



CHURCH NEWS

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With this third issue (No. 57) of Volume 6 we will endeavor to continue the regular publication of an exact English translation of the Russian version of "Church News" which we began in the fall of 1988. We have received many requests from members of our Church Abroad who do not speak Russian to begin publishing in English. We hope with your support to issue in English bi-monthly.

The Russian version of this publication exists entirely due to the voluntary support of our readers. We do not have a fixed subscription fee, but we would like our prospective readers to realize that in order to provide information from various sources, we have to maintain numerous subscriptions that are not cheap. In addition, there are the expenses of producing the text and, of course, postal fees.

We intend with English subscriptions to follow the same policy of gratefully accepting donations to help cover our expenses.

CHURCH NEWS

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THE NATIVITY EPISTLE OF THE FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROCA (the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad),
METROPOLITAN VITALY

Christ is born, glorify Him!

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Nearly 2000 thousand years ago there happened a great, universal event of cosmic import: in the country of Judea, in a little town of Bethlehem, there was born in an unusual manner to a Virgin a Son, Who's name is Jesus Christ. This event happened to be of such an importance, that the entire human race, by common consent began its new reckoning of time starting with this day and now we all say 1996 A. D. -- the year of the Lord -- from Nativity of Christ.

The outstanding importance of this supernatural event proceeds from Jesus Christ Himself and because of what He brought to humanity.

Jesus Christ is God, vested in our human nature -- with a human soul and body and therefore we call Him the God-Man. Since He is God and there is no sin in Him, He is the only sinless, the only pure, holy human being among all of those who were, are and will be.

Before Jesus Christ there were great thinkers, who all were astonished that sin rules in mankind. They could not reconcile themselves to that and founded the schools of thought and even united people with the religions they established. In Europe there were Socrates, Plato, in Asia there was Buddha, all of whom wanted to make man better, but all of whom went to their graves without moving this task from a standstill, for it was beyond their power.

During the Christian era in Europe and Asia philosophers and teachers appeared who had in mind to improve human society, by offering to it their man-made ideologies: while at first glance it seemed that these were good ideas, it became apparent that the implementor of them would be the same human being who was a slave to sin and was permeated by his destructive passions. In other words, the problem lay not with the teaching per se, but in human nature itself.

Jesus Christ did not leave us a system of social or public order nor either any political doctrine, but He brought to us an absolutely faultless, certain recipe for how to cure mankind itself. Jesus Christ knows, that if human nature would become the same as it was when He created Adam prior to his fall, then the entire earthly realm would become good, orderly -- God's. And the Lord solves this issue, which no one had ever resolved previously through His holy and providential gift. First, of all, He grants us His Divine teachings, the Good News, the Holy Gospel, and then immediately establishes His Church as a indestructable, unconquerable spiritual stronghold. Through His Church, the Lord gives to us, who are weak, feeble, and insignificant, the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit, so that we can according to our abilities accomplish the words of His evangelical teachings.

During the entire history of humanity, not a single philosopher, teacher or leader could do anything similar. This is why we call our Lord, Teacher and Saviour. Both qualities, Teacher and Saviour are inseparable and unconfused, having in mind the oros [proclamation] of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon [?!]. The Lord both teaches and sustains. All of salvation is in Him Alone, our Teacher, our Saviour: in Christ, from Christ, through Christ -- and without Him all is nothing and all perishes eternally.

In this event of all events, Christ's Nativity, we all rejoice and in these festal days of the Nativity we wish you all pure, celebratory joy and peace of soul. Amen.

THE NATIVITY EPISTLE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ROFC (The Russian Orthodox
Free Church)

From the Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir, Valentine, to the pastors and faithful children of the
Russian Orthodox Church

Again and again the Bethlehem cave opens within which the great miracle occurred -- God appeared in the flesh. Today the miracle of miracles occurred -- God appeared in the world in the flesh. We, who thirst for salvation must search for Him and bear Him in our hearts, because we are already united to Christ through the holy faith and the Mysteries of the Church of God.

Every Orthodox Christian must listen to his heart and as often as possible to ask it: does it keep it's unity with Christ, the Divine Child?

The venerable St. John of Damascus says that as a bee flies away from smoke, so in the same way Christ can not dwell in an impure heart, which we often -- daily, monthly, annually -- have within ourselves, forgetting about repentance in our sinfulness and not even wanting to notice Christ in our hearts. Christ, with His teachings of the Faith, transmitted from God the Father, should be born in our hearts not only annually, but every month, daily and every minute.

But in order for Christ to be born again and again in our souls, in order to renew our lifegiving unity with our Lord, the Holy Church established periods, during which our mind and our hearts would tear themselves away from the

whirlwind of worldly triviality, raise themselves to the Lord and immerse themselves into the Mysteries of Salvation, cleansed beforehand by repentance with the offerings of worthy fruits, adorned with clean thoughts and good motives.

We call upon you, fathers, brethren and sisters, beloved in the Lord, to meet in a worthy manner the exalted Guest, following the 40 day example of fasting set by the Prophets Moses and Elijah which would serve to cleanse us of defects of the flesh and of sin. Through Confession and repentance we will be able to prepare the gift of our souls for Christ, the Divine Child.

Our faith in the Son of God is a strong bastion of our Christian good fortune here on earth as well in eternal life. Unshakable faith in our Lord Jesus Christ Who came into the world, providing us with the true meaning of life, will strengthen us in sorrows and sicknesses.

I wish you all the best, dear fathers, brethren and sisters in Christ on this most festive and all-joyous holy day of our salvation -- the Nativity of Christ.

From the bottom of my heart I wish that you greet this holy day of Nativity with the lights of faith, hope and love burning brightly for the Lord. May the joy of our salvation be complete and follow every one of us into eternity.

May your heart not become confused on your selected path of salvation, which will lead us to eternal glory in the name of Jesus Christ.

Christmas 1996-1997, Suzdal

Valentine, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir

FROM THE LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ABROAD

The editors of *Church News* have received copies of the following letters: a letter-report to Metropolitan Vitaly by Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain and the reponse to it by Metropolitan Vitaly. Both letters have already been very widely circulated. While astonished to see that a correspondence between the First Hierarch and one of the Bishops of the Church Abroad has become the common property of a most varied audience, which indicates a total disorder in the Synod's office procedures, we nevertheless, originally intended not to publish the documents we had received. However, when it became known that Archbishop Mark himself distributed his letter in an official manner and the letter of the Metropolitan, independently of this, also circulated together with the letter of Archbishop Mark we, therefore, felt free to publish both of these extremely important letters. A copy of the letter to Archbishop Mark, according to the signature, written by Metropolitan Vitaly, was mailed to all the bishops of the Church Abroad.

Archbishop Mark's letter, under his own letterhead is dated: Munich, Nov. 20th/Dec. 3rd, 1996.

To His Eminence, the Most Reverend Vitaly, Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York
Your Eminence, beloved in the Lord Most Reverend Vladika.

Last week in a manner completely unexpected for me, I found myself in Russia, where I spent a total of four days. About a month ago I started receiving calls from the university and the Tver oblast government inviting me to an international scientific conference on the occasion of the 725th anniversary of St. Grand Duke Michael Yaroslavovich of Tver. They had somehow found out that at one time I had written my doctoral dissertation in Heidelberg University on the topic of the literature of the Tver principality from the 14th to the 18th centuries, and they very much wanted me to present a paper at this conference on this topic. In the beginning I did not think I could manage to participate both for financial reasons as well as because of the short time frame for obtaining a visa. But then literally at the last moment everything came together and I went. I was met right at the airport in Moscow -- a professor-Slavicist and member of the Academy of Sciences from Moscow met me with a driver from Tver. Late in the evening we arrived in Tver and went right to a reception. Slavicists, historians, literary scholars, linguists, and sociologists from Russia and abroad had gathered together.

That same evening in a conversation with one professor from Moscow I asked how the local bishop of the MP [Moscow Patriarchate] would react to my presence. From the subsequent conversation I came to understand that there was already a certain tension there. Although the hour was late, I decided to call Archbishop Victor directly. He responded very cordially -- it turned out that he is a Ukrainian from Pochaev -- and we agreed to a meeting the next morning before the beginning of the conference. In the morning he greeted me warmly, and when we came to the conference, I understood that I taken the correct step, since 20 of his priests were present there. Seeing that I was talking with him, they all began coming up to me for a blessing and the possible tension was immediately removed.

At the conference they stressed in every way that I was a bishop of the Church Outside Russia. My paper was received with great enthusiasm and on the spot I was invited the next day to speak to the student Slavicists of Tver University. This meeting with the students was also very lively. I not only read a paper on ancient Tver literature, but afterwards I answered the most varied questions from the students and professors. They decided on the spot to undertake the translation of my dissertation into Russian.

While visiting the churches of Tver during the breaks between sessions of the conference, I became convinced that a new generation of educated and highly principled clergymen is at work there and that in all respects the most positive ecclesiastical activity is being carried out. Of course, it is entirely possible that is an exceptional diocese, but what I subsequently saw in Moscow did not differ much from this.

After two days in Tver, I spent the third day of my visit to Russia in Moscow. There I met with the Patriarch, deepening the very superficial and brief conversation which I had with him last year in Munich, above all speaking about the conversations with clergyman of the MP in which the recently discussed the very difficult time of Metropolitan Sergius' activity. The conversation was very quiet and in every aspect one felt that the Patriarch was consciously avoiding any sort of pointed remarks. However, here too, as earlier in Tver, there was present a feeling of pain caused by our history with Valentine, the more so because Valentine's group goes further and further in accepting the most unattractive people. It especially caused pain that we did not understand that in the Soviet period the MP did not have the possibility of suspending clergymen or of deposing them if they had, as did Valentine, the support of government officials. In my conversation with the patriarch I also felt a sincere desire to discuss honestly all the problems which divide us.

Both in Tver and in Moscow I understood from conversations with clergymen that Ecumenism long ago went out of fashion, with the exception of a handful of desperate defenders of it. Everywhere they are building baptistries so adults can be baptized by full immersion.

After my meeting with the Patriarch I visited several monasteries and churches in Moscow. When I was there earlier I simply did not dare to enter them, but now I was met everywhere with love and understanding. Maybe it is easier for them to swallow foreigners than Ukrainians or other eccentrics.

In all respects I see in the Church, just as in society, large movements in a positive direction. I came back completely inspired and strengthened in my conviction that we have to maintain human contact with these people so as at least to achieve mutual understanding.

They say that Vladika Laurus was in Moscow at the same time as I was, but I did not manage to see him, since I wanted to make the maximum use of that short time which I had at my disposal to acquaint myself with local conditions.

I ask your episcopal prayers and remain with love in Christ
Your Eminence's obedient servant,
Archbishop Mark

While mailing copies of his letter to the Metropolitan Vitaly, Archbishop Mark at its conclusion noted that the First Hierarchy of the ROCA did not approve his letter.

The letter of Metropolitan Vitaly is written under the English language letterhead of the President of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA, although a Russian language letterhead exists. The Metropolitan's letter, without indication to whom it is specifically addressed, is dated Nov.29/Dec 12, 1996.

Your Excellency, Most Reverend Vladika,

I received your letter/report about your trip to Russia, about which you did not inform me in advance, as is the accepted practice among us. I read your report with great attention and I have the following to say to you: nothing in your trip and what happened to you in Russia was accidental. Everything was prepared, thought out in advance, and planned by the Moscow Patriarchate. In my opinion you were spiritually deceived, entranced, and to a significant degree taken captive. In such a spiritually unsober state, you lost the gift of the Holy Spirit to discern spirits, and began to misinterpret everything, seeing through rose-colored glasses. For you ecumenism suddenly disappeared somewhere, yet all this was happening to you at the very time when the MP announced for all to hear, *orbe et urbe*, that all our martyred clergy have suffered outside the fold of the Church, and for that reason the MP will not glorify these passion-bearers. But as for the MP itself: this is the Church of the usurper of church authority Metropolitan Sergius and, of course, subsequently his successors down to Patriarch Alexei II. But for us this is the Church of the *cunning*, the Church of the Antichrist. By this blasphemous announcement the Moscow Patriarchate completed and sealed its irreversible apostasy from the body of the Church of Christ.

Thus there now rests with us a sacred obligation and inalienable right also, *orbe et urbe*, to proclaim the loss of grace by the Moscow Patriarchate and to have no further contact of any kind with it. One cannot fail to note that by not glorifying the holy martyrs the Moscow Patriarchate reveals into what an abyss of theological ignorance in the *realm of Church dogma* it has fallen.

I am very much afraid, Vladika, that your individual, thoughtless, and ill advisedly precipitous step and its consequences, by depriving you of the gift of discerning spirits, has placed you in the very

jaws of that ancient dragon which is ready to swallow you. That such a thing not happen to you, I will pray to our Hodigitria [Trans. Note: this is a title of the Theotokos which could be rendered She Who Guides or Leads] on the day of her feast.

Vladika, we are not eccentrics, but the Church of Christ, on earth militant and in heaven triumphant with all those who laid down their lives for Christ our God, i.e. for Christ's Church.

Your trip to Russia, supposedly of a scientific nature, but then to Moscow to meet with Patriarch Alexei, turned into an unlawful contact with the Moscow Patriarchate, for which you had no blessing of any sort. Now, it has also been revealed that once previously you met with the Patriarch in secrecy. You went to Moscow to meet the Patriarch a second time, to which the "scientific commission" in Tver did not invite you. How typical it is of the Moscow Patriarchate to gather Slavacists, historians, literary scholars, linguists, and sociologists, in order to open the dust-covered archives of an ancient literature to throw dust in the eyes of the masses of unsuspecting and thoughtless petty bourgeois, *pour épater le bourgeois* [to impress the bourgeois], and at the same time blasphemously to do violence to the blood of the Russian hieromartyrs and confessors. There it stands, the red [*krasnaya*] Moscow Patriarchate in all its glory [*krase*]!

How grievous and sad all this is!
+ Metropolitan Vitaly

It is amazing, that Metropolitan Vitaly, while expressing such an adherence to principle in the question of the Moscow Patriarchate, limited himself only to a condemnation of Archbishop Mark's activities, and did not take any action to suspend him and order a trial for blatant usurpation of the powers of the First Hierarch, who, according to the Statutes of the ROCA, paragraph G, "communicates with the leaders and representatives of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches concerning matters of church life in fulfillment of decrees of the Council or Synod of Bishops, and also in his own name". In addition, the Metropolitan also did not react in any way to the appeal of Bishop Barnabas, made by him in the name of the Synod of Bishops in 1993 to a self-ordained Metropolitan Vladimir "Locum Tenens of the Kievan Patriarchal Throne" and seeking prayerful communion with him!

As is obvious from Archbishop Mark's letter to Archpriest Michael Artsimovich, widely distributed in Russia and abroad, which created a sensation in its being very offensive to Russians, already in 1992 he did not conceal his intention of starting negotiations with the Moscow Patriarchate in order "to establish a strong, unified Orthodox Church in Russia". Is not this the reason why he so passionately began to hate the then Archimandrite Valentine of Suzdal at his very first meeting with him, who unexpectedly was preventing the plan of Archbishop Mark, conceived long ago, to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate? Trying to derail Archm. Valentine's work of restoring a Free Russian Church (which was a serious blow to the Moscow Patriarchate), Archbishop Mark never stopped short of repeating any slander coming from the Moscow Patriarchate. Archimandrite Valentine was accused even of "living in luxury" in a house which, in fact, had no warm water, certainly no bath nor even a shower, and also of having numerous icons in valuable rizas [covers made of precious metals and stones], which, in actuality, for a long time have adorned the churches restored by him!

MORE ON THE TREACHEROUS POLICIES OF ARCHBISHOP MARK

A magazine *Pravoslavonii Dnevnik* [Orthodox Diary] (# 20-21) for December 1996 and January 1997 published an article by Priestmonk Alexis, the rector of the Copenhagen ROCA parish in Denmark. The article was originally published in the parish newsletter in Danish and entitled "On the Way to the Unified Russian Church."

This article is signed by Priestmonk Alexis after which he makes a very telling addition: "with the agreement and approval of Archbishop Mark," which gives it the import of an official document.

On the Path to a United Russian Church¹

During the first week of October the clergy and representatives of the diocese of Germany and Great Britain spent their annual meeting in the recently acquired parish complex in Cologne, Germany. Our parish was represented by the parish priest, Hieromonk Alexis (Biron).²

Archbishop Mark, who presided over the meeting, gave a report on the Bishops' Sobor held at the beginning of September in New York in which all of the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad participated. *One of the more important issues submitted for discussion was the report of the Sobor's commission on the relation of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to the other parts of the Russian Orthodox Church, for example, to the Moscow Patriarchate and to the various branches of the Catacomb Church.* [Italics by the editors of *Church News*] The commission recommended that ways be sought to establish the causes dividing the separate parts of the One Russian Church, both within Russia itself, and also abroad. Each of them has her own history filled with grief and suffering, but nevertheless it is clear that they all belong to one and the same Body.

It is quite obvious that the existing division cannot be overcome automatically, but it demands a thorough elucidation of the reasons that brought about the present situation. We all are well aware that we all must answer for the integrity of the Body of Christ, for the maintaining of the Truth preserved by the Church, for the millions of the faithful, be they Russians or of some other descent.

The commission recommended that any proposition which might be put forward in an attempt to overcome the existing difficulties be seriously considered, even to the point of sending delegates to the Bishops' Sobor of the Moscow Patriarchate, if the appropriate invitation be received.

In our diocese very good results have been obtained from the regular meetings which have been taking place now for the last two years between Archbishop Mark and Bishop Theophan of Berlin (Moscow Patriarchate). A commission, consisting of three priests from each side, assists both hierarchs in drawing-up a common program for the resolution of a number of practical issues concerning the two parallel dioceses in Germany.

It is quite obvious that between the ROCA (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad) and the Moscow Patriarchate there exist very great difficulties, which must be overcome. Such issues as the close collaboration of the hierarchs and clergy with the KGB, the recognition of the Russian New Martyrs, rampant ecumenism, need to be discussed. This is not an easy task, and it will demand much time and patience.

Of late, the processes taking place in the Moscow Patriarchate indicate that certain positions, which previously were considered obstacles to overcoming the differences between us, are now undergoing change. The forthcoming canonization of the Holy Royal Martyrs, Tsar Nicholas and the members of the Imperial family (canonized by the ROCA in 1981 in New York), is one of the manifestations leading to an improvement in relations between our two Churches.

Both in his report and in the reflections which he shared with us, Archbishop Mark emphasized that we must be cautious to the utmost degree, so that at the very time that we are striving to overcome the existing schisms, a new one does not arise. The process of seeking ways for reunification should be approached with great caution and a sense of responsibility.

It is still too early to conjecture in what way this new initiative will develop; nevertheless we all understand that sooner or later we shall achieve this longed-for unity. We all feel confidence in the wisdom of our hierarchs who have steered our Church through all the years of persecution, beginning from the time when, in 1920 in Sremski Karlovci (Serbia), Metropolitan Anthony, of blessed memory, founded the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The Synod was established in response to Resolution No. 362 (in 1920) of Holy Patriarch Tikhon, which authorized those hierarchs residing in freedom to form such a synod in order to preserve the structure of the Russian Church from destruction during the Bolshevik persecutions and pogroms, and in the event of the impossibility of communication between the bishops abroad and the Patriarchal Throne in Moscow. At present the situation has changed somewhat, and as a consequence of this the issue of the reunification of the two parts of the one and the same Russian Church acquires an especially paramount significance.

Although we, therefore, should maintain caution and not make any hasty statements, *it can be said with certainty that a positive development is discernible from both sides, and that with God's help and by the prayers of the New Martyrs and of all the Saints of Russia, we will in the near future see our Church united.* We must offer up prayers for this, being united in our support of the leadership of our wise hierarchs, headed by His Beatitude, Vitaly, Metropolitan of Eastern America and Canada, First Hierarch and President of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA.

Hieromonk Alexis,
*with the agreement and approval of
Archbishop Mark*

¹Excerpted from the Orthodox Digest *Pravoslavny Dnevnik*, No. 20-22 -- Dec. 1996-Jan. 1997, pp. 14-16. Published by Gleb Rahr of Kingston, N.Y., who in turn took it from the bulletin of the ROCA parish of St. Alexander Nevsky in Copenhagen, *Kirdbladet*, No. 36, Nov. 1996. Thus the English text given here is from the Russian translation of the Danish original.

²The Church of St. Alexander Nevsky, being the only ROCA parish in Denmark, is part of the diocese of Germany, and therefore its representative attended this meeting.

It seems, that when Priestmonk Alexis was composing this article, he hadn't read yet the excellent answer of Metropolitan Vitaly to the treacherous report of Archbishop Mark. One would hope, that the Metropolitan be supported by quite a few not so "wise hierarchs" as Archbishop Mark and a whole host of those of like mind. It is sad, that in the person of the German Archbishop Mark a "Trojan horse" has entered the Russian Church Abroad. He was one of the main figures who harmed the restoration of a canonical Orthodox Church in Russia free of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Furthermore, he was the main force thanks to whom the Church Abroad stained her garment through communion with the uncanonical hierarchy of Metr. Cyprianos of Oropos and Fili from which it now unsuccessfully tries, after a long delay, to disassociate herself.

The Sobor's Commission need not be concerned about recommendations for "seriously considering any proposition" from the Moscow Patriarchate, including delegates from Church Abroad to the Moscow Bishops Council "if the appropriate invitation be received". Unfortunately, the friends of Patriarchate should not worry on this account. Such an invitation was received already in 1988 (albeit in an unofficial manner), when the Moscow Patriarchate expected the arrival of none less than the then-Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Laurus himself who, it seems, at the last minute became frightened. Instead (again secretly), Mr. George Lukianov went, who did not hesitate to brag that at the Moscow Council he was seated under a placard reading "The Delegation of the ROCA". In the same line, as verification of the fact that the Moscow Patriarchate expected Archbishop Laurus at its Council, the editors of *Church News* have a letter, under the letterhead of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Surozh, in which he writes: "...there was talk, -- with great hopes -- of the expected arrival at the Council of Archbishop Laurus of Syracuse, but I do not know on what grounds. There were at and 'around' the Council also lay-observers from the Church Abroad, but I did not happen to meet them. All of them arrived with the permission or initiative of Metropolitan Vitaly (in any case, this was the talk in the Patriarchate)."

The editors *Church News* of just recently received a xerox copy of an article by Vladlen Sirotkin in English, unfortunately in a uncited magazine. The article is devoted to the question of the return to the Moscow Patriarchate of the prerevolutionary church real estate located abroad. Under the photograph of Holy Trinity Cathedral, belonging to the Orthodox Palestine Society in Jerusalem, there is a list of real estate abroad with the estimated value indicated. Thus the property of the Russian Church in the Holy Land is valued at 3 billion dollars, in Greece - 600 million, in Italy -- 300 million. Then the properties in France, England and Scotland are listed. But the most remarkable thing in this article is that *the property of the Russian Church in Germany is not mentioned*, and this is a country in which the majority of churches are from prerevolutionary times! One can guess that Archbishop Mark already has an agreement with the Moscow Patriarchate not to demand the return of any churches on German territory for the time being, since they expect these will be handed over to them before long.

The article of Priestmonk Alexis is supplemented by commentaries of Gleb Rahr (now very sympathetic to a unification of the Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate) who singles out a comment by Archbishop Mark that the negotiations with Moscow Patriarchate might result in the next schism. "*This [comment] should be understood*," writes Rahr, "*as expressive of apprehension that some members of the Church Abroad will not follow their hierarchs in the event that they reunite with the Mother Church and schism will come to the jurisdiction Abroad itself*".

It seems, that the reproachful letter of Metropolitan Vitaly of Nov. 29th/Dec. 12, 1996 did not have the intended effect upon Archbishop Mark, because in his 1996 Nativity Epistle he writes:

For decades we have suffered, seeing the persecution of our Church in Russia as well as unchurchly activities and vain worldly wisdom hiding behind the mask of churchliness. Now, however, we rejoice in the long hoped for signs of a cleansing of the church organism from influences foreign to her. The enormous changes in the Russian land are evident not only in the outward building of churches but also, in the inner activity of spiritual growth. This encourages hope for a resolution of the hitherto unresolved contradictions, which have confounded the establishment of a solid church unity.

Alas, here and now the ancient demonic and human pride raises up fresh impediments both by the irrational activities and declarations of people, who are not following the churchly path to a resolution of the painful problems. Far from everyone is ready to abandon the pretensions of their self-dependence [САМОУТН -- C. N.'s Trans. Note: usually rendered by "self-will"] for the sake of true union with God and their neighbours. Yet God in Trinity, Who calls us into His Unity, is completely other than our weakness and, with limitless power, destroys all the obstacles and barriers that are built on the fragile foundation of human vainglory.

That a schism in the Church Abroad will result over the question of unification with Moscow Patriarchate in the near future -- of that there can be no doubt. It is obvious that it already is developing in some parishes. But it is also very clear, that one of the most visible creators and leaders of it will be Archbishop Mark, who demonstrates such an blatant ingratitude to the Church Abroad, who unconditionally accepted him, a German, within her fold.

FROM THE LIFE OF THE FREE RUSSIAN CHURCH

As we noted in the last number of *Church News* (#56) for 1996, Archimandrite Peter with a group of nuns, a last count numbering 65, requested asylum from Archbishop Valentine of Suzdal and Vladimir due to persecution instigated by Metropolitan Methodius of Voronezh of the convent they founded.

It has since become known that Metr. Methodius appointed as abess for the convent newly established by Archim. Peter a relative of his, whose life and conduct did not correspond to monastic standards. As a result the nuns protested, demanding a change of abess and the convent was besieged by fifty clergy sent by the Metropolitan with the help of the police. The majority of the nuns were forcibly removed from the convent.

Archb. Valentine received the fugitives very warmly and lodged them in his recently constructed two story frame house. Vladyka also offered them the use of an immense church in the town of Omutsk a few kilometers from Suzdal which similarly only recently (literally, this summer) had been restored from its ruins. It was proposed that Archm. Peter would buy a large house up for sale not far from the church and move the nuns there. However, his affairs were unexpectedly altered. It became known that he was on very good terms with Protopresbyter A. Shargunov, who is famous even in America, since he called upon all to vote for the communist presidential candidate, Zhuganov. Shargunov, evidently, induced Archim. Peter to return to the Moscow Patriarchate. So Archim. Peter acted in concert with the words of Ecclesiastes about the wind that "goes to the south, goes round to the north, goes round and turns, and the wind even goes in circles, turning back the wind on itself" (Eccl. 1:6). The Holy Scriptures have other more vivid expressions about the inconstancy of human nature (Proverbs 26:11, and also the Second Epistle to Peter 2:22).

Father Archimandrite had not even enough civility and courage to personally inform Archb. Valentine that he was breaking the oaths of loyalty recently given to the RFOC. Hiding behind women's skirts, he sent in his place a few nuns who announced that they were returning to the Patriarchate. Without even expressing to Vladyka any thanks for the refuge and large expenses of taking in 65 persons, they abandoned the refuge offered to them. We must note that the Patriarchate then offered to buy from Archb. Valentine the newly restored church in Omutsk, but Vladyka replied that he has always considered that churches are not for sale.

It is now known that the nuns have been accepted by Archb. Eulogy of Vladimir and were immediately placed in small convents throughout his diocese. As far as Archim. Peter is concerned, it seems that he is suspended (in having no right to wear a pectoral cross) until Pascha and at present stays in Moscow (maybe with Archpriest Shargunov, who misled him?).

One should expect that the Moscow Patriarchate will do everything possible not to permit the nuns to be together again in one monastery, since they demonstrated that they are capable of organizing an open protest which in the eyes of Patriarchate is a very grave sin.

Meanwhile, the house just vacated by the nuns and in which no one had ever lived burned to the ground during night of the fourth day after Christmas. It seems, the fire was set as a "thank you" from Patriarchate for sheltering nuns they previously had persecuted.

DECREE OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX FREE CHURCH

Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Free Church in its meeting held on November 10/23, 1996 in Suzdal, upon familiarizing themselves with materials from the 1996 Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the announcement about "resumption of the work of the Russian Bishop's Conference in the city of Odessa" **decrees:**

1. To direct attention of all the faithful children of the Russian Free Church on entrance of the Church Abroad (ROCA) into a new phase of disintegration and apostacy from the truth

In today's conditions in order to fulfill *the will of the Supreme Church authority*, as expressed in one of the most authoritative and last of its documents - the Decree of 7/20 November 1920 #362 by His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon, the Supreme Church Council and Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Church Abroad must follow one of the following directions:

a) it has to accept the fact of the termination of persecution of the Russian Church, move its administration to Russia and no longer call itself the Synod of the ROCA, but begin to organize a temporary (until a Local Council is held) office of Church administration (cf. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Decree #362);

b. if the hierarchs of the ROCA do not find it possible to return to the Homeland, but still believe that persecutions are terminated, they must recognize that their church administration is subject to the Church in the Homeland (this administration must be organized according to Decree #362 {par.2} Russian dioceses which are under the same conditions) and the Church Abroad itself is a part of the restored Russian Church.

c. if the godless government, according to opinion of hierarchs of the ROCA has not been eliminated, or is only eliminated in part, then all the more should they not extend their authority over Russia, but should continue *temporarily their selfgovernment* (par. 2, 5, and 9 of Decree # 362).

Instead of this, already for three years, some of the hierarchs of the Church Abroad, chaired by Metropolitan Vitaly, have attempted to prove that they are this same *supreme and central Church authority* (while actually the central Church authority terminated its existence with the death of the last Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne, designated by Patriarch Tikhon -- Metropolitan Peter).

On the other hand, the Council of the ROCA in 1996 announced the beginning of official contacts with the leadership of Moscow Patriarchate. The issue is not one of individual meetings, but about the attendance of

representatives of the Church Abroad at the Bishops' Council of the Moscow Patriarchate. The canon: "those who have prayed with heretics are to be excommunicated" has been forgotten. (Apostolic Canons 45 and 65).

Perhaps the Synod of Bishops ROCA believes that the Moscow Patriarchate is no longer heretical? But the reality bespeaks opposite -- the Moscow Patriarchate has acquired new defects: usury, commerce in wine and tobacco, a merging with organized crime.

Therefore, the Synod of Bishops of the ROFC believes that the plan to unite the ROCA with the heretical Moscow Patriarchate has begun to be realized. Neither the repentance of the hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate, nor the fulfillment of any conditions for unity previously stipulated by the ROCA are being required and this testifies to a serious illness in the Church Abroad itself.

2. The announcement of the Council of Bishops of the ROCA defrocking the President of the Synod of Bishops of ROFC, the Most Reverend Archbishop Valentine, is not recognised and not fulfilled due to the unjustifiability and illegality of such an act.

The arguments of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA concerning the alleged "guilt" of Archbishop Valentine, first presented in the "Decree of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA" of March 23rd/April 5th, 1994, were examined in detail and refuted in a letter of the Temporary Supreme Church Administration of the Russian Orthodox Free Church dated April 6/19, 1994 in #56 (cf. *Suzdal'skii Palomnik [The Suzdal Pilgrim]* Nos. 18, 19, 20 pp. 196-206). Analogous insinuations were expressed by the Synod ROCA in the "Decree of 9/22 of February 1995" (cf. *Suzdal'skii Palomnik*, 1995, # 23, p.31). An answer was also given to this "Decree" by the Temporary Supreme Church Administration on March 1/141 1995 #6 (cf. *Suzdal'skii Palomnik*, 1995 # 24, pp.19-21).

The "Resolution" of the Council of Bishops of the ROCA puts forth the same "reasons" using the formulas of 1994, with the same canonical and factual errors and does not require a special clarification.

3. The so-called "Russian Bishops Conference", held in October, 1996, in Odessa is not recognised, as it is an institution absolutely foreign to the church administration in Russia.

All present and future "resolutions" of the so-called "Russian Bishops Conference", which announced itself in October, 1996, in Odessa have no connection with the Russian Orthodox Free Church.

Neither in the Statutes of the ROCA, nor in the materials of the Local Council of the Russian Church of 1917-1918, nor in the decrees of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon, nor in the tradition of the Russian Church, is there any indication or instruction whatsoever for the possible existence of such a strange *puppet institution*, which would "decide" Russian Church problems, being established from abroad, and having no authority of its own, and not even a representative in this body established from abroad, while its "meetings" are controlled by the representatives of the "founder".

4. We warn the faithful children of the ROFC not to have any contact with Bishop Evtikhy (Kourochkin) -- one of the most obvious and unprincipled transmitters of plans to blend the ROCA with the heretical Moscow Patriarchate, for whom, by his own admission, neither holy canons, nor decrees of the Local Council of 1917-1918 and St. Patriarch Tikhon have any meaning (see Section 5 of the Minutes of the Assembly of Clergy, Monastics and Laity of the Diocese of Suzdal of the ROFC of January 12/25, 1995). (*Suzdal'skii Palomnik* # 22, pp.10-16).

There are also testimonies of the press (the truthfulness of which cannot be questioned) about the heretical pronouncements of Bishop Evtikhy (Kourochkin) [see in particular *Russkoe Pravoslavie, Russian Orthodoxy*, the newspaper of true Orthodox Christians of Russia, # 3, 1996, pp 3-4: "The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and Bishop Evtikhy" and also pp. 8-9: "About Grace in the Sacraments Performed by the Moscow Patriarchate", a report by Bishop Evtikhy to the Council of Bishops of the ROCA, November 15/28, 1994, also pp. 10-14; "A Response to the Report of Bishop Evtikhy" (authored by R. Dobrovolsky), pp. 16-17: "An Open Letter in Connection with the Response of Bishop Evtikhy Regarding Accusations of Heresy" (by the group in Moscow, Zealots for the Right Faith)].

Valentine, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir.

Presiding Bishop of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Free Church

Theodore, Bishop of Borisovo and Sanino

Seraphim, Bishop of Sukhum and Abhasia

Archpriest Andrew Osetrov, Secretary to the Synod of Bishops

ABOUT "THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH-SOCIETY STATION"

The paper *Russkaya Mysl* ("Russian Thought") in its issue # 4144, 1996, published an article by Paul Sidorov, which lays out details about the character of Roman Catholic propaganda in Russia broadcast on radio.

As the article indicates, "the station received a blessing from His Holiness Alexis II Patriarch of Moscow" and "the station is financed by the Catholic foundation 'Assistance to the Church in Need', the very same foundation which pledged annually \$1000.00 to each priest of the Moscow Patriarchate, yet not individually, but through the diocesan bishops.

The President of this Center of the "Christian press" (representing only Catholics and "Orthodox") is a prominent priest of Moscow Patriarchate, John Sviridov. Catholic propaganda is broadcast through the radio program "Blagovest" ("The Good News"), the supposedly Orthodox radio program "Sophia" and a student program "Prolog". Beside those

three organs of propaganda, there was "added" a Catholic radio program "Dar" ("Gift") attached to the Apostolic Administration for Catholics of the Latin Rite in the European sector of Russia (Editor in Chief, Peter Sakharov) and also the program of the BBC, "Voskresenie" ("Sunday" or "Resurrection"), (Editors, Priest Serge Hakkel and Faina Yanov). "The concept of the broadcasts," the article states, "from the very start foresaw the cooperation of various Christian Confessions (primarily of Orthodox and Catholics) in order to promote rational dialogue wherever possible between Christians and to overcome mutual prejudices".

A whole host of Patriarchate priests from Moscow and its environs cooperate with the Catholics in the arena of seducing Orthodox. Among the most active ones are: Archpriests John Sviridov, Boris Nichiporov, Abbots Innocent Pavlov and Ignatios Krekshin, Hieromonk Hilarion Alfeev, Priests Alexander Borisov, George Chistiakov, Vladimir Lapshin, Alexis Gostev and Paul Vishnevsky. From the Roman Catholic side there "operates constantly" the Catholic Priest Eugene Heinrichs from St. Petersburg.

The author of this article admits that there are persons who express their criticism of the broadcasts, but "one should consider that the friendly style of the overwhelming majority of those on these programs during the last months quite softened up many representatives of the "opposition". Attacks by those who dislike this activity sometimes had an organized character". Namely, a group of priests wrote a protest to Patriarch Alexis, but their protest produced no results and this Vatican propaganda enjoys patriarchal protection.

Yet the author complains, that "the attacks of some Orthodox clerics and laity, who are inclined to fundamentalism and xenophobia (in particular, a communist newspaper *Soviet Russia*) have continued. It is well understood," as is stated further, "*that to those who lead Orthodoxy to a precipitous loyalty to tradition and a narrowly understood patriotism, the broadcasts act like a red flag to an bull*". (Italics by the editors).

At the end of this article there is an announcement that the expansion of the reach of these broadcasts beyond Moscow and its suburbs and also into other regions will result in additional expenses and the means for making donations to this end are given.

In another issue (4149) of the same paper (*Tserkovno Obshchestvennii Vestnik # 3*) an interview of Archpriest J. Sviridov with Sergius the Bishop of Solnechnogor is published.

Archpriest Sviridov said, that at present, the Church "needs to consolidate in all the directions. The Church contains in herself different directions and different political views". He suggests that Bishop Sergius gather under his aegis the representatives of all the different views and he believes that "such a meeting, on a serious theological level could be a serious assistance for the preparation of the [All-Russian] Council".

Answering a question on "consolidation" in the Church, the Moscow hierarch replied quite contradictorily. It seems that "*the Church has to be unified, but this unity should not mean uniformity of views and opinions. The fullness of the Church consists in (the fact) that its people manifest an entire music scale of spiritual fruits*".

It seems, that Bishop Sergius has not kept in mind the liturgical exclamations: "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess..." or: "And grant that with one mouth and one heart we may glorify and praise Thine all-honourable and majestic Name..."

CHURCH RELATED MURDERS IN RUSSIA

When speaking of church related murders one should understand by such a murder, that both the victim and the killer are members of a church organisation.

Church related murders have a long tradition. Special attention should be focused on murders during the 70's and 80's, and in particular the murder of Archbishop Methodios, and the perishing "under mysterious circumstances" of a hieromonk of the Pskov-Pechersky Monastery, Raphael Ogorodnikov and the Old Believer Priest Eugene Bobkov. Also there is information covering the same period about suicides, threats of murder and attempted murder. Yet, one should note: the published information does not contain enough details so that one could specify the character of some of those murders in a church situation with acceptable certainty. In particular, it is not clear if they were in a strict sense just church related.

The issue of church related murders was opened in September of 1990, when a Moscow archpriest, Alexander Men', was murdered. After this murder, between 1990 and 1996, about 15 clerics were murdered in Russia, both monks and lay people, including Abbot Lazarus Solnyshko, Abbot Seraphim Shlykov, Monks of Optina Hermitage Trifon, Pherapont and Basil, Hieromonk Nestor from the village Zharki in the Ivanovskaya region (and who was close to the late Metropolitan John Smychev), the architect of St. Alexander's Church in Novocherkassk N. Burdin, 2 pilgrims in Trinity-Sergius Lavra. If one includes murder threats, calls for killing and attempted murders, then the number of such cases in a church environment becomes much greater. There are also cases of suicide and murders of children, and also a theoretical justification of infanticide (see, for example, the reasoning of the Moscow Priest Dmitry Smirnov in the newspaper *Radonezh* for last year) in which the gas chamber is declared to be "a wonderful human invention".

The fight against crime in the church environment is quite unsatisfactory and this is why the exposure of church related murders is extremely low. And this explains why we know so little about them. So the Moscow Patriarchate is not waiting for its safety to be secured by the state, but has secured it herself, by hiring bodyguards and creating diocesan defense groups. But, sometimes, the church defense only adds to the problem, which is verified by a case in Rostov-on-the-Don, where on April 1, near the cathedral church, several church guards, while on duty, raped a woman, threatening to kill her and accompanying these threats with severe bodily injuries.

The prognosis for the trend is quite uncomfortable. Today, criminals and business are tightly connected and this connection is getting stronger, and this is why one can expect a rise in the number of church related murders because the Moscow Patriarchate is more and more involved in the "improper activity" -- dealing in gas, cars, diamonds, chicken legs, vodka and tobacco.

Priest Vladimir Gornostayev.

UNCLEAR STORY OF PRIEST (?) GLEB YAKUNIN

Obshchaya Gazeta (General Newsletter) of Dec. 5-10. # 48 (176) reported that "a well known priest-dissident returned to the lap of the Orthodox Church". In a brief account it is related that Yakunin, who was defrocked by the Moscow Patriarchate received quite unexpected support from the civil authorities in the person of the Mayor of Moscow -- Luzhkov. A short while ago he gave Yakunin an empty office on the Georgievsky Crescent located in the courtyard of the state Duma to be converted into a house church. Yakunin was defrocked due to his stubborn unwillingness to relinquish his seat in the Duma. Ironically, the decree of his defrockment was signed by one of the patriarchal metropolitans, who himself was a member of the Duma.

While defrocking Yakunin, the Patriarchate did not excommunicate or anathematise him, so the indication that he "returned to the lap of the Orthodox Church" -- makes one wonder. It is very likely, that Luzhkov persuaded the Patriarch at least not to notice the establishment of Yakunin's parish.

ROMAN POPE ACCEPTS AN INVITATION FROM COMMUNIST CASTRO

A very conservative Catholic paper *The Wanderer* from the end of November reported that Cuba's dictator Fidel Castro was in Rome and had an audience with the Pope which lasted for 35 minutes. During this meeting the question arose of "the normalization of the conditions of the Church in Cuba and in general [of] the role of believers in national life. President Fidel Castro renewed his invitation to the Holy Father to visit Cuba, specifically during 1997".

After his visit with Pope, Castro met with Cardinal Secretary of State Angelo Sodano. Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, a secretary for international relations, also took part in the meeting as well as the foreign minister of Cuba. Here again the situation of Catholics in Cuba and South America in general was discussed.

In the end the Pope accepted Castro's invitation and they both exchanged gifts: Castro gave the Pope a piece of abstract, modern art of silver, and the Pope gave Dictator Castro 3 medals, struck to commemorate the 18th anniversary of his pontificate.

Castro had to promise the Pope that he will be able to travel wherever he wants and deliver addresses regardless of theme and place. Not without reason, the Roman Catholics see this agreement as a major victory for the Pope.

The magazine *Newsweek* for the end of December also devoted a long article to this occasion. It noted that an unusual mutual understanding developed between the Pope and Castro. When leaving the Vatican, Castro declared that the Pope is "the most extraordinary person of our times"

DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANS FROM AN UNEXPECTED SIDE

A newspaper *The Jewish Press* from Dec. 6th published an article by Rabbi Eckstein entitled "It Is Time to Respond to the Plight of Persecuted Christians". In several of his articles he tries to unite Christians in America of different nationalities subject to persecution, to make them come out against persecution with a united front. The oppression by Islamic fundamentalists in the Middle East is very severe. In Pakistan a "blasphemy" law was passed, which forbids any criticism of Mohammed on penalty of capital punishment. Egyptians who convert to Christianity face imprisonment and torture. In Sudan children are taken away from parents and are sold into slavery. In China Christians have to meet in secret. In Viet Nam Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy and leaders are being arrested. In Algeria the very same fundamentalists call for "the annihilation and physical liquidation of Christians" and so forth.

Michael Horovitz, an organizer of this unification process for the defense of Christians, complains that the White House and the Justice Department are not taking any measures to defend them. US Attorney General J. Reno in most cases seeks to turn away the vast majority of the Christian refugees, leaving them to their fate. Yet, an active group of concerned evangelicals managed to organize in January a conference on "The Global Persecution of Christians" in

Washington, D.C. At this conference representatives of the 10 million member National Association of Evangelicals used it as an opportunity to unveil their "Statement of Conscience" in which they blamed the US Immigration and Naturalization Service for a "hostile" treatment of Christian refugees.

Horowitz said: "As a Jew, I find what is going on with the persecution of Christians throughout the rest of the world eerily parallel to what happened to the Jewish community in Europe during the late 19th century".

A PLACE FOR CHRIST THE SAVIOUR IN THE CELEBRATION OF HIS NATIVITY

The bulletin *Ecumenical News International* from Jan 15th reports that the representatives of western confessions in the US are very much concerned that the celebration of Christ's Nativity no longer has a religious character and became an excuse for commercial money making. The efforts of many pastors to add to this holy day a spiritual meaning through the slogan: "Keep Christ in Christmas" actually produce no results.

A Protestant group "The Lutheran Hour Ministries" with its center in St. Louis, Missouri, commissioned a survey of slightly more than 1000 Americans in 48 states, asking them: "When you think about December 25, which is Christmas Day, what, if anything at all, makes Christmas important to you personally?"

More than 4 out of 10 (44%) declared that Christmas is important for them as a reason for a family reunion, 3% were happy about the parties and gifts, another 3% loved it as a nonworking day and 5% said there was "nothing" special about Christmas.

Also another group in Oxnard, California, made a similar survey. The results revealed that only one person in three considered that Christ had a central meaning for them on this feast day, which for a long time in America has been termed the "holiday season", because at about the same time Jews celebrate their "Channuka" and African-Americans the recently invented "Kwanza"! Both groups exchange gifts on those days.