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**EPISTLE OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE (AUTONOMOUS) RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
TO THE GOD LOVING FLOCK, CLERGY AND LAY PEOPLE  
REGARDING PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS**

Beloved in God Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, and venerable Monastics, entrusted to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and the Savior of the world Himself!

May the Lord's peace and blessing be with you!

All of us see and begin to understand that the world around us is ceasing to be Christian. Even more, it is now not even a post-Christian world, but already a post-religious one, in which even the concept of religion totally disappears, any sense of the need for religion. A long time ago Christianity subdued the world, and now the world, which has broken off from the power of Christ, expels true Orthodoxy from its midst. The Kingdom of Christ – the Church – is not of this world, as the Lord Himself has told us: "I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). The contemporary civilization of the postmodern epoch gave birth to informed society (the main subject of which is not so much money, but information) in which the traditional world outlook disappears, traditional forms of economy, while money gradually loses its material value and transforms into the virtual signals of computers. The growing "virtualization" of the human activities little by little is including all forms of human society. In the information society the old technology of subduing people through money and power becomes the manipulation of consciousness. In various ways, sometimes even by unnoticed means, people are led into committing sins, their will power is broken, they are led into slavery of the passions and the ruler of this world, Satan. In this there is hidden a great danger.

The Holy Apostle Paul directs us to stay in the freedom that Christ has granted us (Gal. 5:1). This freedom is spiritual freedom, freedom from the power of sin and death. We should not be slaves to the passions and sin; we should not participate in the general apostasy, but we are not able to stop being so. "Apostasy is tolerated by God, therefore do not try to stop it with your weak hand. Stay away from it yourself," St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches us. But since we live in this world and the Church continues to be in the world of this contemporary godless society, she remains an object of the influence upon her by this society. In connection with this the matter of personal identification numbers worries our flock.

The Holy Fathers teach us that sin is rooted in our will, in our free choice. If we are convinced that PIN Numbers are "the seal of antichrist" and our conscience would accuse us of accepting it, then, by all means we should renounce it, because someone who desecrates his conscience sins, as Holy Scripture teaches us (1 Cor. 8:7-12). We should renounce any conscious participation in any anti-Christian deeds of this world, which is rushing toward the antichrist and should act according to the words of the Apostle Paul and be like those "that buy, though they possess not". The criterion and judge of our acts remains our conscience. It judges our actions. Therefore, every Christian decides for himself the degree to which he can allow himself to participate in the life of the godless and theomachist civilization, guided by the internal voice of his own conscience and the Holy Gospel. The world rushes to separate us from God and His Holy Church, to entangle us by the chains of various "virtual conveniences," to blind us through the pride of technological prowess, to enslave our soul with worldly matters. If we consciously permit ourselves to be involved into this process, we sin.

However, we should not imitate the exalted inhuman and hypocritical opponents of the PIN Number from the MP, who are ready to place upon people the "heavy burdens and grievous to be borne", but at the same time enjoy all the "goods of civilization".

Let us not be excited by various missionaries who come to Russia from other Orthodox countries and who sternly warn against getting passports, but who themselves have them and easily cross the borders of all the countries in the world. Their heaven is the same – hypocrisy, as the Lord has told us (Mt. 23:3-4)

Beloved! It is necessary to remember that we live in a post-Christian world. The old "Christian world" has passed away and will not return. The frenzied desire by some for the revival in any country of an "Orthodox monarchy", in which there would be the rule of the true faith, should be considered a senseless utopia. One should soberly and bravely look forward and not be confused by the spirit.

The Holy Apostle Paul teaches us not to be "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2) but to stand for the Truth by renouncing any, even the slightest, communion with heretics. This, above all, concerns the prevailing heresy of ecumenism and her disciple, the Moscow Patriarchate – and the other false churches of "global" Orthodoxy. Because, according to the Apostle's teaching, someone who defiles himself by communing with heresy is an antichrist.

Christ demands His little flock uphold and manifest to others the Orthodox Faith. In this desert of the contemporary world the oases are few and we have, according to the word of the Prophet, to prepare the way for the Lord, by imitating the ancient Desert-fathers. In addition we, as disciples of Christ must be ready to confront the fact that they will laugh in our faces, mock, slander, judge and persecute us because we do not live the way the children of this world live and do not follow their insane ways.

If we are not ready for this, we are not worthy to be called Christians. The Church has had the vivid experience of living under the Soviet terror, when everything was taken away except the faith. At that time, as during the second century persecutions, the principles of the Christian way of life remained the same. "Neither world, nor language, nor customs separate Christians from other people", says one of the epistles of the Apostolic period. "They fulfilled their duties together with all the other citizens, however, they were exposed to persecutions equally with the others. Each foreign land is a homeland and each homeland is a foreign land" ("Epistle to Diognet")

Let us remember, beloved, **who has sealed himself with the seal of antichrist: he who lives outside of repentance in slavery to sin, the one who stains his conscience by accepting a PIN Number, who keeps relations with the heretic-ecumenists, by participating in their prayers and false mysteries, those who lie against the Truth and abuse the Church.** One should be afraid of this, turn away and run from it. But let us remember that the door of repentance is open to any one. As we know from the life of St. Basil, even the sale of his soul to the devil cannot deprive a person of the Lord's mercy. Let us watch over ourselves, and not to fall into laxness or the sin of judgment.

May the merciful Lord preserve us for His Heavenly Kingdom!

President of the Synod of Bishops, + Valentin, Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir  
July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003      Suzdal

Members of the Synod of Bishops:

Theodore, Archbishop of Borisovo and Sanino  
Seraphim, Archbishop of Suchumi and Abhasia  
Irinarch, Bishop of Tula and Briansk  
Bishop Ambrose

## EPISCOPAL CONSECRATION IN SUZDAL

According to information received from Suzdal on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003, by a decision of the Synod of Bishops of the ROAC, the consecration of the 13<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the ROAC, Archimandrite Sebastian (Zhitkov) was performed.

In the evening, the day before the feast of St. Evfimy of Suzdal, in the St. Tsar Konstantine Cathedral there was the right of nomination of Archimandrite Sebastian to be Bishop of Cheliabinsk, the vicar of the Suzdal diocese. On the next day the consecration was performed, headed by Metropolitan Valentin with Archbishops Theodore, Seraphim and Bishops Ambrose and Irinarch concelebrating.

His Grace Sebastian was born in 1941, graduated from the St. Petersburg Ecclesiastical Academy and then became a clergyman of the MP in Cheliabinsk. There he demonstrated great activity by opening new churches, gathering communities and straightening out the local church life. However, as is customary for the Moscow Patriarchate, which does not tolerate for long clergymen who are too active, he was slandered and persecuted by his diocesan authorities and even was incarcerated for a time. In 2000 he was received through repentance by the Primate of the ROAC Metropolitan Valentin and a year later was promoted to the rank of archimandrite.

At present, Bishop Sebastian has three parishes: In Cheliabinsk, Zlatoust and the village of Sargyzy. In his flock are many doctors, teachers and in general those with higher education. He is known and respected by many in Cheliabinsk, Perm and Moscow.

The day of the feast of St. Evfimy of Suzdal, according to local tradition, was marked by a solemn hierarchical service of a moleben with an akathist to the Imperial New Martyrs, presided over by the Primate Metropolitan Valentin in the church of St. Lazarus. After the Liturgy, performed in St. Constantine Cathedral, there was a procession with the relics of St. Evfimy, which rest in the cathedral. The service was concluded with wishes for many years to the "persecuted hierarchy of the Russian Church, the suffering Russian land and the Orthodox people living in the homeland and the Diaspora" as well as to the Synod of Bishops and the newly ordained Bishop Sebastian.

On the next day, commemorating the discovery of the relics of St. Sergius, Bishop Sebastian served a vigil service and Liturgy on the side altar of St. Sergius in the Suzdal Dormition church at which he ordained Hierodeacon Mitrophan (Koshevoy), who was tonsured and ordained in Suzdal, although he is a clergyman of Bishop Sebastian.

## LEGAL CASE ABOUT THE SEIZURE OF ST. STEPHAN'S CHURCH IN VILLAGE OF KIDEKSHA CONTINUES

According to the agency Vertograd # 372 of July 18<sup>th</sup>: "The FSB administration (Federal Security Service, actually the same as the KGB, "Ch. N") in the Vladimir Region is trying to attain an illegal court decision to confiscate the church in the Kideksha village from the ROAC.

In the very large St. Stephan's church, belonging to the ROAC and which was fully restored from ruins with the assistance of Suzdal diocesan funds, the defrocked by the Synod of Bishops Andrew Osetrov blasphemously continues to serve. He was "reordained" and has become a clergyman in the Moscow Patriarchate.

"On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Suzdal local court decided to take this church from Osetrov, however, on March this decision was appealed by Osetrov to the Regional FSB administration, which has close ties with the governor of the Vladimir Region Vinogradov and the Archbishop of the MP Evlogy of Vladimir and Suzdal. The appeal asks in essence to shift the problem from being a legal question to a political one.

A member of the local FSB, Boris Neskorofov, held a talk with the chief of the local Committee (KUGI) Badalian under whose responsibility are the government's properties and has sharply criticized him for supporting the legal demands of the Suzdal Diocese of the ROAC. After pressuring the representatives of the KUGI and receiving from Osetrov the power of attorney, Neskorofov attended the session of the court of appeals. As a result of pressure upon the members of the court by the FSB, the correct decision of the Court made on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 was revoked and the case renewed. The next meeting of the Suzdal's regional court is scheduled for July 31".

Unfortunately, it would be very surprising if the Suzdal court will not submit to pressure from the FSB and revoke its own correct decision.

## COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The official newspaper "The Path of Orthodoxy," of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA, published in Serbian and English in the July-August issue reported that in Belgrade from May 13<sup>th</sup> to May 24<sup>th</sup> there was a session of the Council of Bishops, presided over by Patriarch Paul of Serbia.

At this council several new martyrs, murdered by the Croatian partisan "ustashi", were canonized.

One of the main topics of this council was the relationship with the so-called Macedonian Church, which like the Ukrainians has proclaimed its independence or autocephaly. The Serbian Church, longing for peace and legality has tried on several occasions to reach an agreement by canonical means to solve this problem of self-proclaimed autocephaly. The Macedonians have totally ignored the efforts of the Serbian Church. Based upon a decree of 1967 and in connection with the decision of the Macedonian Synod in August of 1990 – the Serbian Council of Bishops has suspended Metropolitan Cyril of Polosh and Kumanovo. At the same time, the Council has appointed 2 bishops as vicars to the Patriarchal Echsarch of the autonomous Ohrid Diocese. In an effort to keep the peace, the Council of Bishops has given the schismatic bishops until September 1<sup>st</sup> to repentant.

Supported by the Macedonian government, all the clergy, which does not have official government permit or duly registered church community and tried to come to Ohrid during last year – have been turned back at the border. Even the Patriarch was not permitted to come to Macedonia! The Macedonian hierarchy claims that the name "Macedonian" is a political issue and as example points to the "OCA" in America, which is not recognized by anyone except the Moscow Patriarchate. At present, the Macedonian Bishop Stephan is looking for support from the government and insists that the Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski should protest to the Serbian Church, which supposedly "is disturbing the relations between two nations".

As at the previous Councils, the Serbian Church is very much concerned about the proper manner of teaching religion in the public schools. The Council also insists upon preserving the traditional Slavic alphabet, opposing the efforts of many to use the Latin alphabet. Unfortunately, even in Russia, there have been public proposals to adopt the Latin alphabet!

The Council was also concerned with a new trend of anti-religious attitudes, which linger from Communist times and include "the participation of the press and the so called non-governmental organizations in which at times also the governmental agencies participate". In order to regularize the relationship with the government authorities, the Council has established a special Committee that is to meet with important representatives of the government.

The Council had also to pay attention to the uncanonical interference in the life of the Serbian Church by a schismatic Bulgarian group, especially in the regions of Crna Gora. The Serbian Church plans to demand from the Bulgarian Church "as well as from other Local Churches the convening of a Pan-Orthodox Conference in order to regulate all the existing problems according to the canons".

## SUPPORT FOR THE IDOL-WORSHIPPER

In the June issue of "Church News" we published information about the blasphemous blessing of a statue of the "Mother Protectess" committed by Metropolitan Barnabas of Cheboxar and dispersal of the protesting these acts parish. The rector has addressed his Metropolitan with an excellently well-based argumentation.

78 parishioners of Fr. Andrew Berman sent a complaint to the Moscow Patriarchate and thus we learn that "**in this conflict Patriarch Alexis II supported Metropolitan Barnabas**" !

According to the newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" ("Russian Herald") # 14, the manager of the affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Sergius, sent the following letter to Metropolitan Barnabas:

"Your Eminence, dear Vladyko! After receiving your letter to His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexis about the unhealthy situation in connection with the blessing of the monument, **we express our concern and do support your position.** (emphasis by "Ch. N.")

"I prayerfully wish this conflict be healed and for the normalization of the church life of the diocese based upon the principles of canon law and our Orthodox traditions.

"His Holiness is praying for your health and wishes you God's help in carrying out your archpastoral work".

According to the newspaper, on May 19<sup>th</sup> there was an extended Diocesan meeting at which "the rectors of the important churches unanimously criticized the act of Priest Andrew Berman and asked..., in case of non-repentance, to have him defrocked". These rectors cited several canons regarding revolting against one's bishop. All of these canons improperly quoted can be expressed by one thought: "If any of the clergy insults the bishop let him be deposed" (Rule 55 of the Holy Apostles). It is self-evident that while there are canons that defend bishops from criticism or departures from them, there are also those that justify such actions. It is obvious that in canon law a case of blessing of a pagan statue by a bishop not foreseen, as was performed by Metropolitan Barnabas, and in addition with a cathedral choir singing "Let us come and worship"!

In accordance with the recommendation of the false brothers and due to a decree of Metropolitan Barnabas, the Priest Andrew Berman was suspended from priestly duties, is no longer considered to be a priest and is forbidden to wear clerical garb and a cross, while his parish was annexed to the Holy Trinity Monastery.

This history is very typical of the Moscow Patriarchate!

## SECOND INTERVIEW OF FR. GEORGE EDELSTEIN AND METROPOLITAN CHRISOSTOM OF VILNO

The Internet edition of the newspaper "Moscow News" on June 26<sup>th</sup> has published an interesting interview given by the Priest George Edelstein with the reporter Anna Rudnitsky

Rudnitsky started the interview with a statement that Fr. Edelstein has on numerous occasions publicly indicated that the MP has connections with the "special services" and asked if there was any reaction to these declarations. Fr. George answered that: "Three years ago I wrote a report addressed to the Archbishop Alexander of Kostroma and Galich with a request to give me at least some information about the work of this Committee which was investigating the connections of the ROC with KGB agents. I received no answer and even do not know if my letter reached him. In August 2001 this report was published in the newspaper "Predely Veka" ("Limits of the Age"). A few weeks later I received an answer from the Metropolitan Gedeon of Stavropol. The essence of his letter was that I am not a Christian, but a wet Jew and that no matter how much one tries to feed a wolf, it still looks to the forest. But, in essence, these words are a mockery of the sacrament of baptism".

"In what manner did he inform you – personally?" asked the reporter.

"He sent a letter to the editor. They called me and asked if I wanted this letter forwarded to me. I asked them to publish it. But I am not so much interested in the disputations at this level, I am more interested in the Church situation of today. And I believe that after the period of so-called perestroika **this situation has become much more worse than it was 15 years ago.** (Emph. "Ch. N.")

The journalist asked in which way is it manifested.

"The point is that the cadres [regular peacetime establishments] are deciding everything. And the Committee of the State Security for which I do have deep respect was involved with the cadres of the ROC. It would be stupid to undermine their work. Step by step, they have selected cadres and have built a system from which lay people are totally excluded from any participation in the life of the Church. No one is interested in their opinions, the Councils, at which any Christian could step forward are no longer convened for some time. The Church has turned into an island of stagnation. I feel very sad to say this about my own Church. At the same time I can say in her defense, that in my Church there happened to be such people as Chrysostom, who have decided to admit that they collaborated with the agencies. Therefore, we at least have some hope for recovery".

This declaration of Fr. George is more than optimistic. After all, of the high ranking members of the MP Synod, which completely consists of the "former" KGB agents and which have been exposed by Yakunin, not one of these hierarchs has admitted his collaboration with the KGB. Therefore why Fr. George mentions "such people" in the plural, while the only one is Chrysostom, who by the way, merely admitted to his collaboration with the 'agencies,' but has never repented of it!

Fr. George was also asked about the pressure or threats against him on part of the diocesan administration, to which he answered negatively. Giving an example of his friend, Fr. Alexander Men, killed by an unknown murderer, Fr. George said: "They do not threaten: they simply do their work".

The interview of Metropolitan Chrisostom also is of interest. It was given to the newspaper "Sovershenno Secretno" ("Completely Secretly") and published by the "Portal Credo.Ru". The questions regarded his service in the KGB and his opinion about Metropolitan Methody, at present a possible candidate for the post of the Patriarch.

The interview is rather long and we do publish it in an slightly abridged form.

Question: "At one time you were the source of exposes of collaboration of the ROC with the KGB, when in 1992 you spoke at the Council of Bishops with a declaration about Metropolitan Methody. If I am not mistaken, you also yourself then admitted that you were enlisted by the KGB. Like many in those years, this was a tempest in a teapot, it had no consequences. How do you feel today about the ROC collaboration with repressive agencies?"

Answer: In your question there several inaccuracies. In 1991 I declared that I had had contacts with the KGB organs. **This was not repentance, but just verification of the fact that for 18 years I was in touch with the representatives of these agencies.** (Emph. by "Ch. N.") At the Council of 1992 I indeed supported the establishment of a Committee to study the contacts of the clergy and, primarily of the senior hierarchs with State Security. I have never judged or accused those who collaborated. I wanted the Committee to expose those who betrayed, slandered, informed on their parishioners: such spiritual fathers indeed should be punished — expelled from our ranks. I myself was in contact with the KGB, but I never was an informer. And being in contact I was coerced: such was the system. And I am convinced that **the majority of bishops were forced to enter into contact with the agencies.** The only point is – what was the manner of these contacts: some gained promotions and did everything that was demanded from them. Others were able to protest and maintain their righteousness, that is what I did. **But in contacts with the KGB as such, I see no harm: these were the state agencies and we were its citizens...."**

Question: And your attitude toward Metropolitan Methody? In your appearances at the beginning of 90's he is presented as a man who made a career in the church through his collaborations with the KGB. Was he also forced to "keep contact" without hurting any actual persons or the reputation of the Church at whole?"

Answer: I did talk about Metropolitan Methody: I do not exclude that he was a member of the KGB staff. I assumed so. At one time we were not only the colleagues with him while working in the Foreign Relations Department, but even friends. Once I shared confidential information with him and he betrayed me. From this I came to the conclusion that **he keeps contacts with the KGB not only for the sake of benefits [?!] to the church, but also looks for his own profit**".

Question: And in general: does a person have the moral right to become a high ranking hierarch with a past as a KGB collaborator?

Answer: I do not exclude it completely. The history of the Church knows many examples of cases when she was presided over by less than worthy persons. The Patriarch is elected by the Local Council, the participants of which are guided not only by the objective motives, but also in particular, by very personal motives. We believers hope for the Lord's providence. But it is also permitted to elect unworthy representatives to the senior clergy!

Question: And in general, according to your opinion how should the relations between the Church and secular government be regulated?

Answer: The Church should fulfill her salvific mission and her representatives should start cavorting with those in power as little as possible. The Church should evaluate the actions of society and the authorities exclusively from the moral point of view. Our Church was for many years under the yoke of the Communist government and now, after receiving definite freedom, she wants to talk, give suggestions to the government, to interfere with politics..."

Question: It is not surprising: Today the Church is surrounded by respect and honor, sometimes even extreme, and demonstrative. The top people go to churches, stand during the festive thanksgiving services... Does the Church need this exaggerated attention from the government?"

Answer: This is a very dangerous phenomenon. Most of the faithful, seeing the representatives of the government in the church with candle in hand, do not believe in their sincerity. Our society is not religious but one should not confuse this with atheism – our people do not believe anything. The authorities only make gestures of loyalty to the Church, while actually the Church finds herself in a difficult situation. Her property does not belong to her. According to the new real estate laws the Church has to redeem the land on which a church is located. But where is she going to get the funds for this? In this regard, the Latvian situation is much more correct. There are good just laws and I am guided by them and I do not depend on a relationship with the government. Governments come and go, but the laws remain. The fact that today the Church is treated with affection by the first rank persons in the government makes me feel nothing but worry.

The rest of this interview is devoted to the situation of the Church in Latvia.

It seems that the widely circulated letter of Fr. George Edelstein to President Putin has created much public reaction. Thus, Radio Svoboda has published on the Internet another interview with Fr. Edelstein of July 15<sup>th</sup>. This time also Gleb Yakunin participated, while the questions were put by Jacob Krotov.

He was asked what his comment about the "deep infiltration" by KGB into the Russian Church meant?

Fr. George answered: "In 1991 my interview was published in the newspaper "Arguments and Facts" with the title "Chekists in Cassocks" in which I stated that in the MP every second clergyman directly or indirectly is connected with the Bureau of State Securities (KGB). I was much criticized with heart rending cries that I disgraced the Church. In particular, Fr. Shargunov insisted that surely not every second, but every tenth was collaborating. Eleven years have passed since then. Every tenth – at that time there were 10,000 clergymen – it means at least 1,000, who, as Fr. Shargunov said, are busy with Judas' sin or are guilty of Judas' sin. How many of this thousand (I repeat, this figure is not mine, but Fr. Shargunov's) have repented? That means today there are a thousand Judas's – a minimum of a thousand – who stand at the holy altar and exchange kisses with the brethren... I quote the document by the committee of Ponomarev where there are listed 8 or 10 code names of our hierarchs".

Krotov also questioned the former priest of the MP, Gleb Yakunin, who now has become a "priest of the Apostolic Orthodox Church" and who was a member of the committee which was to publish the KGB archives, why at that time there was talk only about the hierarchs of the Russian Church.

Yakunin gave an interesting answer:

"At one time Bishop Alexander, a young bishop, supposedly was not connected... For sure they recruited, by the way, very young priests and bishops. On one occasion, when this commission still functioned, and which at that time was created by the Synod and the Council, in a somewhat delicate manner he asked me: "Gleb, do you have some material regarding this ugly theme?" To which I responded: "His Holiness played a big role having this commission closed" ... And I feel very guilty, when I exposed these horrible materials. I was like passionate hunter, when I saw these... **I was in a shock when I saw these outrageous documents, which stated that the Church is actually a branch of the KGB.** I was unable to keep this information to myself. I started secretly to share it with some, even our deputies, that there are unbelievable documents. This quickly reached Patriarch Alexis. And he reacted with fear. He went to Hasbulatov – by the way, a truthful Muslim. And he had the power to dismiss our committee. And indeed the committee was closed. If I had kept my mouth shut; if only this disgrace had not spilt upon the head of the Russian Orthodox Church... I just had time to finish the study of materials from 1917 to 1988, because the rest of 89 and 1990... The staff said that these materials were still in production and hadn't reached the archives. Although they were certainly deceiving us, nevertheless, we could not get them".

The next question by Krotov was to Fr. Edelstein. He found that it is not logical that he complains to the Chekist Putin about other Chekist members.

Fr. Edelstein answered: The President does not hide that he is a Chekist. His collaborators – Kremlin's administration does not hide that they are the members of KGB. But our bishops, and priests hide it. (All underlining by "Ch. N.") I never speak against the Committee of State Security. All the time I demand that I be told the truth, that they not lie to me. My main enemy is – Sergianism – this is a lie from beginning to the end. And when I say, that our bishops are Sergianists – it means that they are lying, lying about everything. If you are a hierarch – fine. If you want to be a KGB officer – be that, but just do not play a double game.

Quite justifiable demand of a clergyman of his bishop!

### **ONE MORE "STATE CHURCH"**

The Internet publication "Forum 18" Oslo (Norway) has reported on one more legalized "state Church", this time in Bulgaria.

"Church News" has on several occasions reported on the privileges given to the MP by the government to the loss of all others, not so much of the "non-traditional religions" (traditional are – Orthodoxy, Islam and Judaism), but mainly to those Russian Orthodox who do not recognize the Moscow Patriarchate.

In our June issue, we reported on a recently signed agreement between the state of Byelorussia and the Moscow Patriarchate and about the special privileges granted her at the expense of other faiths.

Now, we find out that a similar agreement was signed between the Parliament and the Bulgarian Church. In addition to other agreements, the constitutional Court and its Directorate has the power at their discretion to impose fines (in amounts of nearly \$3,000) upon religious organizations. The Bulgarian Church, after once being registered, does not need to annually repeat this registration, while all others are obliged to according to the rules regarding all other religions and personalities "carrying out religious activity in the name of a religion without representative authority". The second fine is almost double the amount of the first.

It has also become known that the "alternative Synod" of the Bulgarian Church (which never received the right of state registration) could get it, but under another name.

At the time of the almost simultaneous fall of Communism in Russia and the West, one part of the Bulgarian Church condemned the unlimited submission of the Patriarch to the Communists, demanding that he repent. The Patriarch refused to repent and then a part of the episcopate established a parallel Bulgarian Church. It still exists.

The state official, when asked by a representative of "Forum 18" if this Synod will obtain registration, answered certainly, but only if it applies under another name and has suggested: The First or the Local, or the Schismatic, or the Alternate Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

It seems, that the "former" Communists have in no way changed their methods of pressuring the Church's conscience and prove to the world their former methods!

### **"UNIFYING COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE TRUE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN RUSSIA"**

Our publication received by fax from the Internet edition Portal Credo.Ru about a Council that opened in Moscow on July 13<sup>th</sup>, under the name of "The Unifying Council of Bishops of the True-Orthodox Church in Russia". In this "Council" 20 so-called bishops participated (according to another published list, there were 11 and 5 clergymen). This entire group consists of various imposters, some of whom pretend to have the source of their existence from the Catacomb Church.

The president of this "Council" happened to be "His Beatitude Raphael (Prokopiev) Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia, the President of the Sacred Synod and the First Hierarch of the True Orthodox Church."

The correspondent of Portal.Ru reported that the "Council" met absolutely openly and any one who wished was free to attend these meetings. He naturally expected that at the opening of the meeting there would be a solemn church service, but it didn't happen. At the head of the table sat Metropolitan Raphael. The Portal's reporter stated that "he comes from the military – in the 1970's he served as an instructor in Syria and was wounded, as a result of which his legs were partially amputated".

At one time he "was attracted to folk healing but then converted to Orthodoxy. Raphael received his initial ordination from questionable clergy, maybe the self-ordained group of the 'lamekin branch' of the TOC, however, in 1997 he was reordained into all the sacred ranks by another group, which received its apostolic succession from the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church (which is not recognized by any "official" local Orthodox Church). Being very energetic, Raphael rather soon became the head of this "church", however, the "church then suffered a schism, which, as usual, was followed by a number of another schisms. "Some of the separated 'branches' have decided to unite under Metropolitan Raphael. However, for the first time in the history of the 'neo-catacomb movement' this uniting process was joined by traditional members from the Catacombs, in the person of Metropolitan Epiphanius, who used to avoid appearing in public and was very unwilling to have any contacts with "outsiders". The conjoining of members of the genuine catacomb tradition is undoubtedly a success for Metropolitan Raphael and much strengthens his position as well as that of other 'alternative' branches'.

The representative of Portal reports that, "the council started with an extremely long opening greeting (more than one and a half hours) by Metropolitan Raphael, which was in 33 parts (to match the years of Christ life in the world). The

general idea of the report was rather liberal, although moderate, so as not to scare away the Catacomb members. In the section 'About the church service' the Metropolitan appealed for making it 'richer' by reading from the Scriptures, and read mainly in Russian, and the lives of the saints were to be 'cleansed of historical inaccuracies'. He also suggested the acceptance of a 'diversity of liturgical rites' and even 'to search out the theology' of the Churches that have joined the new unification, thus making a gesture toward the 'Apostolic Orthodox Church' known for its extreme liberalism and which calls itself – in the words of Gleb Yakunin – the successor of the Renovationists. He also appealed for unification with 'other Christian Churches' while carefully avoiding the term 'Ecumenism.'

During the meeting of this "council" one of the participants (a priest and secretary of Metropolitan Epiphany) had a clear attack of demonic possession, with wild cries and foaming at the mouth. The possessed crawled under a table and was carried out of the hall by "priests" sitting next to him.

The Internet publication of the newspaper "Kommersant Daily" of July 15<sup>th</sup> also reacted to this "council". According to this information, this group is planning to declare itself the successor of the pre-Revolutionary Russian Church and to demand the "return" to her of church properties.

In the opinion of the deputy president of the Foreign Relations Department of the MP, Archimandrite Mark Golovkov, "The TOC – is an uncanonical formation; they are people whom we may not call priests and even less call them the legal successors of the pre-revolutionary Church".

This is a rare case when we have to agree with the Moscow Patriarchate!

Portal has presented a multitude of interesting and characteristic details about this unauthorized gathering, which covers under the name of the "Council of the True Orthodox Church". Unfortunately, the size of this extremely important and interesting report is too long for our publication.

This history is a proof of how easy it is in our times to swallow the bait of well sounding name and, instead of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, to join the satanic paws, not even the schismatic, not merely sectarians!

The readers of Portal's report should be grateful to its correspondent who has so clearly exposed this group as criminal adventurers.

## **ECUMENICAL PILGRIMAGE**

The newspaper "Orthodox Observer" of the Greek Exarchate in the USA in the issue for June-July 2003 reported that Metropolitan Anthony has decided to widen the long lasting dialogue with the Western heretics and therefore has organized a pilgrimage with the Catholic Archbishop William Levada and an Episcopal bishop William Swing.

The pilgrimage visited the historical centers of Canterbury, Rome and Constantinople. The idea was realized on April 1<sup>st</sup> when the pilgrims arrived in London. There in the cathedral of the Apostle Peter a common prayer service was held. According to the newspaper: "In a particularly moving moment, their host, Bishop of London Richard Chastres, asked the three religious leaders to offer a common blessing to the large crowd of churchgoers". Then the pilgrims proceeded to the Anglican center of Canterbury, and from there, to Lambeth and Westminster Abby.

The next stop was in Italy, at the St. Francis of Assisi monastery and on the day after the arrival, this delegation was received on a special private audience by the Pope, at which he presented them with a commemoration medal. In addition, the delegation visited the church of St. Susan, the grave of Apostle Peter and the Lateran museum.

In Rome there was also held a common prayer service and Archbishop Levada offered a special mass during which he prayed for unity and peace.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, the whole group went to Constantinople and was met at the airport by Metropolitan Theoliptos. The next day in the patriarchal chapel in the presence of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew a common prayer service with the heretics was also held. The non-Orthodox participants on this pilgrimage were impressed by the accessibility of the Patriarch and had a long discussion about various matters. The Patriarch presented them with the commemoration crosses.

The pilgrimage concluded with a visit to the mosque converted from the cathedral of St. Sophia and to the church of the Life Giving Spring in which are located the graves of the Ecumenical Patriarchs. Then the Patriarch served an akathist with members of the Synod.

While on this pilgrimage, Mr. Marcus donated to the Patriarch and the Roman Pope \$50,000 each for their charities.

## **THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

The bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of July 23<sup>rd</sup> reported the General Secretary of the WWC Konrad Raiser was recently in Russia and has declared that he is well pleased with his mission, namely, to restore relations between his Council and the Moscow Patriarchate.

The last was very unhappy with the insufficient role for the "Orthodox" in this heretical and Masonic establishment. Besides, some "Orthodox" pointed out that the WCC has fallen under too much of a Protestant influence and thus it recommended using "inclusive language" when mentioning the Lord's name, a female priesthood and matters of gender in the Scriptures.

Raiser became concerned in 1990 when the Georgian and Bulgarian Churches left the WCC. At that time, this organization promised the "Orthodox" to make some reforms and, it seems, the Moscow Patriarchate was satisfied with



that. Priest Vsevolod Chaplin, the Deputy President of the Foreign Relations Department declared that, "The changes are becoming part of the WCC's day to day life.

Raiser explained that the Protestants and Orthodoxy present "two fundamentally different cultural Christian traditions". He believes that the main object is to reach a situation at which "both parties will see each other as different, but a true expression of the Gospel".

In Moscow Raiser met with the leaders of the Orthodox Church, including the head of the Foreign Relations Department, Metropolitan Kirill (Mikhailov in the KGB) and also visited Kiev and Minsk. In Moscow he met with Vladimir Zorin, the government's minister in charge of national and religious affairs.

Speaking at a Press conference in the central hall of the agency "Interfax" in Moscow, according to report of NEWSru. Com he said that, "One of the principles of the World Council of Churches is – if one is acting on the territory of other, than she has to do it with the permission of the Church which is already present there. The Moscow Patriarchate, namely in Russia does have this canonical right of the Church." Raiser has admitted that "this sometimes creates problems for the activities of other Churches... At the same time the principle remains".

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, an official representative of the MP, in name of her Foreign Relations Department thanked Raiser for his support in matters of interchurch relations, while Raiser stated that in Russia no rights of any minorities are limited. "There is not a single case, which could be qualified as open persecution".

Knowing of persecution committed by the MP and local authorities against the Autonomous Russian Orthodox Church – one can object to the statement of the General Secretary of the WCC – that at best he is ill informed about this matter in contemporary Russia. However, the AROC not only in no way is a member of the WCC but her Primate some time ago left the MP, not wishing to participate in ecumenical common prayers.

Another Internet publication, the "Nezavusumaya Gazeta Religii" ("Independent Newspaper/Religions"), in an article by Mark Smirnov with the title "It is too late to burry WCC"... on July 16<sup>th</sup> reported that the aim of this conference was the discussion of the international ecumenical movement and the problems of theological dialogue between the Orthodox and heterodox, as well as to "lead some consultation with the representatives of the MP about the future participation of the ROC in the activities of the Council... This event was organized by the Department of the Foreign Relations of the MP... The leader of the work of the round table was the Deputy of the President of the Foreign Relations Department – Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin". (Underlined by "Ch. N.").

## **SODOMY THREATENS ANGLICANS WITH SCHISM**

"The New York Times" of July 19<sup>th</sup> reported that a bishop was elected for New Hampshire, a G. Robinson who does not hide his criminal inclinations. His designation immediately created an uproar in conservative Anglican circles in America, similar to what has happened in Canada and England. A theologian Dr. K. Harmon said that this will lead to the point where their bishops will stop meeting with each other at the councils and would argue about each other's legality, while lay people in large numbers will leave the "church". A second cause of division among the Anglicans is the consecration of women-bishops in England.

The very same newspaper on July 24<sup>th</sup>, in a extended article by Kourt Goldstein warned that if the Anglicans do not take urgent measures to achieve reconciliation, this will threaten the unity of 79 million Anglicans scattered over the various Anglo-Saxon countries.

The Anglican confession basically can be extremely diverse, depending upon the thinking of their rectors. For example, in the 1970's a certain Anglican priest in England was baptized into the ROCOR. In his church he had Orthodox icons and candle stands! After moving to the USA, he was ordained and even appointed a rector to the second church of St. Sergius in the Synod building where the services were conducted in English for American converts to Orthodoxy. Unfortunately, he had to be removed, when he became a Roman Catholic!

The bulletin "Ecumenical News International" of July 9<sup>th</sup> reported that similar scandals over homosexuality spreading in the citadel of Anglicanism in England.

Canterbury Archbishop Rowan Williams (the official head of all Anglicans), who previously expressed support for the homosexuals, appointed a Geoffrey John to be bishop of Westminster Abby and at present, this has created an bitter polemic in the English newspapers.

Liverpool bishop James Johns has accused the Oxford bishop Richard Harries of appointing him as his vicar, while ignoring the necessity for the need "to restrain all parties" regarding the legality of sodomy.

He has also declared, that "one of the strengths of the Church of England is its diversity, but that should not be mistaken for anything goes."

The newspaper "The Sunday Times" wrote that the English liberals very much hope that this situation will force their church authorities accept the legality of sodomy and therefore, the Anglican clerics who practice it, would have a chance "to come out of the closet".

Richard Kirker, General Secretary of the Society of Lesbians and Homosexuals declared that when the Anglicans in 1994 have approved women bishops, at that time there was a lot of argument and expectation that quite a few people would leave this church, however, actually very few have.

However, under the pressure of Anglican society, Geoffrey Johns has resigned on his own, even before he was installed as bishop of Westminster Abbey and the Canterbury head of all Anglicans had to say that the John's appointment "had brought to light a good deal of unhappiness among people, who could by no means be described as extremists".

It is quite beyond doubt that the sin of sodomy before our very eyes has become a general religious and political problem!

## **CONTROVERSIAL MOVIE**

"The New York Times" of August 2<sup>nd</sup> published an extensive article by Laurie Goodstein about a movie that would debut this Spring entitled "The Passion."

The theme of the crucifixion of the Savior for a long time (since the Middle Ages in the West) has been reenacted in the village of Oberammergau in Germany, where all the residents participate as actors. The role of the Holy Virgin could be played only by a virgin of immaculate reputation. Starting with the end of the Second World War and the extensive influence of the Jews upon all matters, the text of the Oberammergau play has been revised several times in order to omit anything that could be classified as "anti-Semitism".

The future movie, made by Mel Gibson, who has put 25 million dollars of his own funds into it and knowing that this movie will be publicized not by the professional agencies, but by his own means, has so far been shown to very few critics.

Judging by the opinions of conservative Christians, the movie strictly follows the Gospel text and the majority of actors use the original Aramaic or Latin languages, without any English subtitles.

Despite this, the movie has been strongly criticized by Catholics, because Gibson belongs to a Catholic group which has split away from the Pope after Vatican II, which declared that Christ was crucified by the Romans and the Jews had nothing to do with it. This group believes that all the Popes after the Vatican Council are heretics and its clergy serves only in Latin.

At the insistence of various Catholics, the movie was shown to several cardinals in America, who became concerned that this movie might create an outburst of anti-Semitism, but Gibson has refused to show it to the Jews. As might be expected, the main concern came from Jewish groups and in particular, from the Anti-defamation League. Its president, Abraham Foxman said: "If you say this is not anti-Semitic and this is a work of love and reconciliation, why are you afraid to show it to us?"

Those who have seen the movie say that the extreme cruelty of the Romans is depicted, in the beating of Christ before the Crucifixion and Mr. Hudson, a Catholic publicist has said: "By the time the Romans get through with him, you have forgotten what the Jews might have done".

Mr. Lauer, a representative of the company "Icon Productions" which will distribute this movie to the theaters, said that the controversy and noise about it are the best advertisement it could get. "You can't buy that kind of publicity," he said.

## **FROM THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS (Letter to Archbishop Anthony of Geneva – 9/22 January, 1975)**

Your Eminence,

Dear Most Reverend Vladyko;

Thank you for your frank letter of December 27<sup>th</sup>. I appreciate that you have expressed yourself with no reservations, although your clear prejudice against me certainly did grieve me. I see that you ascribe to me everything evil that is not pleasing to you in Synod affairs for some reason or anything you disagree with. However, it is far from reality that the Synod's decisions always reflect my opinions or are made due to my suggestions. Forgive me, but I have the impression that my very existence irritates you and you will not make any allowances. However, I try not to criticize the Synod's decisions or the Metropolitan's to anybody, even when I do not agree with them, because our ecclesiastical community suffers too much with a tendency to criticism, which is enkindled by the work the Soviet agents which is hard to see. The most odious rumors appear from nowhere. I am sending you a copy of an article from Argentina in which some attention is paid to you too. Here the work is done by Chukhnov and some others. A lot is said about me by poor Kargai, not as an agent but due to his unexplained anger toward me, and who just recently announced that he wants to leave the priesthood and marry.

I can understand that being far away you could easily believe in my "evil powers" which became intensified by the time of the Council to the weakening of our Church, but I have hoped that you know me well enough not to trust easily in the various inventions about me. But I was surprised by your unfairness and the unfriendly suspicions you have, when for example, you reacted to my, as I believe, quite innocent question about the Parisians. Don't you know that I was entrusted with the work of providing information and that I get questions from agencies and newspaper editors? That was always part of my job. And even of my very care not to harm your work (in dealing with the Parisians) you reproach me, by saying I intrude in matters of no concern to me. Have you decided that I want to crush the Parisians? Quite the opposite, I fully agree with you. But in this matter there is an obvious shortage of information from the headquarters. If you complain, some times justly about the lack of information from headquarters, then here I have heard complaints about the lack of information from your side. For example, I do not know of your epistle you sent about the Council to the Metropolitan or

Vladyka Laurus, but not only I, but also the members of the Synod, find out about the text of your epistle from the local Jewish newspaper, where it was mentioned that this was published with some abbreviations. The full text I happened to read only a day before yesterday in a newspaper published in Buenos Aires.

I feel that your reproach regarding Orthodox Affairs [Pravoslavnago Delo] is also unjust. First of all, as far as I can remember, when there was a meeting of the committee, the discussion was about America, and not about things in general, because no one wanted to damage your established organization. But if a local center were to exist near the Synod (geographically) I would not participate in it, as I do not participate in the work of Orthodox Affairs, while always willing to assist, if it is necessary and I can do so. Equally, I do not participate in the work of youth organizations, but I help them when they ask for it. Believe me Vladyko, that I have enough work even without that.

Regarding your wish to remove me from the meetings of the Councils (and maybe also of the Synods) I would like to introduce a correction, that this was not the wish of the diocesan bishops, but was expressed only by you and Vladyka Anthony of S. F., who, however, lately admitted what he had written was a mistake, and even asked my pardon, for which there was no need, because I am not offended by either of you, but I viewed this strictly from the point of view of its benefit to church matters.

Speaking frankly, I cannot understand your wish that I would give at Councils "a bit of independence" to the bishops. Being a consultant, I am permitted to freely express myself at the Synod's meetings, while at the Councils I write the minutes and only occasionally do I ask to say something in order to inform or to correct factual errors. Quite often this happens at the request of a hierarch. This is obvious from the minutes itself. But in which way can I restrict the liberty of the bishops? All of us have been acquainted since the first years and we are not ashamed to express our opinions in front of each other. When I unofficially read your letter to the members of the Synod, believing that they should be aware of your displeasure with me, the hierarchs were surprised no less than I was.

As for your suggestion about removing me from the meetings, I am surprised at your surprise. I have worked for the Synod from the beginning of 1931. My participation at all meetings during the Councils was introduced by Metropolitans Anthony and Anastassy. More than 40 years have passed. I didn't seek this myself, but they began to invite me, a young layman, to the meetings of senior hierarchs, which in preparation for some decisions, Metropolitan Anastassy quite often used to do while in Yugoslavia. My removal after so many years, especially during the hunt against me coming from Soviet agents, which they are working so hard at, would mean that there is something true in all their slanders.

After all, my removal is what they are working so hard for in order to weaken the Synod. To fulfill their wishes not only would be unfair, but also would make me useless to the Synod. The unfairness I can suffer with no complaint as it is beneficial for the soul, but the second consequence is more important. It would put an unfavorable light upon many decisions of the church authorities which were made over a period of more than 40 years. At this point it were better that I myself resign for some reason.

You are mistaken when you write that I "govern the Church". I do not deny that my opinion is taken into consideration. One would be totally stupid if in all these years one did not gain some experience. Vladyka Metropolitan writes quite a bit himself, or if he asks me to compose a letter, he advises me about what should be written. The major part of the correspondence is carried out by VI. Laurus and quite often I find out about it only when it is reported by him to the Synod.

Therefore one should not overestimate my influence.

But even if one allows that it exists, it is not clear to me what you are accusing me of, other than this very fact, that is, in which way did I abuse it or of what have I been guilty, such that you want me to be removed from the Synod. I also do not know what are your plans to fill up the vacuum left, which could happen.

Forgive me Vladyko for this long letter. I do not want to take up your time, but I wanted to remove this unexpected misunderstanding with you, in the first place for the good to our Church. If I have in some way offended you – I beg your pardon.

We have too many external enemies to create disagreement or tensions among ourselves. The Soviet agents work with rumors and slanders, while people easily accept them. I believe, that if there are points on which we do not share the same opinions, this does not concern principles, but just tactics, for example, the limits to apply economy. Here we have to be patient with each other. And as much as the center has to pay attention to the distant parts of the Church, even so more in the interest of the its unity that requires attention be given to the opinions of the First Hierarch and the Synod. Lack of coordination – which can be easily noticed from outside – is the worst thing that can happen.

I write this in the hope that despite your negative attitude towards me, you have no doubt that I am guided not by personal interests and am, as much as you are, concerned in the first place with the church's interests. If I were to think otherwise, I would not write to you and make an effort to restore your trust. Because, if you wrote that in the center there is necessary the trust of the Synod for diocesan bishops, than no less important likewise is the trust that those in the center are thinking not about themselves, but about the Church.

Thank you for information about the position of Archb. George. With the Metropolia here things are at a stand still. We did exchange letters. Now we wait for their answer. They want us to factually agree with their autocephaly, but do we have the right to do so in the name of the Russian Church? Meyendorf in the Metropolia's English newspaper published their reply to our appeal, but our appeal is only in the form of a proposal. At the same time, he has attacked us with crude distortions of our history, for example, that those members of the First Karlovtsy Council abruptly left it because of disagreements about political matters. I wrote them a mild correction to this history, but they did not publish it in their next issue. Yesterday I met with Meyendorf. He told me that he supposedly hadn't received my letter, but will publish it when it

is found. We met on the jubilee of P. F. Anderson. Although he (Meyendorf) is unfriendly towards us (in the Parisian manner) he himself approached me, being uncertain that I would recognize him. The entire festivity was in an ecumenist spirit and was presided over by the Greek Bishop Iakovos. This is why I showed up only for the reception, but didn't attend the supper. I have been acquainted with Anderson for 50 years and continue to have good relations. Another of my good acquaintances, a Jesuit, asked me if I would be willing to meet with the Soviet Archpriest Anatole Kaznovetsky, a known KGB agent. Certainly I refused. He asked me on account of Kaznovetsky's request.

Patriarch Pimen will not come here, because he is afraid of demonstrations. Instead Nikodim will come. The concelebrations with the bishops of the Metropolia will be held far away from New York, in Pennsylvania. Makary, Bishop of Uman, who was here so far, is appointed to Geneva. He is young, clever and, undoubtedly went through the KGB schools; he is rather secular. He showed up even in Jordanville. Probably he will stop at your cathedral also.

Asking for your holy prayers and blessing I remain your devoted servant,  
Protopresbyter George Grabbe