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UNCONTROLLED TERROR AGAINST THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN SUZDAL IS GROWING

Each day there come from Suzdal more and more troublesome news about the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church. The pails of dirt with which her enemies showered the First Hierarch of the Russian Autonomous Church Metropolitan Valentin were far from satisfactory to them. Despite all their efforts, the residents of the city have him reelected as representative to the City Council for the third time. This has forced them to use the method of open terror not only against him alone, but also against a number of members of the Orthodox Church in Suzdal and her neighboring parishes.

When just starting her attack against the ROAC and her First Hierarch Metropolitan Valentin – the Moscow Patriarchate pretended to be just an uninterested observer. However, after being able to secure the support on part of “high level authorities” and anticipating a victory, she took off her mask. By now it is absolutely obvious that the main reason of pathological hatred toward Metropolitan Valentin is a fact, that he presents to her a dangerous **competition!**

In tiny Suzdal, in which nearly all residents who do go to church (some 500 to 600 people only) – they are his flock. In this little town, there are 11 churches he has restored from ruins, while Moscow Patriarchate has opened only three. He has two convents with their own churches and one monastery. The Moscow Patriarchate has one convent and in it, blasphemously is located a popular restaurant! For all the 10 years, the Moscow Patriarchate has not built there a single church. Metropolitan Valentin, with no financial assistance on part of the government and even local authorities has built two new churches: on the cemetery and the new settlement, as well as a chapel on the lot, where once there stood St. Barbara's church, totally destroyed by the atheists. And this is not enough: he managed to receive the “humanitarian assistance” in form of dry products which he partly gives away and during a whole year every day feeds free of any charges the seniors and in general needy people. No one is asking them to which church they are going if any at all. Metropolitan Valentin established in Suzdal the only one parochial school, which is attended by more than 60 children. Their needy parents some time get a “stipend” which is paid to children for going to school and “their outstanding achievements”.

All of this, in the eyes of the Moscow Patriarchate, which didn't do a single similar thing – it is a tremendous crime!

Since the slanders were of no help – an open terror became a way out. Having support of the Moscow Authorities and as we find out from the article published in Internet “Romantis” and signed just “Suzdal's resident” --- “drunk girls of frivolous behavior, who hang around with the members of the group (“Our Cause”, Ch. N.) have related that “all the procedure is already decided in Moscow, where there is the main client – the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate”. The Moscow's “Orthodox patriotic” mafia received an “offer of a deal to “condemn Valentin”. The amount of price is not clear, but undoubtedly, it is not small. It was decided to start with developing a “blue” cause (gay in Russian slang) and make sure he would be condemned for pedophilia (that was the idea of the clients). However, on the trial, the 4 “sexually abused” unexpectedly renounced their testimonies and apologized (to Metropolitan) for the slander.” . . .”In case nothing comes out of the trial, then there is to be organized the regular scenario: car accident, setting fire on the house and similar. But such a final is not welcome, because the clients want to discredit the whole leadership of the ROAC as “manger of debauchery” in order to have better chance to deal with the whole ROAC”.

All this explains the silence and inactivity of the regional and local authorities. The new mayor does not hide his contacts with fighting group of “Nashe Delo” (Our Cause), with representative of the Moscow Patriarchate Archbishop Eulogy of Vladimir, and the rector of the Kazan church (the first church restored by Metropolitan Valentin, at that time archimandrite) a member of the Federal Security Services (former KGB) – priest Dimitry Letko, with organizers of these disturbances: D. Krasovsky and A. Osetrov. Priest Letko was in service of KGB for 15 long years!

The article quite correctly describes the excesses in Suzdal and undoubtedly, it is not signed for fear of own safety.

Meanwhile, the fighting group has beaten up protodeacon Serge Slonov, for the second time beat up and nearly kidnapped Andrew Smirnov, attacked a 73 old woman and threatened to kill 12 year old Ivan Saveliev, set fire on the house in which live invalids and blind nun, broke into iron doors of St. George church in the village of Krapivie and desecrated churches in Ivanovskoye, Ves, and one cemetery. Nothing was stolen from the churches, but everything was turned upside down in the sanctuaries and Gospels and crosses from the altars were thrown on the floors!

According to information received by Vertograd, “the members of militia believe that by these actions some one is ‘warning’ the ROAC about more serious intentions”.

All the official reports and complaints on part of the Diocesan Administration and individual persons to various departments of authorities of Vladimir and Suzdal -- remain with no reactions what so ever.

In order to get some sort of a justice, a delegation of clergymen and lay people of the Russian Autonomous Church asked for the audience by the new mayor of the city, A. A. Ryzhov. According to Vertograd (news #262) , despite the numerous amount of petitioners, the mayor received only two of them: hieromonk Theophan (Areskin) and I. S. Saveliev.

Hieromonk Theophan asked the mayor if organizers of the slanderous movie against the Metropolitan Valentin which was demonstrated on the concert on May 14th have been identified?

The mayor answered that he has ordered the law enforcing organs to clarify this incident, but – so far there were no results and it is not know when they will be received. The President of the Suzdal's City Council declared, that the criminal action can be taken only if there would be a “victim” but, he said, “there were no reports on your part”! These words are a blunt lie. We do have copies of protests addressed to Putin and various departments of the State Duma and authorities of

Vladimir and Suzdal! According to him, at present there is going on an investigation if the movie with slander against the Metropolitan Valentin, "actually presented some elements of the crime".

When talking about the effort of kidnapping by "Our Cause" of Andrew Smirnov, the chairman of ROVD acknowledged, that there are "signs of kidnapping", but "still, this has to be proved". And the attack on the grandmother of Andrew Smirnov happened to be "a result of unfriendly relations between two people".

When Fr. Theophan asked what was done to stop the terrorist actions of the group "Our Cause" in Suzdal, another representative of the authorities Davidov declared that the extremist character of this group still has to be proven. Then he offered to the members of the Russian Autonomous Church to "make peace" with the opposite side (the Moscow Patriarchate). To this Fr. Theophan said that "we are always open and ready for a dialogue, but the opposite side does not want to listen to us: they just hit the heads on cement, kidnap and start fires and so on". To this the mayor responded: "why should we divide one sky under the Suzdal, after all, God is One?". From that on there started numerous accusations against the leadership of the ROAC in that it supposedly "forced the babushka's to come from their vegetable plots" to the administration and this, also takes the time of the city's administration. Ryzhov also accused the representatives of the Russian Church in spreading around the information by magazine Vertograd with the "slander" about him, but he gave no facts, and yet, threatened with turning his complaint to the court.

After this meeting with Suzdal's authorities, Fr. Theophan said: "they are all against Vladyka, and they have chided us".

Despite all of this, according to information of Vertograd of May 22nd, Metropolitan Valentin participated in the first meeting of the newly elected representatives to the Suzdal's city Council.

On the agenda there was also the matter of demonstration of the outrageous movie by Osetrov on the concert on May 14th. On the meeting there was read the demand of residents and electoral to "search and investigate the activities of organization 'Our Cause' which arranged the demonstration of the movie".

Mayor Ryzhov, who was present at the meeting pretended to have absolutely no knowledge about the film. To this Metropolitan Valentin responded and said: "You have very well known everything and have known it ahead of time". You have met with Eulogy (the head of Vladimir's MP diocese) a few days before that. You have known it even before your election. You have been present on the concert and have left before the movie started, leaving instead your deputy and other administration workers". Metropolitan Valentin has also announced his representative's declaration, which was ignored by the majority of the representatives.

The representative of the City's Council; Doctor Olga Kitayeva reported on the meeting, that three teenagers approached her and said that they are contemplating a suicide, because they have been disgraced over whole Suzdal when they were forced to participate in Osetrov's movie.

The President of the Council declared that he has ordered the law enforcement organs to investigate situations around the First Hierarchy of the ROAC and promised to the representatives that within a week, "when everything becomes clear" there will be held an open meeting of the City's Council with wide discussions about the present situation.

Meanwhile, the Orthodox Suzdal, holding its breath is waiting for the shemiaka's trial (Shemiaka in Russian saga's - a crooked judge). When the trial will start, so far is not known for certain, since the judge I. Mysiagina said that the case so far did not return to Suzdal's court from the Vladimir's regional court. But, as per information received, if the judge does not know when the trial will start, a person, who began all of this, Mr. Osterov knows and he affirms that the trial will happen at the end of June. The same verify the "abused" E. Kutsik and D. Krasovsky. Most probably the postponement is organized with the aim for the procurator to have time to press upon the "abused" so that they would change the statements they made once in favor for Metropolitan. This is why Suzdal' militia is active and in particular, the investigator of criminal cases Sarkisian (who had nothing to do with this particular case). After 70 years have passed, it is no surprise that the soviet "organs" could fall for such a provocation. But does it really has to happen in the 21st century? One catacomb nun E. says that so far, not one of the clergymen was ever found not to be not guilty. As an example she related about her spiritual mother, schima nun Joanna, who was condemned to be shot for he faith, but instead was sent to 25 year labor concentration camp and was released due to an amnesty. She died recently in convent in Suzdal.

Let us hope, that the Lord, according to His mercy will not allow to celebrate the victory of the enemies of His Church and will protect her from all the perils her First Hierarchy. Meanwhile, he in the first place and his immediate collaborators and faithful flock are carrying a difficult, but honorable podvig of confessors!

MEETING OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ROAC

Despite the terrible current experience in Suzdal, on May 6/18th there was held a meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in the following structure: President Metropolitan Valentin and members of the Synod: Archbishops Theodore and Seraphim and Bishop Ambrose of Khabarovsk. According to minutes #24, following the agenda there were deliberated: 1) address of the World Wide House for Justice; 2) request of Bishop Ambrose of Khabarovsk to be transferred to a diocese closer to Suzdal; 3) case of the internet arguments of reader V. Moss and hieromonk Gregory (Lurie) regarding the veneration of the Name, Nestorians and other heresies.

Regarding the first point, there was heard "the report about the address of the World Wide House for Justice (World Center of Bahai) about the eschatological evaluation of the present situation in the world society. In the address the call for unity is made and in a private letter -- any kind of assistance is offered in matters of inter-religious conflicts".

On point 1 resolved: to refuse to participate in the above said organization and assistance from Bahai".

On point 2 resolved: to let His Grace Ambrose have a prolonged medical vacation with right to stay in the monastery of St. New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in Suzdal while preserving the rule of Khabarovsk's vicar".

Regarding to point 3, after hearing the report of President about details of the arisen controversy, resolved: "to call upon the arguing parts for peace and brotherly love in Jesus Christ, putting away their oppositions and pride, because, by not obeying the decision of the Synod of Bishops, the arguing parties do put themselves outside of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church and are subject to canonical reprisals".

TROUBLE STARTED BY BISHOP BARNABAS IS BECOMING WORSE

The Vertograd #260 of May 28th has published a very extensive protest by Archbishop Lazarus of Tambov and the Diocesan Council regarding the resolution passed of the conference of North-American hierarchs of the ROCOR(V) in April 7/20th, 2002.

In our Paschal issue for month of May #4(105) we have reported about this hierarchal conference which was held in Mansonville during which, upon insistence of Bishop Barnabas, rather in a scandalous manner there was revoked permission given by Metropolitan Vitaly to Archbishop Lazarus and Benjamin to create an independent hierarchy.

The revocation of this resolution might be a reason for another schism within the group of Metropolitan Vitaly. This time, Bishop Barnabas has a substantial assistance. In opposition to Bishop Barnabas, who is a total ignoramus not in the canon law alone, but in general in all the ecclesiastical matters -- "bishop" Vladimir is a well read and well educated person.

Archbishop Lazarus, believing that Metropolitan Vitaly is indeed able to rule -- insists that his original decision of March 26th is legal and therefore, he is asking for summoning a Council for which he is also listing the following "necessary preliminary conditions", namely:

- 1) Cessation of all hostile actions and propaganda against the Russian Hierarchs (that was pointed out in the address to Bishop Barnabas), and an apology for latest public insults.
- 2) Cessation to usurp the ecclesiastical power by misusing the difficult position of the First Hierarch
- 3) To respect the rights of the Russian Hierarchs as ruling Bishops, including those which were given them by the decree of the First Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly in his letter to Archbishop Lazarus dated 11/26th of March (and who is for number of years a President of Council of Russian Hierarchs and this year is marking his 25th anniversary as a Bishop). (Underlined by us, Ch. N.)
- 4) A clear confession of his position: do the North American Vicars and the European Bishop Barnabas plan to establish Church in Russia or they are planning to join the schism of Suzdal or Greeks? Without this -- the participation of the Russian Hierarchs in the Council to come is not possible. One should remember the words of the saintly new martyr Archbishop Hilarion (Troitsky) who said: "the ecclesiastical Council should be gathered and not select. A selected Council will have no authority".

The Russian Hierarchs have a solid status as ruling Bishops, which was recognized by the previous Councils of the ROCOR, the support of their flock; they recognize as the First Hierarch the Metropolitan Vitaly and are following his directives of March 26/11th, 2002, which was expressing the free will of Metropolitan. Therefore, they do not consider the decisions of the Canadian Conference of April 7/20th of current year to be obligatory to them. (Underlined by us, Ch. N.)

It is amazing, that Archbishop Lazarus did not realize until now, that in view of old age senility of Metropolitan Vitaly, he has only the possibilities to be in jurisdiction of adventurer Bishop Barnabas, because of whom there was created a third jurisdiction in Russia -- or to return to the situation when under his Presidency there was created the Provisional Supreme Church Administration. However, now the situation has drastically changed. Due to outstanding energy and gifts of at that time Bishop Valentin, there is now existing a "Suzdal's schism" officially registered as the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church which has 11 Bishops (three of them a Catacomb bishops), more than hundred open parishes, no less than 200 Catacomb parishes and communities and parishes in USA and Latvia.

There is no way to hope for apologies on part of Bishop Barnabas and therefore, the canonical trouble he has started from the very first days of existence of the ROCOR in Russia -- it will grow even more badly!