there and, it seems, that he continues to trust Bishop Barnabas, who is unacceptable to the best of our priests in Russia. The Metropolitan is mainly under the influence of Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles, who under no condition wants to permit Bishop Valentin to rule, although he has proven himself to be very loyal to our Church and an outstanding administrator. He gathered into his diocese nearly a hundred parishes and keeps adding new ones. I met his assistant, Bishop Theodore, who made an excellent impression. This is a knowledgeable, but humble person with great oratorical gifts. I also met with the outstanding clergyman of Bishop Valentin. Archpriest Michael Ardov, who lived with Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff for a month, so I have had the chance to have many and long conversations with him. He is smart, educated and a convinced supporter of Bishop Valentin's work.

Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles caused no less damage to the revival of ecclesiastical life in Russia than Bishop Barnabas. On the one hand he ruinously influences the Metropolitan and, on the other, himself intrudes in church matters in Russia. Thus, after sending to Voronezh a truckload of clothing for the local community, which already belonged to one of the Russian Bishops, he demanded that he be commemorated as the ruling Bishop.

From several sources I know that Archbishop Anthony sent out an "official statement", with the reference to the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on March 21-25 about the suspension of Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Valentin. You certainly know very well that at this unprecedented meeting of the Synod of Bishops all the members left without making any decision at all. How did Archbishop Anthony dare to send out on his own such a decision that didn't correspond to the truth?

Unfortunately, all his activities were never creative, but always destructive. Even in his younger days in Jerusalem he has left behind a bad memory. At present he has broken the record of the Church Abroad by building one church for more than 35 years that at present stands without crosses and almost no icons inside and having a diocese of only three parishes.

According to some information, the Metropolitan was very angry with him for his opposition to glorification of Archbishop John. It is said that he even expressed the opinion he should retire. In the history of our Church this is the first case of open opposition to the Council of Bishops and to it in the case of glorification of one of our own hierarchs.

I have difficulties with the Metropolitan. I have openly written him a critique of some blunders of the Synod. He wrote me back, without refuting a single one of my arguments, but groundlessly accusing me of supposed sympathy with Hitlerism. A believe that this answer was written by Bishop Barnabas and Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles. The first continues his strong influence over him, despite his many crimes, for which he deserves to be defrocked. Instead of this, the Synod has just sent him for three months to Jerusalem, without the right to serve. I do not know exactly, but it seems that he didn't get there, but sits in Europe and continues his intrigues. And all this is unattended as well as everything else that he has done so far. Why the members of the Synod disregard it, I cannot understand....

Three years ago I reported to the Metropolitan that it is necessary to end the artificial intrigues of Bishop Barnabas against Bishop Valentin. Bishop Valentin has straightened out the relationship with Archbishop Lazarus and he finally united with him. But the Synod, to the joy of the Moscow Patriarchate, and without any reason, turned the matters against both of them. For two years in a row there was no response to their requests and reports, as if they had no parishes at all. Meanwhile, the parishes that united with them grew in number and were under the impression that they were uniting with the Synod. Ideologically it is indeed so. And the Russian bishops, after gathering more than hundred parishes felt a certain strength and at the same time have realized all the weaknesses of our church organization. This was a necessity that forced them to turn to the Patriarchal Decision of 1920, which gives several directives as to how to restore ecclesiastical administration in case of its liquidation by the communist government. The Russian Bishops at present are, on the average, young pastors who have not undergone the KGB vetting for bishops. To simply disregard so many parishes, taken away from the MP, because they have used the Patriarchal Decision of 1920 instead of including them in the proper organization in Russia would be really criminal. But also including them into the Church

jurisdiction Abroad would be unnatural. To resolve this matter on the side of Abroaders alone, without their participation is also not natural. They quite justly want to base their existence upon the Patriarchal Decision. **It is urgently necessary to create two ecclesiastical provinces: in Russia and Abroad.** How to organize their relations a bit later – is a future matter, but at the start, the matter has to be resolved together.

Actually at present, our ideology and the ideology of our Russian bishops is the same and it has to be treasured. If our Council will not stand on this position, I foresee nothing but terrible temptations for all the faithful.

Vladyka! Right now we stand on the edge of a total moral catastrophe. It is quite obvious that we have not coped with the problem that was laid upon us by Divine providence and was predestined so clearly by our former Metropolitans.

The Council can and has to straighten out this misunderstanding, but who will raise this question at the meeting? Will any one support my ideas? What to do if my memos just stay in the archives? I doubt that I will be able to participate in this Council and therefore my feeling is that we are rolling unrestrained into the abyss and now it is especially vivid and painful. Help Vladyka, to straighten out this terrible listing of the ship. Yesterday I met with Bishop John (Legky) when he visited me. He is also very sad about a lot in the actions of Vladyka Metropolitan, and probably would support you, if you would be willing to comply with my request,

I would like to know what do you think? Are you ready to raise this question on your part or in my name? I believe you have the material. If not, certainly I will it to send you. I do not need a long letter, but only “yes” or “no”. And the sooner, the better. In any case you could answer me by telephone.

Asking for your holy prayers I remain, your loving brother in Christ + Bishop Gregory

Note: There was no response to this letter — neither in writing, nor by telephone!

A CONFERENCE ON THE “HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 1917-1933”

According to information in the “Nezavisimaya Gazeta” (“Independent Gazette”) of November 28th, 2001, there was a conference held in the suburbs of Budapest in the residence of the Budim Serbian Diocese. The conference’s theme was the “History of the Russian Orthodox Church 1917-1933” as was decided at the session of the ROCOR Council of Bishops held in 2000. In the decision it is stated that the aim of the Conference is “to historically evaluate the course of the Russian Orthodox Church” after the Revolution. In the view of the organizers, at first the Conference was to be held outside Russia, but “it is not to be excluded that similar conferences will be held in Moscow or St. Petersburg”. The end result of such conferences will be “the creation of a set of questioned and disputed assertions which relate, from the historical point of view, to any one part of the Russian Orthodox Church which aim to remove the obstacles for future communion in the Truth” (Minutes # 7 of the Council of Bishops, 2000, Decision IV, para. G) (Emphasis by “Ch. N.”)

The organizer of this conference was the main assistant to Archbishop Mark of Germany, Archpriest Nicholas Artemov. The ROCOR was represented by (besides Fr. Artemov, of course) Archpriest Alexander Lebedev, Archpriest Victor Potapov, Priest-monk Evfimy (Logvinov), Maria Sockova and a permanent resident of Moscow, Michael Nazarov, whose adherence to the ROCOR is more than dubious.

From the MP clergymen who participated were Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) and Archpriest Valentin Asmus. The “academic authorities” were represented by Olga Vasileva, Anatoly Kashevarov, Sergius Firsov, Michael Shkarovsky, Stanislav Petrov and Alexander Zhuravsky.

Further it is reported that “Since during the deliberations the clergymen of ROCOR expressed the wish to convene (even if in the distant future) a Pan-Russian Council with the participation of representatives of the parts of Russian Church which are at present separated, the conference expressed the hope for ‘a conciliar removal of the separation which has existed for a number of years’”. (Emphasis by “Ch. N.”)

The two page report of this conference ends with the sentence: ‘Despite the principle differences of opinion in views and evaluations among the participants, the meeting in Sentendra left the most glowing impression of the pastors of the Church Abroad [knowing their views –this is in no way surprising, “Ch. N.”] and there is a readiness on the part of both sides to have a dialogue and possibility of the Russian historians to assist and arrange this dialogue’.

MOSCOW PATRIARCH PROMOTES AN OIL COMPANY

The spiritual leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate never stop being the objects of public sensationalism. The very latest of them is the appearance of Alexis II on TV promoting the oil company LUKoil. Several publishing media have reacted to this unprecedented commercial promotion by the Moscow Patriarch. The newspaper "Moscovskii Komsomolets" ("Moscow Komsomolets" a Communist newspaper) published a short article on December 4th entitled: "Alexis II Photographed for Nonprofit Reasons."

According to MP representatives this appearance on TV was made at no cost. However, the Moscow Komsomolets reports that the Patriarch supported the activity of the oil company, which has an impressive role in Azerbaijan and has built there a cathedral. Speaking ironically, the "MK" says: "The interests of the oil company and the Patriarchate coincided. After all, the appearance of an Orthodox cathedral in a Muslim country also strengthens the position of the Orthodox Church. Thus, to deem the participation of the Patriarch in the LUKoil advertisement as utterly free of charge is not quite correct. If Alepkperov (the president of the company) is not personally paying the Patriarch, nevertheless, transferring oil dollars in sufficient amounts for building churches supports the Orthodox Church".

The newspaper "Moscovskoye Vremia" ("Moscow Times") of November 20th reports that Ridiger was seen outside the church surrounded by the main administrators of the company as well as within the glittering iconostas. Over him there popped up on the screen "10 years of LUKoil – for the good of Russia". In this advertisement the Patriarch said: "We are grateful to LUKoil for its support of many Russian Orthodox Church projects aimed at the restoration and revival of what was destroyed in the past years".

On December 5th "Ecumenical News International" copied the article by Andrew Zolotov from the "Moscow Times".

No matter how generously the MP might be supported by any company or private person, until now the Orthodox Church has shown her gratitude by prayers for the contributors. According to the unanimous assertions of various reporters, this company alone gave the MP tens of millions of dollars.

ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IGNORES JERUSALEM PATRIARCH

According to the bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of December 5th, the Israeli government categorically refuses to acknowledge and approve the new Jerusalem Patriarch Ireneos because it considers him a Palestinian. Meanwhile, the governments of Jordan and Palestinians have approved his election.

Not a single representative of the Israeli government attended the installation ceremony of the newly elected Patriarch in August. So far, not a single Israeli minister met or spoke with him. The local authorities insist that they have information from the security agencies, which cannot be published, that the Patriarch is connected with the Palestinian Liberation groups.

This affront to the Patriarch has also practical consequences. For example, the government refused to give visas to persons invited by the Patriarch. All the efforts to organize the meeting of Patriarch with the highest Israeli officials so far have been unsuccessful, although it is known that he already met with the Jordanian King.

The Jerusalem Patriarchate is the largest landowner in Israel and even the land on which the Israeli Parliament stands belongs to him. The Patriarch stated that he will have to negotiate the agreements of the rents, but that he is not going to use this to undermine the stability of Israel's government.

Patriarch gave an interview to the newspaper "Jerusalem Post" and stressed that he has no intentions to middle in political matters. "I am not pro-Palestinian, not pro-Israeli, nor pro-anything. I am only pro-God", said the Patriarch. He also noted that among the Christians under his jurisdiction there are not only Palestinians, but also Greeks, Arabs, Romanians and a lot of non-Jews from the former Soviet Union.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE "ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA"

The agency "Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc." on December 13th published a letter signed by Nina Tkachuk Dimas in which it is reported that information about large contributions over the past 3 years by two related foundations which are linked to Metropolitan Theodosius and remained unaudited and need updating.

According to the published information about donations to charitable and religious organizations, the OCA have received between 1999 and 2000 \$4, 575,000.

The official publication of the OCA "The Orthodox Church" for December, states (with no explanation), that Bishop Innocent of Hagerstown is suspended and sent into retirement. At the same time, three priests were suspended and 4 deposed. Again, no explanation was given.

We reported a few years ago that these financial affairs in the OCA resulted in a sort of revolution within its administration. Are not these mass suspensions and depositions the result of protests against the First Hierarch for his unwillingness to give the account of management of such huge sums of donated money?

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN MOSCOW

The newspaper "Moscow Komsomolets" of November 14th reported that the authorities of the Moscow Educational District and the Moscow Patriarchate have signed an agreement about introducing religious education in secular schools on a voluntary basis.

It provides for cooperation in various matters, namely warnings about the harmfulness of smoking, of drugs and involvement in sects.

Amazingly, the agreement in no way mentions a struggle by the Church against the widely advertised moral perversions on TV screens in Russia.

According to "NTVRU/Religion and Society" theological faculties already function in nine higher educational institutions. Unfortunately it is also reported that "the developed poly-confessional (i.e., about various faiths) governmental educational standard in the field of theology will allow the student on their own free will to gain a knowledge of the world religions."

The study of world religions, without a substantial knowledge of one's own Orthodox faith will be very harmful for students. Surely, the MP knows this. Therefore, there is nothing to be happy about here.