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MEETING OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE AROC

On July 2/15th 2003 in the Synod headquarters there was a regular meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the Autonomous Russian Orthodox Church. Present were: the Presiding Bishop of the Synod of Bishops, Metropolitan Valentin of Suzdal and Vladimir; the Manager of Synod matters, Archbishop Theodore of Borisovo and Sanino; Archbishop Seraphim of Sukhumi and Abkhazia; Bishop Irinarkh of Toola and Briansk and Bishop Ambrose.

His Eminence Metropolitan Valentin described his pastoral trip to Udmurtia during the beginning of July, where there are parishes of the Suzdal diocese. Vladyka visited the church of St. Panteleimon in the city of Votkinsk, as well as the town house, where he served and preached. Vladyka pointed out the hard work of the rector of the St. Panteleimon church, Fr. Valery Yeltsov, the churchwarden, and a member of the community, Alexis Larionov, who built and painted the icons in a chapel of the town house, the dining room and the guesthouse.

At the Synod the matter of a meeting of the Council of Bishops of the ROAC was discussed, in order to make decisions about various ecclesiastical problems. The Metropolitan noted that there have been several requests addressed to him by the faithful that a "Preliminary Council" be convened to define the problems and prepare the appropriate materials. The Synod of Bishops commissioned Archbishop Theodore to study this particular matter and to present the results to the Synod of Bishops.

At the discussion of matter of the relations of the ROAC with the government of the Russian Federation it was pointed out that there have been blatant violations of the principle of secularity by the local and regional secular governments and limitations of the rights of religious organizations that do not want to be under the ROC MP. In the opinion of the Synod, there is obvious collaboration between the secular powers and the MP. It was resolved to address the God-fearing flock in Russia and abroad with a special epistle about the current situation of the Autonomous Russian Orthodox Church.

The Synod of Bishops also discussed the matter of accepting the individual number (like the Social Security # in the USA). His Eminence Metropolitan Valentin said that if these numbers are considered as the seal of antichrist, then he is categorically against these INN. The Bishops have unanimously expressed their disagreement with the conscious and voluntary participation of the faithful in world-wide globalization. It was resolved to inform all the Archpastors and the flock of the position of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church with a special epistle.

The President of the Synod of Bishops proposed the consecration, agreed to at the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on October 5/18, 2002, candidate Archimandrite Sebastian (Zhatkov). Archpriest Arcady Makovetsky informed the hierarchs of his trip to Cheliabinsk and Zlatoust and about the church life of the parishes there. Then Archimandrite Sebastian was invited to answer the questions presented to him. The Synod of Bishops resolved to perform the consecration of Archimandrite Sebastian as Bishop of Cheliabinsk, Vicar of the Suzdal diocese. The date set was July 4/17 in the Tsar Constantine Cathedral, the feast of St. Evfimy of Suzdal and the Imperial Martyrs.

ST. OLGA CHURCH OF AROC IN DANGER OF SEIZURE

The Internet agency Vertograd # 371 of July 10 reported that, "In the evening of June 26th the St. Olga Church in Zheleznovodsk was suddenly visited by MP Bishop Theophan (Ashurkov), who just shortly before had been appointed to the Stavropol diocese to replace the deceased Metropolitan Gedeon (Dokukin). The bishop walked into the church, observed the wall paintings and interior, then went to the office building and demanded that the women who were there take his blessing and 'return to the fold of the Mother Church.' To the offer to talk about it to clergy, Bishop Theophan replied that he is in a hurry to go to Kislovodsk for a meeting and quickly disappeared. Next day, a clergyman of St. Olga's church, Archpriest Roman Novakovsky, in the presence of parishioners performed a rite of the lesser consecration of a church".

It has become known that Bishop Theophan at a meeting of Kislovodsk deans swore he will do everything possible to have the church returned to the Moscow Patriarchate.

The editors of Vertograd foresee that in this case there will be extensive use of the slander against the First Hierarch of the Autonomous Russian Church Metropolitan Valentin, based upon the litigation in the past year in Suzdal as well as the brainwashing of the public by the local press.

This church was built at beginning of 70's by the talented family of Novakovsky, who personally worked on the construction, painted the inside and decorated it with an artful iconostasis.

Among clergy of this parish, there are three priests, the brothers Novakovski, who distinguish themselves with a lot of energy and persuasion. Right after the unexpected visit by the Moscow hierarch, Fr. Roman immediately on July 1st ordered an extraordinary parish meeting at which he reminded the parishioners that the MP first created the Sergianist schism and then fell into heresy, when she became the active member of the WCC and therefore, according to the canons, it was necessary to separate from it. He also happened to get from the press the biographical information about the newly appointed bishop to this area, apparently not too flattering.

This is far not the first effort on part of the Moscow Patriarchate to seize this particular church.

"VISIT OF FIRST HIERARCH OF THE CHURCH ABROAD"

A newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" ("Russian Herald") published in Russia and extremely loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate in issue #13(615) published the information about Metropolitan Laurus' visit to Ukraine. On the first page of this newspaper the following is stated:

"The First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, Metropolitan Laurus of Eastern America and New York visited the Tchernovitsy diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate. The First Hierarch was escorted by a group of clergy from the USA. Vladyka Laurus together with the guests visited the cathedral church of the Holy Spirit, St. Nicholas, visited a church in Tchernovitsy, the Presentation of Holy Virgin Convent in Tchernovitsy, where they were welcomed by the nuns. After visiting Banchen's Transfiguration Monastery, the guests from America also visited the orphanage at this community".

It is interesting to note that the magazine "Pravoslavnyaya Rus" ("Orthodox Russia") of Jordanville has not published a single word on this visit by Metropolitan Laurus to churches and monasteries belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate!

BISHOP BARNABAS AGAIN

The Internet publication of the "Kievan Patriarchate" "Ohliadach" ("Observer") on June 26, 2003, published an article under title "Various Orthodox Looking for Alternative to Moscow". The very same information was also published by the very well informed bulletin of the MP parish of Three Saints in Garfield, NJ.

According to this information, the parishes of "Belorussian Autocephalous Church" have decided to join the "Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kievan Patriarchate". The Belorussian Archbishop Petro (Hushcha) has already started preliminary negotiations on this matter. The article points out that similar movements have arisen in Russia seeking an alternative to the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Ukrainian publication "Ohliadach" ("Observer") reported that in circles of the ROCOR there is a significant schism regarding the relations toward the Moscow Patriarchate: those who support it and those against. In particular it is reported that "Archbishop" Barnabas (Prokofiev) of Cannes and Europe, "head of the ROCOR," is leading the movement, which is against relations with the Moscow Patriarchate. It seems he represents ROCOR (V) with such energy that instead of Metropolitan Vitaly he is already believed to be the head of the ROCOR!

Probably quite a few remember that his name is connected with the scandalous petition to the self-ordained Ukrainians in 1992 to enter into eucharistic communion with "Patriarch" Vladimir Romaniuk. The whole affair became exposed when Metropolitan Vitaly received an invitation from this "patriarch" to visit Kiev in order to make the inter-communion formal.

According to the decree of the Council of Bishops, Barnabas was forbidden to visit Russia for five years and also to go to Jerusalem for a few months, and not to serve there. The bulletin states: "On an unofficial level, however, relations have continued to the present. With the secret blessing of Archbishop Barnabas, Archimandrite Iosaf (Shibayev), dean of the Russian parishes of the ROCOR, went under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kievan Patriarchate.

Archimandrite Iosaf (Shibayev) at the beginning of the 90's left the Moscow Patriarchate, joined the Russian Church Abroad and was in the diocese of Archbishop Anthony of Geneva. At one time he was a candidate for an episcopal consecration. However, when this became known, the Synod of Bishops office was flooded with protests and information that he is a homosexual. Therefore his consecration never happened. Now this archimandrite was ordained a bishop of Belgorod by the Ukrainians and became a member of their Synod. There are already three dioceses of the "Kievan Patriarchate" in Ukraine.

Ukrainians believe that if sufficient amount of ROCOR members leave it, there might be created an autonomous "church" under the Kievan Patriarchate!

The bulletin also briefly mentions the present "Patriarch" Philaret Denisenko. Previously he was a metropolitan in the MP and an agent of the KGB with code name "Antonov". Despite the fact that he openly had a mistress and, by now, three adult children, the MP didn't feel it necessary to defrock him and only after Denisenko proclaimed himself a "patriarch" did it start to act. Now he eagerly has started relations with the Greek parishes of the "True Orthodox Church in Russia", especially Cyprian Kaminsky and the Old Calendar Greeks in USA. One Greek group in Athens has handed over a large church to the "Kievan patriarch", and in Europe has entered into communion with the Bulgarians. He dreams of creating autonomous Russian and Greek churches under his patriarchate and, even more, there are already talks of creation of one global Orthodoxy under the "Kievan Patriarchate"! Furthermore, if the plans go that far, to create a global Orthodoxy under their leadership, church history teaches us, that from a poisoned well clean water never flows!

Two Ukrainian "patriarchates" (In Kiev) created themselves shortly after fall of Communism's regime at the beginning of 90's. Not one of them, despite all efforts, even bribing the Ecumenical Patriarch for recognition, have not been successful. One of the "patriarchs" (Volodimir Romaniuk) has died and there was no information that he was succeeded by another.

The "Belorussian Autocephalous Church" also exists illegally. According to the customs of the Orthodox Church, a Patriarch heads an Autocephalous Church. At most, it could get autonomy from the MP, but under no conditions an autocephaly!

SCHISM IN ONCE-UNITED ROCOR GATHERS MOMENTUM

The Internet agency Vertograd # 369 of June 28 published a number of documents (of 15 pages) from Archbishop Lazarus (Zhurbenko) which were published by him as a result of a hierarchial conference on June 11/24, 2003.

The appeal of Archbishop Lazarus is addressed to: "Archpastors of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under the omophorion of His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly". In it he expresses sadness that "instead of exposing the actual schismatics of the Synod of Metropolitan Laurus and Sergianist Moscow Patriarchate... the mind and energy, for some reason, are directed toward scandals and abuse of their own bretheren in the homeland, as well as toward those who remain faithful to the legitimate First Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly".

Metropolitan Laurus was elected First Hierarch of ROCOR in place of the retired Metropolitan Vitaly and, in a proper sense, to speak of a schism created by him is incorrect in this case. One may expect that a schism in the Church of Metropolitan Laurus will happen in the near future because of his flirtations with the Moscow Patriarchate (under the cover of "autonomy") which are happening behind the scenes and which would confront many of his flock with the dilemma: to join the Moscow Patriarchate with him or to distance themselves from him and be under some hierarch able to lead the movement against the Moscow Patriarchate.

Archbishop Lazar bitterly complains in his appeal and asks the question: "Why there is an effort by any means to chase us from the Church and isolate our First Hierarch by distorting the truth about the actions of the Russian hierarchs, and without grounds to accuse us of unauthorized actions and even of being two-faced? Yet they cover their own ambitions and canonical violations with the honest name of the elder Metropolitan without informing him of the real intentions of the Russian hierarchs and, at times even forging his signature to dubious documents".

Metropolitan Vitaly is already 93 years old. Right after his election to the post of First Hierarch (in 1986), one could already hear complaints from clergy, visiting the Synod center, about his lack of memory. Over the past 17 years this condition could only get worse, and in no way better. In addition to this, an unfortunate characteristic of his was (even as an archimandrite) a total inability to withstand any kind of pressure, although his first reaction in any matters of principle was always correct.

In his letter to Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) of September 7, 1983, Archbishop Anthony of Geneva wrote: "Most of all I am saddened by Vladyka Vitaly (clearly our future Metropolitan). He gets excited and then gives in and retreats. I cannot understand such behavior".

The pressure of Bishop Barnabas, who undoubtedly never had the book of Canons of the Ecumenical Councils in his hands, is the only ready explanation for the instability of Metropolitan Vitaly. In his present condition, he might sign any sort of document that is put before him for signature.

Archbishop Lazarus, who has based his entire legal status upon one document signed by Metropolitan Vitaly, but which he retracted the next day – does not want to acknowledge such a possibility: yet, Metropolitan Vitaly in his Ukase # 325 of November 20 declared that Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin "have placed themselves outside of our Church. Consequently, both the above mentioned hierarchs and the clergy under them are not to be considered clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad". (See "Ch. N." #12 (113) of 2002). This Ukase was signed **by all five hierarchs of Metropolitan Vitaly's group!**

One has to agree with the opinion of Archbishop Lazarus (who himself has consecrated 5 bishops) that, "The majority of prospective persons for the episcopacy, promoted by the group of usurpers of the ecclesiastical administration of B. Joukoff with the aim of opposing the Russian hierarchs on their canonical territory, consist of fugitives and even suspended clerics. The aim of this senseless action is to set up another altar and create a hostile hierarchy and thus destroy ecclesiastical life in Russia".

One should recall the outrageous demand of Bishop Barnabas at the Council of Bishops in 1994, when he asked to be appointed to rule **ALL** the parishes in Russia, when there were already 5 hierarchs!

In a special section of his statement "A declaration regarding the activity of Bishop Agathangel (Pashkovsky)" Archbishop Lazarus quite justifiably comes down on him, who remained faithful to the Synod of Metropolitan Laurus, for his canonical violations and efforts to seize the church belonging to Archbishop Lazarus.

Then, in 5 pages, there follows the "Declaration regarding the destructive anti-church activity of Archpriest Benjamin Joukoff".

It states that "Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin themselves over the past year (from March 2002) have not received any Ukases from Metropolitan Vitaly. There were no inquiries or summons of them regarding their activities to be held openly in their presence, as is to be done according to church rules in cases when controversial ecclesiastical matters are to be resolved.

"From September, the connection of Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin has been artificially severed. Numerous efforts to make telephone calls to the Metropolitan have failed (for example the refusal by L. D. Rosniansky to connect Bishop Benjamin with the First Hierarch). The letter of Archbishop Lazarus of September 4/17, 2002, which was sent simultaneously by mail and fax, remained unanswered and there is no guarantee that the Metropolitan was acquainted with it".

In another place, on page 2, there is testimony of Archpriests Melekhov, Joseph Sanders and Vladimir Moss which asserts a long known fact that Metropolitan Vitaly is "totally isolated from persons disliked by this group [Rosniansky and Joukoff, "Ch. N.]" so that even the Canadian vicars are unable to change this situation. And as a result of such a captivity of the Metropolitan "the group of usurpers uses his name and signs all sorts of resolutions".

In the same document it is asserted (quite wrongly) that "due to efforts on part of Archpr. Joukoff, the planned trip of Metropolitan Vitaly to Russia in the spring of 2002 to personally meet with the Russian Hierarchs and discuss the situation in Russia collapsed".

For quite some time, as early as 1990, offers were made for the Metropolitan to visit Russia, but he suffers with a persecution complex and is afraid that he might be poisoned even on the plane. Controlling his weak willpower, Mrs. Rosniansky entirely supports the fear of these non-existent dangers.

Bishop Barnabas is so insufficiently educated in church affairs that he cannot rule even a diocese and, therefore, has to depend upon the knowledge of Fr. Benjamin. However, it is useful to recall the Council of Bishops in 1994, when it was decided to create a hierarchical council in Russia, obliged to report its activities to the Synod of Bishops. But, as soon as such meeting took place, all the five bishops in Russia were reprimanded by the ROCOR administration.

The sad summary of the situation of the Archbishop Lazarus group ends with an "addenda", signed by all members of his hierarchy, in which it is reported that "... from May 16 to 20, 2003, in Mansonville a private meeting was held of Metropolitan Vitaly with Bishop Barnabas, Bishop Sergius and Bishop Bartholomew at which there was to be approved a document of recognition of the Russian consecrations performed by Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin. However, L. D. Rosniansky and Archpriest Joukoff, who arrived in a hurry after he was called by the former, upset this plan. After that, about three weeks later, there came the Internet publication of the minutes of this "council", which actually had never taken place. The attempt of Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin to personally get in touch with Metropolitan Vitaly by telephone on June 22, 2003, did not succeed, because L. D. Rosniansky refused to connect the Russian Hierarchs with the Metropolitan. All this quite clearly shows the disorganization of the ROCOR (V) and testifies that the First Hierarch and Bishops Abroad do not have any real authority".

The very same agency "Vertograd" #371 reported that despite all this, Archbishop Lazarus "and those with him" have decided to create their own Synod of Bishops, with the reference of Ukase of Patriarch Tikhon # 362, and "in fulfillment of the Order of the First Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly, to the President of the Council of Russian Hierarchs, His Eminence Archbishop Lazarus on February 26/March 11, 2002, [where and when published? "Ch. N."] about the organization of the Synod of Bishops in Russia they d e c r e e:

- 1) To transform the present existing Council of Russian Hierarchs, established at the Council of Bishops in 1994, into the Synod of Bishops of the True Russian Orthodox Church.
- 2) To approve His Eminence Archbishop Lazarus of Odessa and Tambov as the presiding bishop of the Synod and as members of the Synod: Bishop Benjamin of Chernomorie and Kuban; Bishop Dionissy of Novgorod and Tver; Bishop Irinei of Vernen and Semirechensk; Bishop Hermogen of Chernigov and Gomel; Bishop Tikhon of Omsk and Siberia
- 3) All those clergymen faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Church at the Divine Liturgies **are to commemorate the name of His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly with the title of "the first Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church"**. (Emph. by "Ch. N.")

And all this, despite the fact that by the decision of Metropolitan Vitaly on November 20, 2002, Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin and their clergy are "**not to be considered the members of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad**"! This decree was signed not by Metropolitan Vitaly alone, but also by all five of his hierarchs.

There is no doubt that the deeds of Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin have no blessing from God. If in 1993 he would not fall for a bite of Metropolitan Vitaly to be a member of the Synod of Bishops and would not sever relations with the Temporary Supreme Administration which was created under his Presidency, most probably, the situation of the Church in Russia would be quite different. We see that the condition of the Autonomous Orthodox Church, which, despite all the persecutions, slanders and pressure from the Moscow Patriarchate – not only does not get smaller, but more and more members not only in Russia, but also Abroad!

One can say with total confidence: at present, the personal interests of the hierarchs, and their lust for power have led to the point where the principle of the ecclesiastical well-being on a basis of love and benefit to the Church has been lost, without consideration for the scandal they have created among their flock!

NEW ORDINATIONS IN THE METROPOLITAN VITALY GROUP

The Internet site Listok, opened with the blessing of Metropolitan Vitaly, reported on July 9, 2003, that within his newly created "ROCOR" there were performed three new episcopal consecrations.

Consecrated were: Archimandrite Anthony (Roudei), Priest-monk Anastassy (Surzhik) and Priest-monk Victor (Pivivarov). The consecrations were performed on the 28th, 29th and 30th of June, following a decision made by the "Council of Bishops (held under the jurisdiction of His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly from May 16th to May 20th, 2003)" in Paris. The ordination of Archimandrite Anthony was performed by "Barnabas, Archbishop of Cannes and Europe, the Deputy of the First Hierarch of ROCOR" and Bartholomew of Grenada.

As far as is known by us, (and Archbishop Lazarus confirms it) there was **no** Council of Bishops by the hierarchy of Metropolitan Vitaly, although some three weeks later on the Internet its "minutes" was partly published!

Archbishop Lazarus, in his "appeal", mentioned above, relays information about the (at that time) candidates for episcopal consecration. Thus, Priest Victor Pivivarov is a fugitive clergyman, who was suspended by Bishop Benjamin. And Archimandrite Alexis (Makrinov) "who is known at the time of his joining the ROCOR to have made a secret of the fact that he was an active participant in the Ecumenist movement (common prayers, lectures at ecumenical conferences, which were given by him and published in the MP "Journal"). In 2001 he left the ROCOR and created for himself a bishopless "special region".

The manner in which the "installation certificates" were issued is also interesting. Not knowing that they were issued by the President of the Synod of Bishops on commission from the Council of Bishops, these fake grammatas were handed to those consecrated by the bishops performing their consecrations!

Once again Bishop Barnabas is again "within his repertoire"!

"THE RITE OF BAPTISMAL LITURGY"

The Internet publication of St. Tikhon's Institute in Moscow, in collaboration with the Meeting of the Lord Brotherhood has published information, which we print in our translation, but in which we italicize some "interesting" sentences.

"For many years baptismal liturgies have been unofficially performed in parishes connected with the Brotherhood of the All Merciful Savior and openly served in Moscow by the Meeting of the Lord Brotherhood. By now, no one has to get a special blessing to perform them, because the title page on the just published rite has a stamp: 'with the blessing of the all Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexis II (received on October 24th 2000)'.

"However, with the situation which has developed now in the Russian Orthodox church (by the way, because of much efforts made by PSTBE and activists who support the brotherhood, who have actively participated in the decades long persecutions of the 'Kochetkovs' and 'Menevtsev') *the introduction of the new liturgy rite will inevitably evoke the accusation of 'neo-renovationism' and 'modernism'*. In the atmosphere of 'stasis' and irrational fear of displaying any kind of freedom in the church, especially in the field of church services, it is doubtful that it is going to be widely used. *Nevertheless, the work accomplished is a significant step forward.* For the first time St. Tikhon's Institute has accomplished a serious effort to *coordinate present church service tradition with the spirit and meaning of the church service of the ancient and undivided church.*

"The newly printed rite of baptismal liturgy *differs for the better in many ways from the contemporary rite, for example, in the Finnish Orthodox Church.* Unfortunately it is also not perfect. However, if it still is introduced into the church's general practice, the puzzling questions that will arise, will inevitably call for more work on it".

Such is the text, published on June 19, 2003, in the "News" section. Let us hope that this "rite of baptismal liturgy" will not spread throughout Russia.

Despite the mild critique of this "baptismal liturgy" – it is absolutely clear that the Moscow Patriarch that gave its blessing for its use is supported by the Renovationist movement in the Russian Church.

The "Kochetkovs" and "Menevtsy" mentioned in this publication (derived from the names of two priests) are quite obvious heretics of the Protestantizing variety. To them one should add "Borisovtsy", "Sviridovtsy", "Chistiakovtsy", "Pavlovtsy", "Lapshintsy", "Borovovitsy" and, unfortunately a whole number of similar Renovationists remaining in the clergy of Moscow Patriarchate.

Once (a very short time ago) Patriarch Alexis due to strong pressure from the faithful even suspended Priest Kochetkov, but soon lifted the suspension after his very murky repentance. Meanwhile Kochetkov and those with him have been introducing and still introduce purely Renovationist demands and customs. They have a well-organized system of groups (there is information that there are more than 20 of them) and they present a serious danger to ill-informed people. There comes a direct critique of all the traditions of the Holy Fathers, even exceeding the demands during the Renovationist years of 1917-1927.

The contemporary Renovationists are upset by the "excessive" veneration of the Holy Virgin, prayers to the Saints, some of them praise the Protestants, others the Catholics, all renounce the uniqueness of the Church and follow their spiritual leaders Antonin Granovsky and Alexander Vvedensky. They demand married bishops, a second marriage for clergy, almost total abolition of the fasting periods, revision of the canons, acceptance of the Gregorian calendar and "translation" of the church service books into Russian "and other insane words" (to quote the service of the Publican and the Pharisee)

The leader of the "Menevtsy" (Priest Meni) was not only a convinced Ecumenist but believed that there should be a Jewish patriarch. While praising the "Finnish Orthodox Church" the authors of the published article have forgotten that this "church" beginning in the 1920's has been under the condemnation of the 7th Apostolic Canon, because it accepted the Western paschalia. According to it, the Western Easter often coincides with the Jewish Passover and sometimes happens even **before** the Passover!

MONASTIC "MARRIAGES"

On March 5th, 2003 the Internet site "Pravda.ru" published an article signed by Svetlana Yemelianov, with the title "Penance of Fr. John...". The reader is introduced to curious information about a marriage performed by Fr. John, the rector of the 40 Martyrs Church in the city of Pereyaslavl, who was punished by his diocesan bishop. As a result, the parishioners of the church rushed to send petitions to the diocese and collect signatures "in support of one of the most beloved priests". The crime of Fr. John was to perform a marriage of a sister of the St. Nicholas Convent, and, at that, not

just an ordinary sister, but the cell attendant of the Abbess Eustolia. This report does not mention where the St. Nicholas Convent is located, but one can guess that it is within the boundaries of the MP diocese of Rostov, since all the churches of ancient Pereyaslavl belong to that diocese.

"During autumn of this year this sister left the convent, and exchanged the platonic love for God for the real feelings for a young man... it is bad that she secretly left the convent without renouncing her tonsure. And also, that during the wedding ceremony, she didn't reveal the truth to Fr. John. And he is used to trusting people. This is a reason for his suffering," the article said.

"Well, one may by all means sympathize with the priest: it is hard to recognize someone in a wedding gown as a former nun, and who came to the church without any kind of acknowledgment of that. It is also very doubtful that Fr. John did not know the bride. He was a frequent visitor to this convent and must have known a sister who was cell attendant of the Abbess and not an ordinary member of the community. In a convent it is a highly respected duty and, sometimes, the word or advice given by the cell attendant is equal to orders from the abbess herself. The lay people should know that careless clergymen are suspended from performing sacraments and those, who fall into heresy or have seriously violated canon law are subject being defrocked, but this must be done by an ecclesiastical court. Monastic tonsure is not a rank, but a way of life. This is a ceremony, which is considered to rank with the sacraments, such as Baptism or Chrismation which, as we know, are not to be nullified even in cases where the baptized reminds one more of a real atheist, than of a pious believer. However, there is no such punishment in the Church as a "removal of baptism". But, if the bride-sister were to marry not in Pereyaslavl, but in another city, Murom for example, what kind of punishment would the rector there receive? After all, at present there are no records kept of marriages. All is guided by the conscience of those to be married and the priest, who may marry a couple while avoiding ecclesiastical registration. Also the registration itself is in such disarray, that at times even after a year has passed, it is impossible to find documentation.

"However, the precedent of a marriage of a former sister is typical of the city of Pereyaslavl, and for the neighboring Vladimir Diocese, where similar events have happened. In the Prince Vladimir Church in Vladimir, in November of last year, the marriage of the tonsured nun Sophia (Morozova) with the Protodeacon Dimitry Krassovsky was performed. With performance of this sacrament the marriage is legalized. In addition, in the same diocese there was another precedent. A resident of the Holy Virgin Monastery in Vladimir, Hierodeacon John (Krotevich) entered into intimate relations with the Nun Euvfrosinia (Kondratieva), who was serving him. As a fruit of their love a girl was born. It is worth to noting that the Archbishop of Vladimir and Suzdal Evlogy denied the request to lift the monastic vows and ordination of the Hierodeacon John and the Nun Evfrosinia. It is characteristic that these two monastics and Protodeacon Dimitry Krassovsky became the members of Vladimir diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate after leaving the diocese of the Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir Valentin, independent of the Moscow Patriarchate. Metropolitan Valentin severely punished them for this behavior. In order to take revenge on Metropolitan Valentin, these servants of God initiated litigation in which a leading role was played by the above Krassovsky and Nun Sophia. Also Hierodeacon John Krotevich and his lover, Nun Evfrosinia were to participate. To his credit, Fr. John has denounced his previous testimony against Metropolitan Valentin and Evfrosinia who in general refused to be involved in the court litigation.

"The Nun Sophia who, so to say, has entered into a "legal marriage" insists that after the end of the due punishment, her husband, defrocked by the Suzdal diocese will be again ordained in the Vladimir diocese, where the former nun will become a legal matushka. Evil tongues say that the former nun got married with her monastic name of Sophia and not Olga, the name she had in the world.

"For the lay people who expect sainthood and purity within church walls and monasteries, in full measure this reveals pharisaic hypocrisy, with the principle of "the end justifies the means". It is not without reason that in the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate icons weep bloody tears: there is a reason for weeping. But these tears no longer disturb or touch the hearts of those who have lost their consciences, who have plugged their ears, who prefer worldly greed to serving God, Whom they have betrayed and deceived, to Whom, before the Gospel, they swore faithfulness. Now again, before the Gospel, they testify to the depth of their fall when they promise to be faithful to each other. What would the spiritual mother of Nun Sophia say, the Schema-nun Nathanaela (Diachenko), if she saw her daughter in a wedding gown?"

We would also comment: if they are not afraid to break their promises to God Himself, how will they keep them to a fellow human being?

DESTRUCTION OF MOSQUE IN NAZARETH

Two Jewish newspapers: "Haaretz" and "The Jerusalem Post" on July 2nd reported that under the protection of several hundred Israeli policemen an unfinished mosque was destroyed, begun to be built in proximity with the Catholic church over the spot which, according to Tradition, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Holy Virgin and announced to her that she will become the Mother of God.

For several years in a row, the Arabs requested a permit to build the mosque and no longer waiting for the Israeli permit, they started building in October 1999. Immediately there was an outrage from Christians, because this construction totally obstructed the view of the Annunciation church.

In December of the same year, a group of Muslims held a demonstration, demanding this place for themselves under the pretext that it is the site of a grave of a nephew of Saladin, who chased the Crusaders out of Jerusalem.

At present, in Nazareth 30% of the population are Christians, while the rest are Muslims.

In the beginning there was a project to build on this huge place a hotel for tourists and that the mosque will be on another side of the church. During the Nativity period in 1998 there were very stormy confrontations between the Muslims and Christians, so that the church service was interrupted and more than 30 people were injured.

The building of the mosque was started according to an agreement between the parties. The Vatican participated in this conflict. The newspaper "Haaretz" complains that all these difficulties started in the middle of the tourist season. As the result a big hotel, since 2000 remains almost totally empty, so that it had to rent in 2001 80 of their 270 rooms to the Israeli authorities.

The destruction of the mosque by the Israeli government was made under the pretext that the building permission was lacking, to which the Arabs quite reasonably reply that there are Israeli buildings everywhere, built not only without permits but even against the regulations of their own government!

Despite all this, the destruction of the mosque did not provoke any major disturbances.

TOURISM ON TEMPLE MOUNT

The very same two newspapers reported disturbances connected with the Israeli government's permission to reopen tourism on the Temple Mount, without informing the Arabic organization Wakf. The Arabs got upset that the "Initiative to allow the groups to enter was made without approval or coordination of the Wakf". On Monday, July 1st, 20 various groups, each of 20 persons, and consisting of Jews and tourists came to the Temple Mount. The police characterized this movement as "beginning of progress" and reported that the permission to let the tourists come was given by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

In September of 2000, Sharon unexpectedly and in very demonstrative manner appeared on the Temple Mount and at that time it created a huge scandal in Jerusalem. Fearing the dissatisfaction and especially of common opinion from abroad, at one time the Israeli government totally closed access to the Temple Mount. During the last year negotiations continued about opening the Mount, but with no results.

On the Temple Mount there is the huge Mosque of Omar, which covers with its walls the place of the former Jewish temple. In that respect, this place and managing the site – belongs to the Muslims.

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLERGY VISITING HOSPITAL PATIENTS

The bulletin of the parish of Three Saints in Garfield, NJ on June 24th reported that a new law, called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, effective on April 14th which secures patients' rights from strangers finding out what their illness is and what medicines they are taking, resulted in difficulties for clergy ministering to their parishioners in hospitals.

One Greek priest complains that now finding one's parishioner is something like finding a needle in the haystack. If the patient didn't give permission to be listed on a register specific to each denomination, the hospital may not tell a clergyman that his parishioner is there.

Previously the office of a priest or rabbi could call the hospital and find out when and where the particular parishioner is. Now every clergyman, on entering the hospital, has to wear an identification badge indicating his name and denomination. Then he would be shown the list of patients of his own confession and again, only if the patient has agreed that his name might be shown to his clergyman.

A rabbi of a conservative synagogue, who visited a hospital, found the name of only one of his parishioners, while there were several others in that particular hospital. One family complained because he never visited their relative in the hospital, but the family didn't know of the new law and this is why he was not given the names of other parishioners.

An Anglican minister started to publish in his bulletin a request that his parishioners inform him of their hospitalization, but there is also another obstacle: a chaplain of the hospital has the right to ask any patient if he wants to see his rector.

The majority of the clergy considers this law to be extremely uncomfortable, but there are also those who approve of it. So, a pastor of the United Methodist Church has said that after visiting one of his parishioners in the hospital, he found her in tears, because shortly before a member of another sect came and tried to convert her.

The article points out, that not all the parishioners are eager to see their pastors in the hospital, especially if they are having embarrassing venereal diseases, giving birth to an illegitimate child or had plastic surgery.

The law was introduced because one woman was purchasing her medicines in a drug store. Her acquaintance figured out what kind of illness she was suffering and reported it to the company where this woman had a new job. Due to this information she was immediately fired.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND BELARUS GOVERNMENT

According to the Internet agency Forum 18 in Oslo, Norway – on June 12th 2003 the Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate in Belarus, Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and Slutsk (in KGB "Ostrovsky") has signed with the "Prime-minister of the Republic of Belarus G. Novitsky" a special agreement, consisting of 7 articles regarding the collaboration of the Church with the government."

In our June issue we published information regarding a whole number of agreements between the MP and the government of the Russian Federation, but on account of various occasions and on the stretched period of time. But here we see one general agreement which covers all the fields of possible collaboration of the Church and the government and

in much more definite tones. Nevertheless, the "commentaries" to this document by the publishers say that, "the document foresees the elaboration. The conclusion and the fulfillment of *the additional agreements between the Church and the government structures*, which make the concrete principal situation of the agreement signed in Minsk"

It is quite natural to expect that the Moscow Patriarchate, assisted by the government authorities, will mercilessly persecute anybody who might in any respect be in the disagreement with it. In any case, Metropolitan Philaret "Ostrovsky" does not hide his total satisfaction with this agreement!

SCANDAL WITH BISHOP OF ANTIOCHEAN EXARCHATE IN AMERICA

The Internet publication of the newspaper "Blade" in Toledo published on July 12th information that Demetri Khoury of Toledo (Antiochian Exarchate in USA) was arrested in a Michigan casino, because when very drunk he in a very rude manner has approached a woman, who was sitting not far from him. The woman had to alert the casino guard.

Policeman Kushner testified that the bishop, who was in a civilian suit, was using a lot of dirty words, not appropriate by a bishop.

Bishop Demetri was released on \$25,000 bail. Also, because of his offensive behavior in a public place he will be fined with \$500. Besides, he has to undergo a test for venereal diseases. If the court finds him guilty (and this probably will happen, because a camera in casino recorded his advances toward this woman) he might be sentenced to jail for a year's time. He has to appear in court on August 1st. This bishop was so drunk, that he didn't remember his own address!

The head of the Antiochian Exarchate in America, Metropolitan Philip, felt it is necessary to address his flock with a special letter, explaining the situation. He wrote, that Bishop Demetri has promised to get special treatment for alcoholism.

POPE IN BOSNIA

"The New York Times" has published the details of the Pope's visit to Orthodox Bosnia. On June 22nd, the Pope served a mass in the open air in Bosnia's main city Banja Luka. Some 50,000 people came for this occasion from Croatia and other Catholic regions. In his sermon, the head of the Catholic Church in passing asked his audience to forgive the mutual offenses and heal the wounds that were the result of the Second World War. In his speech the Pope apologized for the offenses committed by the Catholics to the Orthodox. At the huge place where the mass was served, in 1942 the Catholics killed 2,500 people, including women and children. This slaughter was started by a Franciscan monk, who sided with the terrorist group of "Ustashi", who were known for their special brutality toward the Orthodox.

Fearing that there might be some disturbances, the local authorities added 4,000 policemen to the already existing local international peacekeepers. Croats were warned not to make any kind of demonstrations and not to bring out their flags.

Banja Luka has some 15,000 Catholic and Muslim residents, while there are 300,000 Orthodox!

As is known, the head of Catholics is especially eager to visit Orthodox countries and, certainly, the visit for the sake of just few thousand of Catholics was just a convenient excuse. Just recently this Pope visited Orthodox Romania, but his real dream is a trip to Russia! It is not impossible that this might happen in the near future.

According to the Internet publication of the Parish of Three Saints in Garfield, NJ of June 26th President Putin while in England expressed a hope that the relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and Catholics "undoubtedly will develop positively... Patriarch Alexy II is very positive about the relations with the Vatican and the Catholic Church, and I hope that relations between the Russian Orthodox Church will develop positively".

At the same time on June 25th Putin declared that the Russian government is doing everything possible to straighten out relations between the Patriarchate and the Catholics. He has stressed that he "knows the opinions of Patriarch Alexis II on this matter and he is positively inclined... We consider that relations between the Holy See and ROC will develop positively". It is well known that the Patriarch was categorically against relations with the Catholics. However, not in any sense for theological reasons, but purely material ones. It means that Putin has managed to "convince" him of the opposite!

CONSIDERABLE VICTORY FOR HOMOSEXUALS AND LESBIANS IN US SUPREME COURT

Two men in Texas, Tyron Garner and John Lawrence, were behaving in their home so loudly, that the neighbors called the police. The policemen arrived, found them to be engaged in the acts of sodomy and, since this is considered a crime in this state, they had to pay a fine. They did, but at the same time they filed a complaint with the US Supreme Court stating that they were deprived of their civil rights by the authorities that interfered in their private life.

On June 26th the Supreme Court consisting of 9 federal judges ruled by 6 to 3 that the law of 1986 (which forbade sodomy) "demeans the life of homosexual persons". One of the justices, Anthony Kennedy, in the name of the whole court declared that the homosexual "gays are entitled to respect for their private lives"...The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual life a crime... and their own private lives still retain their dignity as free persons".

The three justices who dissented from this shameful decree, among them Antonin Scalia said that "this decision effectively decrees the end of all morals legislation" in America. These justices believe that in the near future homosexuals will raise the question of recognition of same sex marriages and there is a good chance that this request will be agreed to by the Court.

"The New York Times" devoted three full pages to this shameful matter including the full text of this decision.

Literarily on the next day, 7 couples living in New Jersey, who previously were refused a marriage licenses, petitioned the State Supreme Court to recognize their marriage due to the Federal Court decision. The Justices said it will take two months to make a formal decision.

On account of such a victory the 34th parade of homosexuals in New York was especially well attended, and Mayor Bloomberg, belonging to a synagogue of conservative Jews marched in this parade. His shameful appearance has before 250 thousand spectators!

The same newspaper on July 1st reported that the British government has proposed granting gay and lesbian couples legal rights as married people. Under this plan the gays are recognized as being in "civil partnership" and according to such registration the partners are obliged to support each other financially and would be eligible to claim pensions and inheritance rights after the death of one "partner" and, other responsibilities and benefits. In other words, this proposed agreement is in no way different from a regular married couple's rights and obligations.

In the middle 40's in the German army homosexuality was considered a crime, while at the same time in the English army it was not officially recognized, but was under the protection of senior army officers.

FROM THE SPHERE OF THE CURIOUS

The Internet bulletin of the Parish of the Three Saints in Garfield on July 5th reported that in Oslo (Norway) on July 4th of this year in a ceremony on the river bank 126 bishops representing Protestants, Catholics and **Orthodox Christians** brought with them from various countries (from Greece to Estonia) little containers of "holy water", which were to be poured into the Nidros river, as a symbol of their unity. However, the Adviser to the Norwegian Health Authority, Johan Aurstad, protested and demanded that this water be boiled for 10 minutes before being poured into the river, in order not to "kill" the fish living in this river!

Aurstad declared that, "The water was of a type used for baptisms, so you have to assume it was drinking water quality, but we had to be cautious".

Unfortunately, there is no information given about the "Orthodox Christians" participating in this blasphemous stupidity.

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS (Letter to Metropolitan Vitaly of March 14/27th, 1986)

To: His Eminence Vitaly, Metropolitan of New York and Eastern American,
President to the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

The dilemma put before me at yesterday's meeting of the Synod was to me utterly unexpected and therefore I was not able to give an answer right away. I was extremely surprised that during the past month the decrees about me by the Council and the Synod were taking the side of restricting my rights and lowering my position. I could not understand the reason. The main reason I saw in the words of one of the Synod's members: I allowed myself to disagree with the members of the Synod on matters of the Jerusalem Mission and proceeding to the investigation of the case of Fr. Anthony.

Regarding the cases of my incapability presented by you, please permit me, in passing, to mention that I was in Rome after Vladyka Anthony of Los Angeles and I followed the decision he made, because I agreed with him. We have suffered a failure because of the impossibility of finding a suitable priest and the lack of faithful people among the parishioners. Regarding Vladyka Constantine I was offering what was in principle already accepted by the Metropolitan and the Synod. His inability to govern due to neurasthenia and physical weakness were obviously to be seen from the very beginning and quite definitely. The difficulties in our diocese, with which I had to deal, are common to many. It is the lack of priests. In this respect in the more normal parishes, in particular in Pennsylvania, I see love and affection. There, my departure might provoke displeasure, misunderstanding and maybe difficulties.

Regardless of all these considerations, I still intend not to rescind the offer made by me to resign. One cannot be loved by force.

If my opinion regarding various matters is met by outrage just because it does not agree with the majority – it is better for me to leave. Then I will not irritate anybody and will not be responsible before God for the events that will follow in our Church.

The Lord permitted me to serve our Church for nearly 55 years. I thank Him for this mercy and for the successes, and for my errors I beg pardon of Your Eminence and all members of the Council.

Your Eminences faithful servant, + Bishop Gregory

Editor's Note:

The necessity to dismiss by any means possible the Head of the Jerusalem Ecclesiastical Mission of 17 years – is explained rather simply. Archimandrite Anthony, shortly before the repose of Metropolitan Philaret won a court case against the state of Israel over property belonging to the Mission, confiscated by the former in 1948, and Israel was to pay back 7 million dollars. This sum is laughably small, considering the true value of the confiscated property, but the Mission's lawyer believed that the material, about to be filed against the USSR, using the precedent of the case against