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ON THE NÀTIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE NEW YEÀR:

THE EDITOR OF "CHURCH NEWS" OFFERS OUR HEÀRTFELT GREETINGS TO OUR REÀDERS FOR
THE FEÀST OF THE NÀTIVITY OF CHRIST AND THE COMING NEW YEÀR
AND WISHES THEM ÀLL
THE BEST OF HEÀLTH AND PROSPERITY.

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*Nativity Epistle
of
Metropolitan Valentine
of Suzdal and Vladimir*

*to the Most Reverend Archpastors, Clergy,
and Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church*

*Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who transcendeth being;
and the earth proffereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable;
Angels and shepherds sing praises together;
the Magi travel together with a star;
since for our sake He Who is Pre-eternal God;
is born as a Young Child.
(Kontakion of the Nativity of Christ)*

*My beloved brethren, Archpastors and Pastors,
and Brothers and Sisters, beloved in the Lord!*

On this holy night of the birth of Christ, I extend to you my sincere greetings from the ancient city of Suzdal, which by the providence of God, has been chosen to be the spiritual center of the Orthodox Church of Russia.

In accordance with the will of God, we have again been found worthy to see this wonderful day, upon which Heaven and earth together sing praises to Him Who was born in a humble cave in Bethlehem, the divine Christ-Child. This greatest of events had previously been announced by the Angel: "For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11-12).

To earth is born the very divine Word Himself, about Whom the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian so loftily testified saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1: 1, 4-5).

A little more than two thousand years ago, this divine Light came into the world which lay, and even now continues to lie, in the darkness of sin and apostasy from God "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" – in the words of that same Apostle John, speaking about the Incarnation of the Savior, – "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God" (John 1:11-12).

The rational mind of man will never be able to attain unto the mystery of God's Incarnation in Bethlehem. This mystery requires reverential faith and love in humility, which must proceed not from some expectation for self-enrichment, but from the animated reaction of a beating human heart to the Gospel's good news concerning the Savior.

Indeed, how is it possible for the mind of man to fathom that the Creator of the whole world, of all that is visible and invisible, has Himself come to earth in created human flesh? How can one comprehend that He Who is more expansive than the entire universe, He Whose words cannot be contained even by the whole world, is now placed in a tiny manger in a humble little cave in Bethlehem, after being born from an earthly Virgin? Truly, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, the mystery of the birth of the God-Man is impossible to grasp with the mind, for it transcends the laws of nature. But what is impossible for the mind is nevertheless possible for the heart, and that which wise men cannot accept, is revealed in simplicity to the uneducated shepherds of Bethlehem.

God became incarnate upon earth in order that we, who are born of earth, might become God; being united with Him through His Grace. The path of deification, the complete unification of our human nature with God, begins with the humble acceptance of the news of the birth of Christ, with a complete turning away from our former unrighteousness, and with a firm decision to begin life over again, carefully and observantly keeping all of God's commandments.

How grace-filled it would be to begin this new life in Christ on the feast of His holy Nativity, after sincerely repenting of all of one's sins, and having partaken of the divine Body and Blood of the Lord!

But to set out upon the path of deification requires no small amount of labor, and great humility. The labor consists mainly of unceasing prayerful concentration, which begins with the mind and then passes over to the heart, with the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer. This labor of prayer, however, cannot be successful without abstinence; without a constant spiritual fast. But this little labor, which we bring to God in accordance with the desire of our hearts, over the course of our entire lives, cannot begin to compare with that superabundance of joy, light and warmth, which the Lord grants to His followers here on earth, and a thousand times more, in His heavenly kingdom.

The lives of thousands of Christian Saints, who by their experiences attested to the reality of this deification, leave no room for doubt. Let us, therefore, follow their inspired example, for the Lord bids each one of us directly, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44).

My fellow worshippers, dearly beloved in the Lord!

The feast of the Nativity of Christ coincides with the beginning of the new year, inasmuch as our modern reckoning of time stems from this event. As we enter the new year, it is essential that we take some stock of the year now drawing to a close. For each one of us, the conclusions that we make should be accompanied by a penitential recognition of our mistakes and sins, which must include a firm decision to never repeat them.

I most humbly, therefore, ask forgiveness from all whom I may have offended during the course of the past year.

Over the course of the past year, the Lord has blessed our holy Orthodox Church with peace and quiet. The horrible campaign of slander that appeared on the scene during the preceding years, has come to nothing. Except for a few minor things, church life in our God-saved city of Suzdal has proceeded well.

However, in many other places and in some of our other dioceses, there were persecutions and attempts to mute the voice of the Russian Orthodox Church. With the collaboration of the apostates of the Moscow Patriarchate, who lay claim to having a religious monopoly in our country, persecutions were intensified on our communities in Zheleznovodsk, in the region of Stavropol, in Kursavka, in the Tver region, in Latvia, and in several other places.

On this day of the great feast of the Nativity of Christ, we especially earnestly offer up our prayers "for all who suffer and are persecuted for the holy Orthodox Faith."

Over the course of the past year, by the will of God, I visited our communities in the USA, in Switzerland, in Bulgaria, and in several of the dioceses of Russia.

I am very happy to be able to report to you that far away, in the land of the Americas, in the country of Haiti, interest in Orthodoxy is growing steadily and the number of those who belong to the Church is growing among people who have never been ethnically or culturally connected to Orthodox tradition. This is an especially interesting development because these newly converted American Haitians have converted to Orthodoxy in its pristine purity, without the baggage of any historical waves of corruption which from time to time, most unfortunately, have prevented even our own countrymen from finding the true Church. We prayerfully greet our brethren in the USA, in Latin America, in Western Europe, in Haiti and in Bulgaria with our whole hearts, and we thank God that He has revealed unto them the true Church.

My dear brothers and sisters!

The contemporary world often subjects the Church's faithful children to various trials and tribulations such as the Church of Christ has never before seen in Her history. Not being able to make the correct response to these trials, some of Her children, unfortunately, have become scandalized and have ended up on the verge of schism. Usually, this situation arises as a result of emotions, passions and ignorance, since, in fact, the universal Church has within its Tradition an answer to every problem that troubles people today.

The Lord said in the Gospel, "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." (Matt. 18:7). In our days, and not without the participation of certain active persons inside the Moscow Patriarchate, a certain new temptation concerning the introduction of new methods of keeping track of people digitally has begun making the rounds, namely, UPC, bar codes, electronic microchips, magnetic strips in passports, etc. Many see in these things the seal of the Antichrist, and others see in them the precursors of the seal of the Antichrist.

The Jews of antiquity, living at the time of the birth of Christ, also saw a temptation in the "digital IDs" of their day, which was instituted by Augustus Caesar. The Gospel states that our Lord, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem because His Mother, the all-holy Theotokos, and the righteous Joseph, the Betrothed, had returned to their native city of Bethlehem, where their ancestor King David was born, in order to take part in the great census. This was the first time that there had ever been a universal census in the ancient world, and there can be no doubt that had it taken place in our day and age, many would see the seal of the Antichrist in it as well. Nevertheless, the Holy Family, including the newborn Christ-child, took part in this enrollment.

What objection could a Christian have against any of these numbers and electronic codes? Could it be because they permit the government to control one's every step, movement, and purchase? But should a true Christian be afraid of such control? In the words of our Savior, "There is nothing hidden that shall not be made manifest." (Mark 4:22). We do not hold any "secret beliefs." We do not form any secret underground organizations. We do not take part in any conspiracies. Quite to the contrary! We are called to preach the Gospel to the whole world openly; "from the housetops." In many instances, thanks to our openness and honesty, many of the smear campaigns that were directed against our Church have fizzled out on their own. If anyone wants to follow us around and spy on us, let him! In the final analysis, a genuine Christian should be ready to endure any sorrow for the sake of Christ, even martyrdom.

But on the other hand, we should not show complacency and carelessness, observing the "signs of the times." From the moment of the fall of the first human beings, the world has been moving constantly towards its end, for a short time before which the Antichrist will set up his reign and will perpetrate the worst persecution of Christians ever. Without a doubt, our day and age is closer to the coming of the Antichrist than any other, however, it is not ours to know the "times and the seasons," and the Gospel expressly forbids us from trying to figure them out. For us individually, the end of the world could come at any time, for at any moment our earthly life could be cut off.

And so, we should expend every effort, as much as is possible, to guard ourselves from the destructive influence of the world. Among the faithful of our Church there are to be found certain ascetics who refuse to carry a passport at all. We respect this decision, but nevertheless, we recognize that not everyone is able to bear it. According to the prophecies of the holy Fathers, on the seal of the Antichrist, which he will cause to be placed upon the forehead and upon the right hand of those who worship him, there will be written, "I come to thee voluntarily." This means that the Antichrist will require a conscious devotion to him after a conscious rejection of Christ. Accordingly, the main distinguishing characteristic of the seal of the Antichrist will be a conscious rejection of Christ. If then we are not required to renounce our Faith upon receiving these various forms of identification, could they be considered the seal of the Antichrist? It would seem that the ID cards of the old Soviet regime would be closer to fitting that description.

Our Synod of Bishops has examined the issue of today's forms of digital ID cards, time and again. Our Church recognizes that these IDs are one step in the overall preparation for the coming of the Antichrist, and for this reason, our faithful children should avoid them, if at all possible. It is, however, absolutely forbidden to agree with the idea of implanting microchips under the skin, whereby they become part of the human body, as this infringes upon the integrity of human nature as it was created by God. Other electronic devices which do not have this characteristic, and are therefore less unacceptable, nevertheless do form part of the electronic world which surrounds us, with all of its computers, scanners, and other computational devices, with which we all must live, like it or not.

Dearly beloved children of the Church of God!

Once more, with all my heart, I greet you with the present glorious feast, and I wish for you all that no temptation of our present world should darken your spiritual joy, nor should hamper you in your approach to the divine Christ-child.

With abundant love in the Lord,

*Lowly Valentine,
Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir
Suzdal
Nativity of Christ
2004/2005*

SUDDEN DEATH OF ARCHIMANDRITE MICHAEL (GRAVES) IN HAITI

In our October issue we published information about the desperate conditions of the community of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in Haiti, led by Archimandrite Michael (Graves).

On November 21 we received via internet the bulletin of this community with an urgent appeal for help. Due to the horrible road conditions in Haiti, the community's 2 trucks after 14 years of service must be repaired. The repairs estimated at \$200, not counting the labor costs. Without them the community will not be able to continue its charitable work.

However, on November 11/24th our telephone rang with a call from Haiti and a person in charge of the orphanage informed us that that morning Fr. Michael had suddenly died. One of his sisters suspected it was a political crime. Considering the primitive conditions of life in Haiti, it is very doubtful that the true cause for death of Fr. Michael will be ever established.

Unfortunately, the body of the deceased was cremated and the urn with the ashes will be transported to USA in order to be buried on the cemetery where his parents are buried. The sisters of Archimandrite Michael had decided that the cost of transporting a casket would be too high.

On Friday December 3rd Fr. Spyridon Schneider, Fr. Andrew (Maklakov) and Fr. Christopher have served the funeral service in Ipswich, in absence of the body. The same service was performed by Fr. Ephraim of St. Barbara Monastery in New Jersey

No doubts the death of the community's founder is a terrible and irreplaceable loss, especially considering the outstanding energy and the extensive charitable work done by Fr. Michael.

When appealing for help, Fr. Michael wrote in his bulletin that he knew perfectly well that the ROAC is itself in material need and he could not expect any help from Russia. However, he had joined the Russian Autonomous Church not hoping for assistance, but convinced by her confessional positions.

On November 13/26th we received a very warm letter from Archimandrite Michael with a booklet of photographs enclosed and basic information about this Orthodox mission, which was established in 1986, but at that time it was in the jurisdiction of the Antiochian Patriarchate.

Due to a hurricane in Haiti, the community had to take in 6 little children who lost their parents in this catastrophe.

Because of the political chaos in Haiti, at present, the situation there is so dangerous that people who are involved with the mission's work do not recommend coming to Haiti. There are too many robberies and murders.

The church services in this community are conducted in French.

"DIPLOMATIC MOVE" OF SECRETARY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF ROCOR(L) BISHOP GABRIEL

An official Internet announcement from the chancery of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under Metropolitan Laurus on December 6th published the following information translated by "Ch. N.":

"Bishop of Manhattan Gabriel has met with Consul General in New York.

On December 6th on day of repose of St. Alexander Nevsky, Bishop Gabriel of Manhattan visited the Consulate General of Russia in New York, where there was a meeting of His Grace with the Consul General of the RF, Sergey Victorovich Garminin. During the warm and friendly meeting His Grace and Sergey Victorovich discussed plans for a visit by the icon of the Kursk Root to the St. Nicholas Patriarchal Cathedral in New York, which will happen on December 12th of the current year. On this day the Odigitria [Directress] of the Russian Church Abroad will be brought to the Cathedral to the beginning of the Liturgy, after which there will be served a moleben with the acathist. (Underlined by "Ch. N.") Sergey Victorovich said that he will participate in this festive event. After the service the icon will be returned to the Synod's Cathedral.

When parting with Sergey Victorovich, Bishop Gabriel of Manhattan invited him to visit the Synod of Bishops and the Synod's Cathedral at his convenience.

In the meeting have participated Archpriest Andrew Sommers and the cathedral's Warden Prince V. K. Golitsyn".

It is interesting: when will we hear that the miraculous icon of Kursk will be brought to Russia (certainly, just "for time being")

The chancery's information does not indicate what was the reason for the Secretary of the Synod's visit to the Consul General of Russia in New York, but the following is logical: while flirting with Patriarch Ridiger, one cannot avoid his colleague in KGB – President Putin. The very tight connections between the actions of President and Patriarch are becoming more and more obvious.

This "diplomatic step" of Bishop Gabriel testifies clearly enough that despite of his numerous statements against the rapprochement between the Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate one cannot believe in the least that he might be a leader of the opposition!

Already on December 12th, in the Internet the report appeared made by the Synod's Chancery, describing the presence of the Miracle Icon in the Cathedral of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The miraculous Icon was escorted by: **Archpriest Andrew Sommer, Priest Seraphim Gan and some altar boys from the Synod's Cathedral.** Just before leaving for the first time for the Moscow Patriarchate Cathedral, a moleben was served in the St. Sergius lower church.

The cathedral clergy of the Patriarchate, led by Archpriest Alexander Golubev and a group of lay people, met the Kursk Icon at the entrance of the Cathedral, and immediately a Liturgy started. After the end of the Liturgy, Bishop Mercury of Zaisk and his clergy served a moleben with akathist before the miraculous Icon.

After the end of moleben "Bishop Mercury of Zaisk and the General Consul of RF in New York, Sergei Victorovich Garmonin welcomed all, after which Archpriest Andre Sommer read the text of an epistle from His Eminence Metropolitan Laurus, the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad in connection with the visit of the Kursk Icon of the Theotokos to the Nicholas' Cathedral in New York." (Underlined by "Ch. N.")

In this epistle, addressed to Bishop Mercury and the Consul General as well as to clergy and lay people of this cathedral, **Metropolitan Laurus wrote:** I cordially greet you, Your Grace and all the participants of this current feast of the little Pascha of Christ at which the Nicholas' Cathedral is visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary in Her Kursk icon, which is the Odigitria (Guide) of the Russian Church Abroad and the faithful children of the God-preserved Russian People.

After a short account of the history of this Icon going abroad in 1920, Metropolitan Laurus ended his letter with the following: "Thus, beginning in 1920, our Kursk Icon has blessed and sanctified by Her presence the feasts, meetings of the Synod and work of the Councils and other events of life of the Church Abroad, advising us on the path in the contemporary world. And now, as always, we passionately pray before Her for Christ's peace for the throne of the All Russian Local Church... that the process of healing the spiritual separations would prosper and would lead us toward unity in mutual repentance and truth. And let this historical event help us work out a brotherly collaboration and witness of the resurrected Christ and the truth of Orthodoxy here in the USA. Let this be an unceasing prayer, dear Vladyko in our Lord, fathers, brothers and sisters. Let us pray to Holy Virgin Theotokos that She would help to heal all the wounds of our church life".

After this "historical event" the miraculous Icon was returned to the Synod building.

ABOUT THE MEMORIAL CHURCH TO TSAR NICHOLAS II IN BRUSSELS

According to a report received from the Church warden of the parish of St. Job the Much-Suffering, Mr. Peter Kochubey, the former rector of this church, Fr. Nicholas Semenov after serving there for 16 years is at present in a very difficult situation.

The matter is that that Fr. Nicholas has decided to recognize Metropolitan Vitaly despite the violation by him of the canonical epistle of the Third Ecumenical Council, addressed to Eustafy, "the former Metropolitan" of Pamphylia. In the same manner as Metropolitan Vitaly, this Metropolitan of Pamphylia resigned under pressure, but later wanted to return to his former cathedra. That was flatly refused by the Council.

Fr. Nicholas Semenov, frightened by the pro-Moscow church policies of Metropolitan Laurus, which became obvious already as of the Council of Bishops in 2000 and so decided to join Metropolitan Vitaly. Metropolitan Laurus immediately suspended Fr. Semenov and has appointed another priest instead. Until now Fr. Nicholas lived with his family in the parish house where he has set up a church on the first floor. The services were regularly attended by some 50 parishioners, who are very much attached to their pastor and didn't want to leave him.

During the last three years the group of Metropolitan Laurus has sued the rector and has won the court case. Now Fr. Nicholas has to leave the church apartment no later than January 5th, in other words, on the eve on the Nativity Feast.

Mr. Kochubey is asking for financial assistance in order to be able to find new living quarters for Fr. Nicholas Semenov within which it would be also possible to have a church.

NEXT TRIP OF ARCHBISHOP MARK TO MOSCOW FOR THE MEETING OF HIS COMMITTEE

According to the Internet official report of the Chancery of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR(L) Archbishop Mark has gone to Moscow to participate in the meetings of the committee for rapprochement or union of the ROCOR with the MP.

According to this information 'on Monday November 15th of the current year there was a separate meeting of the committee and on Tuesday, before the opening of first International Media Convention (SMI) Archbishop Mark met with the Serbian Patriarch Pavle, who was in Moscow on an official visit and informed him of where the rapprochement stands'. To be sure, Patriarch Pavle is very sympathetic toward the union of the ROCOR with the MP.

"Archbishop Mark commented on the decision of the Synod of Bishops to put the matter of unification with the Moscow Patriarchate for discussion of a Council which is planned to meet within two years. Our situation is more complicated because there are powers which oppose the rapprochement. Therefore it is necessary to have an All-Abroad Council with participation of clergy and lay people. We hope to have it so that people would understand the essence of what is happening, because there are many various and incorrect rumors.

The results of the meeting of third joint committee will be deliberated upon at the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops which will be held in January of next year," so states the Synod information.

"The powers which oppose rapprochement" of the ROCOR(L) with the MP do exist, but unfortunately, they work (with the very few exceptions) according to the poet's words: "We have the noble impulses, but nothing is completed." The conversations over disagreements in principle with Metropolitan Laurus' policies is not moving any further along.

A certain laudable exception was one of the deans of the Australian Diocese, Archpriest John Stukacz. Realizing the wrong policies of Metropolitan Laurus and the obvious treason of his Synod regarding the former positions of the ROCOR, Fr. John, according to the Internet agency "Vertograd" # 493 of October 30th (which was published because of his article in the local newspaper "Unification") left the Church Abroad. It is as yet uncertain which jurisdiction Fr. Stukacz will join, but it seems most probably that of Metropolitan Vitaly

The All-Abroad Council is projected to happen in about two years. Even if one is to believe that it can resolve the existing problems of unification with the MP, one has to realize that the delegates to this Council would be very carefully selected by the interested party. After all, the delegates to such Council are to be approved by the Synod of Bishops!

A BIT MORE ABOUT CONSEQUENCES OF MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE COUNCIL

An Internet publication "Mir Religii/Sobytiya" ("World of Religions/Events") on October 6, 2004, reported that "The Bishops' Council of the Moscow Patriarchate has unanimously voted for the restoration (?!) of unity with the Russian Church Abroad. The official restoration will happen after the conclusion of the work of a two-sided committee and mutual agreement about the prepared documents... It is presumed that Eucharistic unity would be announced at the meeting of Holy sacred Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate... **The Council of Bishops has approved the context of documents prepared by the committees, which were presented to this forum for deliberations**".

Another Internet publication "Portal Credo.ru monitoring SMI" of October 8th in an article by Alexander Soldatov reports that the expected "reunification" between the ROCOR(L) and MP has not been accomplished due to "intrigues".

It seems that the main hindrance to the unification process between the Ch A and the MP happens to be the personality of Metropolitan Cyril of Smolensk. The article states: "In the beginning, the process of unification went like a knife through butter, but after Cyril was included – it visibly stalled. The allergy of Metropolitan Cyril has played its role".

In his report to the Moscow Council, after stating that agreement upon Ecumenism and Sergianism was not yet reached "he asked the Council **to give the Sacred Synod authority, if everything turns to be alright – to make independent decisions about reunification with the ROCOR**".

According to various observers during sessions of the Council, Metropolitan Kiril is not a popular personality among the hierarchs, but at the same time they fear him and are afraid to openly oppose him. He is considered to be the richest person in contemporary Russia and, as Americans say, "money talks".

It is natural that Metropolitan Kiril (Agent "Michailov") cannot be trusted among even the contemporary traitors to all the ideals of the former Church Abroad. He is a person of no principles, but a smart politician.

According to the above mentioned publication, of November 8th, regarding suspicions that the MP "has plans to stop celebrating the anniversary of October Revolution" Metropolitan Kirill declared: "The Inter-religious Council in Russia, to whose address were forwarded these accusations, has no plans whatsoever to reassess November 7th the anniversary of

the October Socialist Revolution. **This date is venerated by millions of people. Who would think of challenging these people and why?** It is common knowledge that this date was changed to November 4th (a feast of the icon of Holy Virgin of Kazan), and the very same chameleon Metropolitan Kiril has expressed the opinion that "celebrating the 4th of November might not catch on in Russia, because people know nothing about their own history".

The above mentioned "World of Religions" of November 1st reported that the "Synod of Bishops of the Church Abroad has recognized that the content of the texts worked out at the meeting in Munich corresponds to the original positions of the Church Abroad" and that "These results of the Bishops Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Synod of Bishops" (according to words of secretary of the Foreign Relations of the MP) Archpriest Nicholas Balashov) "give reason for optimism".

Fr. Balashov said that, "The most important thing for us is that the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad has approved the sum of the materials of the second working session of the Committee for Dialogue between the ROC (MP) and ROCOR which was held in Munich in September".

However, the agency "Mir Religii" on October 27th has reported that, "In the ROCOR there are some unhappy with the efforts to hinder unification with the Moscow Patriarchate".

This publication quotes the appeal of the Pastoral Conference of the San Francisco and Western America Diocese addressed to Metropolitan Laurus. It states: "We are aware that the healing process of the split has not met with understanding... Unfortunately, this misunderstanding is partly promoted by people who by unecclasiastical means, including intrigues, rumors and even slander, are doing everything possible in order to confuse, frighten and generate splits within the flock of the Russian Church Abroad".

The clergy of this diocese expressed hope for the fast "reunification" of the Church Abroad with the Church in the Fatherland. "...May the Lord," says this appeal, "let all of us live long enough to see the day when there will be jubilation and festivities because of unity of the Russian Church"!

ABOUT THE COUNCIL OF ROCOR BISHOPS OF METROPOLITAN VITALY

The Internet publication in Russia which is managed by Mr. V. G. Cherkassov-Georgiyevsky who belongs to the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Vitaly has published the resolutions of his Council of Bishops, held on November 7/20th in Mansonville (Canada).

One of the very first resolutions was to rename "The Russian Orthodox Church in Exile" established by Metropolitan Vitaly to the former name of The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

It is interesting that from the very first when Metropolitan Vitaly became the head of ROCOR, he avoided the official name of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and mainly used simply "Church Abroad" or "The Russian Church Abroad".

At the same time the 2003 Statute of the newly established Church was changed to the former one approved by the Council of Bishops in 1964.

The Deputy Presiding Bishop became Bishop Sergius (Kindiakov) of Montreal and Bishop Anthony of Los Angeles and South America became a new member of the Synod.

The Council also deposed Bishop Barnabas, whom Metropolitan Vitaly single-handed and on his own elevated to the rank of the Archbishop. Dozens of letters and reports to the Synod of Bishops and Metropolitan Vitaly himself in which Bishop Gregory demanding Bishop Barnabas be put before an ecclesiastical court to have him defrocked over innumerable violations of the canons had met with no response by the Synod or Metropolitan!

It is very doubtful that Metropolitan Vitaly on his own (without the insistence of Bishop Barnabas) would have taken the chance to establish his own new jurisdiction in violation of the canons. After his fall in New York and a broken collar bone Metropolitan Vitaly didn't serve for number of years. How he "consecrated" Fr. Sergius (Kindiakov) a bishop with Bishop Barnabas is a mystery.

The Internet publication of "Vertograd" news distribution # 496 of December 5th while reporting the defrocking of Bishops Barnabas by the Council of Metropolitan Vitaly, listed a whole number of canons, most of which have no connection with the real canonical violations committed by this ecclesiastical criminal. Not one of the reasons for demanding a trial of Bishop Barnabas, listed in a number of reports and letters to the Synod of Bishops and the Council, are mentioned. And Bishop Barnabas accepted clergy without a release gramata from other Russian Bishops, who suspended them; he put on "trial" a clergyman from another diocese and on the forged letterhead of the Synod of Bishops wrote a petition to accept in prayerful communion a Ukrainian imposter who became even a Ukrainian "patriarch"!

However, the "council", for example mentions the I Canon of St. Basil the Great. It refers to the recognition of baptisms of several ancient heretics for the sake of *economia*. The 18th Canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and the 36th of Sixth Council speak of unlawful gatherings, and the 6th Canon of the Second Council speaks of slander and "being desirous to confound and subvert ecclesiastical discipline".

The 14th Canon of the Sardica Council speaks of unjust accusations and 14th and 15th of the First and Second Council held in the temple of Holy Apostles speak of leaving a First Hierarchy for no valid reasons. Maybe the 15th Canon is the one that fits Bishop Barnabas the most: he created the schisms in Russia as well as abroad!

Metropolitan Vitaly was obliged to write by hand (probably dictated to him, because it is known that he does not recognize his own bishops) the following statement regarding consecrations performed by Archbishop Lazarus. "I,

Metropolitan Vitaly, consider the ordinations of Hieromonks Dyonissy, Hermogen, Tikhon and Iriney performed by Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin to be illegal. I also declare that I have no prayerful and liturgical communion with them.

November 6/19, 2004 + Metropolitan Vitaly (signed)"

This Council anathematized the heresy of Sergianism and granted Metropolitan Vitaly the title of "His Beatitude".

It also created a committee to prepare for the glorification of Metropolitan Philaret! This is extremely surprising, because when it was discovered that Metropolitan Philaret was found to be incorrupt during the translation of his relics to the crypt of Holy Trinity Church in Jordanville Metropolitan Vitaly scandalized and outraged more than 400 people who came to the monastery for this event by not coming to the translation of the relics of his predecessor, although he was informed of discovery of the incorrupt relics!

ECUMENISM OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE

The Internet report of the agency of the "French Press" ("France Presses") of November 30th reports that the Moscow Patriarch on November 30th invited the Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama to meet with him in Moscow.

Dalai Lama was visiting the city of Elista (on South of Russia) to meet with the Kalmyks, his co-religionists.

The local MP Bishop Zosima of Elista and Kalmykia conveyed to the Buddhist leader the "most heartfelt words of the Patriarch Alexis II. Your visit always carries to the world peace and mutual understanding between the confessions. His Holiness would like to see you in Moscow."

This greeting from Bishop Zosima was said to the Dalai Lama at the door of the Church of the Kazan Holy Virgin.

In his answering speech the Dalai Lama said that "the purpose of all the religions is to make the world better. I am not a Christian, but I came to this church due to my deep respect".

After that, as a sign of respect, the **Dalai Lama was led into the altar!**

The meeting of the Dalai Lama with the Patriarch didn't take place because the Buddhist had to return to India, where he lives.

And the Vertograd (News #494) of November 4th reported that Archbishop Nikon (Vasiukov) of Ufa and Sterlitamaka has participated in opening a new Muslim mosque. In his greeting, Archbishop Nikon said that "at present believers are able to freely live according to their religious needs. And that there was a time when the Orthodox and the Muslims were forced to suffer for their faith".

According to President of the RB (?) Mars Shagiyev, "there are no places in Russia where there are such respectful relations between representatives of various religions".

A REVERSE REACTION

We already directed the attention of our readers to the firm aspiration of today's American public leaders to make the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ as little noticeable as possible. Even the "mangers" displayed in front of the churches and which in recent years have become a rarity and this year are even less to be seen. Several popular Christmas carols which used to be sung even on TV and in majority of large stores – this year we heard them, but with the advertisement texts of large shops!

However, such negligence toward the essence of one of the greatest Christian feasts put some people on guard and to pay attention.

"The New York Times" of December 6th reported that in the town of Denver, Colorado there was arranged by the merchants a pre-Christmas "parade of lights". In order to avoid strain and conflicts the essence of the feast was deliberately hushed up.

As the newspaper reports, "the star was Santa, not Jesus and the mood was bouncy, commercial and determinately secular... but this year, Jesus came anyway".

As it happened, this year the mayor has changed the traditional lighted banner of the town hall from "Merry Christmas" to "Happy Holidays". This has provoked indignation on part of members of the evangelical Christian church "Faith Bible Chapel".

This group has decided to have their platform a religious themed float, but the organizers refused them. Then the believers organized protesting groups. When the parading floats were moving past them, they were met by thousands of people on the side-walks, who were loudly singing the traditional carols. The movement was so strong that it has surprised the authorities and religious activists. During the two days of the parade (Saturday and Sunday) the singing of carols never stopped.

A number of organizers have declared that next year they will revise their program and in the future it will not be the same!

Interestingly, that according to the same newspaper, of December 14th, some school-teacher in Italy has decided to please Muslim students and has changed the name of Jesus Christ in the carols to the word "virtue". The article about this case was printed in the local newspaper on the front page under the title "Jesus Banned in Christmas Songs", and was concluded with a question: "Are we going crazy?".

"The International Herald Tribune" of December 10th (published in Switzerland) reported that the grade school in the town of Treviso (Italy) this year has replaced a traditional Nativity play with "Little Red Riding Hood"

Reacting to this the Pope has declared that "Christians have to respect cultural differences, but also proclaim the Gospel and defend Christian traditions".

And "The New York Times" of December 11th reported that the newspaper "Le Figaro" has published the information that in the town of Coudekerque-Branche in France, 1,300 chocolate figures of St. Nicholas were returned, after the elementary school teacher discovered that there was a cross on the Saint's miter. The mayor of this town declared that it was a "politically unhealthy incident" and that St. Nicholas was a bishop. He always was portrayed with a cross".

Any kind of religious symbol is strongly forbidden by French law.

CANDLES AND INCENSE ARE 'HARMFUL' TO THE HEALTH

In line with the general struggle against religion, at present there has come to light the "scientific" proofs of the "harmfulness" of candles and the incense for those who attend services in the churches.

The "U. S. News & World Report" of December 6th reported that "A new study shows that burning candles and incense in churches releases dangerous levels of potentially cancer-causing pollutants, some at levels 20 times higher as the European Union limits".

Researchers from Maastricht University in Netherlands decided to analyze the air in a chapel and in the large basilica in Maastricht and came to the conclusion that after nine hours of candle burning, the air in the church had four times as many pollutants during a mock evening mass as during the morning mass. The believers were warned that the air was as polluted as by smoking. "After a day of candle burning, we found about 20 times as much pollution in the churches as by a busy road".

The researchers have declared that the priests and attendants in the churches are in the immediate danger and have recommended good ventilation in churches and to keep the windows open during the services!

The scientists do not explain why the candles and incense in the churches have been used for at least no less the two millennia and yet no one heard of cancer epidemics!

Certainly, some will say that cancer was not yet known at those times!

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS: Letter of Protopres. George Grabbe to Archbishop Anthony of Geneva May 9/22, 1975

Your Eminence dear Vladyko;

Thank you for your frank letter of December 27th. I value that you have expressed yourself with no reservations, although your clear prejudice against me has saddened me. I see that you ascribe to me as evil everything that you, for some reason, do not like in the Synod and that you do not agree with. However, it is far from always the case that the Synod's resolutions reflect my views or were made on my recommendations. I got the impression, pardon me, that you are irritated just by my existence and you accuse me of everything. However, I try not to criticize the decisions of Synod or Metropolitan even when I do disagree with them, because our church culture is too much inclined towards criticism, which is kindled on purpose, but hard to pin-point, by the undermining work of Soviet agents. The most various of rumors appear from nowhere. I am sending you an article from Argentina in which you too are given attention. Here, the same work is done by Chukhnov and some others. Much was said about me, not by an agent, but through the inexplicable hatred of poor Fr. Kargay who wants to leave his priesthood and get married.

I can understand that living far away, you might believe the conversations about my "evil power", which got much louder as the time of the Council neared in order to weaken the Church, but I hoped that you have known me long enough not too be easily influenced by various inventions about me. But I was astonished by your unfairness and malevolent suspicion when you, for example, have reacted to my, as I believed, innocent question, about the Parisians. Didn't you know that information is my immediate job, and that the agencies and editors of newspapers ask me questions? The metropolitans have never occupied themselves with this. It always was my job. And even my cortisones in the matter that you are dealing with (the relations with Parisians). You blame me for stating that I interfere with matters that do not concern me. Why have you decided that I want to destroy the Parisians? Just the opposite. I fully agree with you. But in this reveals the lack of information from the headquarters. If you complain, sometimes justifiably of a lack of sufficient information from the center, then I have heard complaints of a shortage of information from you. I do not know, for example, if you have sent the copy of your epistle about the Council of Bishops to the Metropolitan or Vladyka Laurus, but of the content of your last epistle, not only myself, but also the members of the Synod found out only from the local Jewish newspaper, which mentioned that the printed text is abridged. Only the day before yesterday did I read the full text from the newspaper published in Buenos Aires.

It seems to me that the reproach made to me regarding "Orthodox Matter" ("Pravoslavnoye Delo") is unfair. First of all, as well as I remember, when there was a meeting of the committee, the matter was about the center in America, and not in general. Because no one was thinking of damaging an already well-functioning organization. But, even if its local center were to be at the Synod (geographically), I would not participate in it, as I do not now participate in the work of the

"Orthodox Matter," although, always ready to help if necessary and I can do so. Equally, I do not immediately participate in the work of youth organizations, but I help them when they ask. Believe me, Vladyko, I have enough work without that.

Regarding the wish to have me removed from the meetings of the Council (and maybe from the Synod, too?) I would like to introduce a correction that is was initiated not by the diocesan bishops in general, but only by you and Vladyka Anthony of San Francisco, who, however, later admitted that what he wrote was a mistake, and even asked my pardon. Of that there was no need, however, because I was not offended by either of you, since I treated the matter exclusively from the point of view of the welfare of the church. **[Note: the letter of apology from Archbishop Anthony of S. F. is in our archive, "Ch. N."].**

Speaking frankly, I cannot understand your wish that I would give Bishops on the Council "a bit of independence". I am allowed, as the Consultant, to freely express myself at the Synod meetings, while during the Councils I take down the minutes and I seldom ask to speak in order to give information or to correct factual errors. Often this happens on request of some one of the hierarchs. This is obvious from the minutes themselves. And how can I restrict the freedom of the hierarchs? We, all of us, are not acquainted for merely a year and very little inhibited by each other in expressing our opinions. When I read your unofficial letter to the members of the Synod, believing that they should be aware of your displeasure about me, the hierarchs were surprised no less than I myself.

And regarding my reaction to your project to have me removed from the meetings, than I am surprised by your surprise. I have worked for the Synod since 1931. My participation in all the meetings during the Councils was introduced by Metropolitan Anthony and Anastassy. Forty years have passed. I didn't seek it, but they started to invite me, at that time a young layman to the meeting of the senior hierarchs, which, while preparing the resolutions, Metropolitan Anastassy often held in Yugoslavia. My removal after so many years and especially in view of my persecution by Soviet agents would mean the addition that in these slanders there must be something true. After all, my removal is something they are looking for in order to weaken the Synod. To fulfill their wish would be not only unjust toward me, but also would make me useless for the Synod. I can suffer unfairness with no complaints, and it is beneficial for the soul, but the second effect is more important. This would out an unfavorable seal upon many of the decisions of the church administration over more than forty years of existence of the Synod. In this case, it is better I go myself for some reason.

You are very much mistaken when you write that I "rule the Church". I do not deny that my opinion is taken into consideration. One would be totally stupid in order not to gain experience over so many years. However, Vladyko, the Metropolitan writes quite a bit himself or, when he commissions me to draft a letter, he points out what the letter's contents should be. Most of the correspondence is done not by me, but by Vladyka Laurus and quite often I find out about it only if he reports it to the Synod. Therefore, one should not exaggerate my influence.

But if to allow that it exists, it is not clear to me, what are you accusing me of, besides this fact, I mean in what manner have I misused it or am at fault so much that you would like the Synod to be free from me. I also do not know how would you fill up this vacuum, which would be created.

Pardon me, Vladyko, for this long letter. I do not like to take up so much of your time with this argument but I would like, above all for the sake of the welfare of the Church, to remove the unexpected obvious disagreement which has happened. If I have in any way offended or grieved you, I beg your pardon.

We have too many external enemies, to create between us disagreements or tensions. The Soviet agents work by rumor and slander, and people sometimes accept it easily. I have the impression that if there is any disagreement between us and we do not agree on some opinions, it is not a matter of principles, but tactics, for example, sometimes on the degree of *economia*. But here we have to be patient with each other. And as much in the center there is needed attention toward those distant members of the Church, there is also necessary for the sake of it unity the attention toward the opinions of the First Hierarch and the Synod. The lack of coordination might be easily noticed from outside and this is worse than anything.

I write this in the hope that, despite all the negative impressions you have of me you, do not doubt that at the same time I am not moved by personal interests just as I think you also are first of all concerned with the interests of the Church. Because, as you have written quite justifiably, the Synod center must trust the diocesan bishop, but not less is important also the other – trust that in the center there is no thought about themselves, but about the welfare of the Church.

Thank you for information about Archbishop George ["Evlogianite" "Ch. N."]. Here, with the Metropolia things are at a standstill. We exchanged letters. Now we wait for their answer. Actually, they want us to recognize their autocephaly, but do we have the right to do so in the name of the whole Russian Church? Will we not, by this recognize Pimen? Meyendorf in the Metropolia newspaper in English has published their response to our appeal, but ours only in a paraphrase. At the same time has attacked us with a crude perversion of history, for example, that part of the 1st Karlovci Council demonstratively left the Council in disagreement over its political resolutions. I have sent them a mildly written correction to the history, but they did not publish it in their next issue. Yesterday I met Fr. Meyendorf. He told me that supposedly he hadn't received the letter, but he would print it if it is found. We met on the jubilee of P. F. Anderson. Despite the fact that he (Meyendorf) is unfavorably disposed toward us (in the Parisian spirit), he himself came toward me with a certain doubt that I would acknowledge him. Indeed, all the festivities were in accord with the Ecumenist spirit and were headed by the Greek Archbishop Iakovos. Therefore, I went only to the reception, but didn't go to the supper. My acquaintance with Anderson has lasted for 50 years and we have good relations. Another good acquaintance of mine, a Jesuit, asked me if I would agree to meet with the Soviet Archpriest Anatole Kaznovetsky, a well-known agent of the KGB. I, of course,

answered that I do not want to. He was asking me at the request of Kaznovetsky. Patriarch Pimen did not come, because they feared demonstrations. Instead the delegation will be headed by Nikodim. The concelebrations with the Metropolia hierarchs will be far from New York, in Pennsylvania. Bishop of Uman Makary, who was here, is appointed to Geneva. He is young, not too bright, undoubtedly went through the KGB school and rather secular. He showed up in our church, was even in Jordanville. Certainly he will come by to see your cathedral.

Asking for your holy prayers and blessing I remain Your Eminence's devoted servant, Protopresbyter George Grabbe

A handwritten letter of Bishop Gregory to Archbishop Anthony of Geneva of January 18/31st 1990

Your Eminence;

I was deeply astonished by your harsh and unfriendly relation toward me during the intermission at the Synod meeting on Tuesday. I am used to respectful and good relations among us, even in cases of disagreement.

I hope that you just got worked up, when for no reason whatsoever you accused me of lying in front of the other brothers.

I would be glad if you would find a way to remove such an obstacle and to preserve our former friendly relations.

Your Eminence's brother in Christ + Bishop Gregory

Letter of Bishop Gregory to Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco of September 7/20th 1994

Your Eminence, dear Vladyko;

I am afraid that due to Metropolitan's wishes you do not respond to my letters, but hope that you have not completely crossed me out of your kind heart.

I do not know, dear Vladyko, if you realize that the actions of the Metropolitan more and more suggest the apprehension that they are dictated by the abnormality which for a long time was in his family. His father committed suicide, one of his half-sisters Julia (from first marriage of his mother) lived in Nyack and in the 60's was treated with electric shocks. I heard that the other sister, living in Canada, is also abnormal and that she is forbidden to admit her relationship with the Metropolitan.

At present abnormality is visible in such a hostile relationship toward me, which I never saw from our deceased metropolitans towards anybody. Because of this our best clergymen are leaving him. From the first day of his administration of our diocese (1986, "Ch. N.") we have not had a single diocesan conference. He has appointed a woman to the position of the secretary of the Diocesan Council totally illiterate in ecclesiastical matters – L. D. Rosniansky. I do not know of such a precedent for this event.

The newest temptation is putting up for sale the diocesan property in Glen Cove of the church for a laughable price (\$600, 000 for a mansion, built on 4 acres of land) with no regard for a healthy good parish. The Metropolitan does not want to talk with anybody about it, I heard that now the parishioners are seeking the assistance of the church communities.

As to general matters of the parishes in Russia, Bishop Valentin, who gathered more than hundred parishes that had left the Moscow Patriarchate, was systematically persecuted. He was placed under suspicion in violation of the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, completely ignoring the thought for thousands and thousands of parishioners and how are they to save their souls. This is not the gathering but a dispersion of the flock that has been trusted to the Synod.

The Metropolitan wants to single-handedly rule this flock, while disregarding the directive of St. Patriarch Tikhon. About that I will soon send you my article. For me this is the only way to express myself, since I have crossed out of the life [of our Church].

Vladyka Hilarion told me that he is forbidden to let me know about any decisions of the Council. Such is now the attitude toward me, the most senior (from 1931) member of our church administration. And in addition, in violation of statutes of our Church, the Metropolitan decides everything individually.

Vladyko, from my meetings with the clergy, I see how far the authority of the administration of our Church has declined. Our Church begins to decompose, the fermentation in the clergy's minds is stronger. But all I can do is pray and be sad, yet also bother you and Vladyka Laurus. About the later I heard that he is ill again. I will die rather soon and can only appeal as much as I can to the others.

I hope that because of your love to the Church, you will help to put her back on the rails of revival.

Is not the started decomposition a result of loss of attention to the instruction of Patriarch Tikhon of November 7/20th, 1920? Will not the lack of this attention be laid upon your conscience too?

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

Copy to Archbishop Laurus.

Note: As became the custom, no response was made to these letters!

Letter of Bishop Gregory to Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco of February 24th/March 9th, 1995

Your Eminence, dear Vladyko;

Thank you for sending the film about the canonization of Vladyka John and also I greet you with the beginning of Lent. On account of this please pardon me. Also pardon me for what I write further.

I was very saddened by your signature on the unlawful and ruthless document against the Russian parishes. Not to mention that this leaves more than a hundred fifty parishes with no bishop – it is also a ruthless effort to stop the revival of the faith in Russia. The commission of these parishes to the Metropolitan is a mockery, because all know that he does not want to visit the Russian flock, because of fear from the influence of his female secretary. Neither the suspended hierarchs, nor their flocks are at fault for existing. But we, the hierarchs, are responsible for their further existence. I am afraid that the Lord might punish us for our indifference toward them.

I closely got acquainted with two young Russian Hierarchs and can say, that we do not have such smart and devoted candidate abroad. I am sending you a copy of my report and ask you to think what a crime is being committed by the effort to replace it with nothingness.

Loving you and highly valuing you as a devoted hierarch of our Church, it hurts me that God's punishment might be laid upon you for the general sin of the Synod for indifference toward the fate of the thousands of faithful in Russia.

Please pardon me for disturbing you, while being the most insignificant hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad.

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

Note from the editor: This letter was written 7 months before the repose of Bishop Gregory.