



# CHURCH NEWS

*On the Nativity of Christ  
and the New Year*

*Church News sincerely greets its readers on the Feast  
and wishes them all the best in the coming New Year!*

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Dear Readers:

With this year we complete 10 years since the appearance of the first issue of the Russian language version of "Church News". It is only with the help of God and the support of our generous readers that this publication could continue to exist so long. We greatly hope that in the future our readers will support us as devotedly. We ask you to keep in mind that, in addition to the mailing and copying costs, we must needs maintain many subscriptions to various periodicals.

In the enclosed envelope with our return address we request that all our readers make an annual contribution to the publishers and that those who no longer are interested in receiving our periodical inform us of this in order to keep unnecessary costs down.

**With all our thanks to all our readers who have supported our publication for so long.**

**CHURCH NEWS**  
639 Center Street  
Oradell, NJ 07679

## NATIVITY EPISTLE OF THE FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROCA, METR. VITALY (Official Translation)

Christ is born, glorify Him!

Beloved children of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in the diaspora and throughout the breadth of the Russian land.

The essence of this great feast of the Nativity of Christ is revealed to us beginning with the very first words of the main hymns -- the troparion and kontakion of the feast. The God-Man, the God who is before all eternity, is born miraculously from the Ever-Virgin Mary. This is an event far greater than every other event that has occurred in heaven or on earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the most perfect man and God, and in a unfathomable way He unites the Divine and human in Himself, as the Church teaches, "without being mingled, without change, indivisibly and inseparably," in the words of the official pronouncement, or *oros*, of the fourth Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon. And Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, established His Church, which is both Divine and human, in His own image and likeness. Containing the human and the Divine within Himself in the utmost perfection, our Lord Jesus Christ also manifests within Himself this unshakable, invincible, Holy, One and unique Apostolic Church. All of us, faithful children of this Church of Christ, admit that we are sinful, weak, infirm and at times even corrupt people, concerning which there is not the slightest doubt.

But we are faced with the ultimate task which is to take this unhappy, damaged human nature of ours, both body and soul, and with the help of Our Saviour, over the course of this short earthly life, to the extent it is possible for each of us, to make it divine. No one should be shocked by the sublime nature and greatness of our calling. The Lord wishes to raise us up to be the very summit of all His creation. This is what the holy King and Prophet David is saying to us when he exclaims: "I said: Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High" (Ps. 81: 6).

For this, which is our most important earthly activity, the Lord has left us His Gospel. But if the Lord had left us only His Gospel, we would be horrified and confused, because in our weakness we would become completely discouraged in the face of such holy ideals. However, the Lord has created His Church, and Himself saves each one of us, helping us to implement in our lives the words of this holy book of Glad Tidings. As we approach the Chalice, we are seized with sacred fear as we think that we are receiving communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we are becoming of one kinship with Christ, as St. Paul says, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but dwellers together with the saints and intimate friends of God" (Eph. 11: 19).

This, beloved brothers and sisters, is the true meaning and aim of our earthly life, and this is what this great festival of the Nativity of Christ teaches us. Never lose sight with your spiritual eyes of this guiding star, which once led the Magi to Christ's manger, and now also leads us to Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

Metropolitan Vitaly

Nativity of Christ, 1997/98

## CHRISTMAS EPISTLE OF VALENTIN, ARCHBISHOP OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR

"To all believers of the Russian Orthodox Church,

"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world." (1 Tim. 3: 16)

While joyfully celebrating the Nativity of Christ, we try to preserve in our Orthodox faith the most glorious miracle, which does not decay in the womb, the Word incarnate, not separated from the Father, Whom the Angels extol with the shepherds as we together with them call out, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The holy Orthodox Church solemnly celebrates the Nativity of the Child God Christ, manifesting the dogmatic truth of Orthodoxy, preaches the unshakability of the Apostolic canons and the decrees of the Holy Fathers and thus edifies each Orthodox Christian.

Although the year 1997 was a year of shocks and temptations, which brought forth countless troubles and ruined hopes, let us not despair nor murmur over our bad fortune, but let us as often as possible elevate our gaze toward the heights and try to be worthy of the Lord's mercy and goodness. Let us pray Christ that the coming year will be a year rich in the goodness and mercy of God.

In 1997 the ill-omened law was passed which disgraces the State Duma and brings ridicule to all Russia's citizens, who, deprived themselves of everything to save their pennies in order to restore the churches destroyed by the Godless.

The ink on the pages of the Law on "Freedom of Conscience" was not dry when the Moscow Patriarchate started to claim churches which had never belonged to her, as for example in the village of Pavlovskoye (in Vladimir Region), the city of Zheleznovodsk (in Stavropol Region), the city of Votkinsk (Udmurtia); during the night, like robbers, they took away in handcuffs the rector of a church in the city of Noginsk, Moscow Region. They even got as far as the Holy Land, where with the help of Palestinian soldiers they stole the monastery of Abraham's Oak, which belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, and roughly dragged the Abbess Juliana and her nuns over the ground.

As Herodias raged possessed, so now rages possessed the offspring of the godless tyrant, the Moscow Patriarchate, which throughout her 54-year existence destroyed the canonical order of the Russian Church, slandered the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, raised a "new generation of clergy" who not out of fear, but willingly served the godless. The archpastors of the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as many pastors even now teach one to lie in name of the Church. The way of accommodation and service to the powerful in this world led the Moscow Patriarchate to monstrous results. Behind the backs of the faithful there is being prepared a full scale and quite blatant mingling of the Moscow Patriarchate with Roman Catholicism in the river bed of the so-called Balamand Union. With such "achievements", the Moscow Patriarchate long ago lost the right to call herself an Orthodox Church, all the more since she cynically considers her self-appointed efforts to pass herself off as the continuation and the legal heir of the pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox Church.

During Soviet times, deprived of the possibility of a legal existence, the Russian Orthodox Church suffered the loss of many millions of victims at the hands of traitors and apostates, who in 1943 gave birth to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Bleeding and persecuted by atheists and false brothers, the Russian Orthodox Church preserved her faithfulness to Christ and her Orthodoxy unharmed by going into the catacombs. Only with beginning of perestroika and the fall of the totalitarian regime, did it become possible to legalize the true Church in Russia, which is now once again in danger of prohibition and illegality as a result of the Law on "Freedom of Conscience".

Beloved in the Lord, fathers, brethren and sisters! In these terrible, and possibly last days, I call upon you for the strictest of watchfulness. "Watch therefore, that you walk circumspectly..." [Eph 5:15]. May steadiness in the Orthodox faith remain with you forever! Stay faithful to the legacy of the holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church, and may they, like a shining star, be always with you. I plead with you to redouble your prayers to the Christ Child and ask Him for the gift of love and mercy, the gift of patience and compassion, without which there is no our salvation.

I greet you on the occasion of Christ's Nativity and the New Year, calling upon you the Lord's blessing and may it abide with you through all the days of your life. Amen.

Zealous for your salvation, VALENTIN, Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir  
Christmas 1997-98; city of Suzdal

## ON THE 40TH DAY AFTER THE REPOSE OF MONK JOSE, THE CUSTODIAN OF THE MYRRH-STREAMING IVERON ICON

Because the custodian of the myrrh-streaming Iveron icon Jose was murdered on the night of 30-31st of October, there has been debate about the actual date of his repose. In some places memorial services were held on December 8, but at the grave of the reposed there were two pannikhidas: on the 8th and the 9th of December. Father Alexander Iwaszewicz, who was the last to see Jose alive, thinks he was murdered on October 31st, a day when the entire US celebrates the profane day of "Halloween", which in spite of the opposition of Roman Catholicism was turned into a pagan holiday to the impure spirits. One of the memorial services on Jose's grave was served in Spanish.

Since the appearance of the myrrh-streaming Icon, Jose, as he himself admitted, became a target of hatred. He received so many threatening calls that he made use of modern conveniences and obtained an answering machine.

Nor did he escape expressions of malice and slander after his repose. For example, our editors have received copies of two letters, one addressed to Metropolitan Vitaly (designated "highly confidential"), signed by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili and another (also with the designation "confidential"), signed by Bishop Ambrose, of the very same group.

The letter of Metropolitan Cyprian is dated Oct. 21/Nov. 3rd. He does not mince words in order to discredit the good name of a person brutally tortured and killed just three days previously, and he "would also strongly recommend that the Russian Church Abroad does not intervene as a Church, but rather that some lay-person (if you so judge) should claim the body and arrange for the burial in a place you deem fit."

The letter of Bishop Ambrose to Bishop Gabriel, is not of any better quality than that of his chief-hierarchy. This hierarchy in a letter, dated Nov. 11th even casts a shadow on the name of Fr. Alexander Iwaszewicz, whom he believes is from Chile rather than Argentina. He writes: "Their paths [meaning of Jose and Fr. Alexander] had separated by the time the crime occurred. It is therefore to be supposed that the police know the name of Fr. Alexander, and he should be warned that they are quite possibly looking for him in connection with this business.... Naturally, he might be able to throw some light on this murky affair."

The malice of the Cyprianites for martyred Jose is easily explained. They pressured Metropolitan Vitaly to demand that Jose bring the Icon to Cyprian, but Jose categorically refused to follow the Metropolitan's order.

Regarding the Myrrh-streaming Icon, it is still not known exactly where it is, although a number of facts indicate it is in the care of the administrator of Jose's will.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ROCA, "CHURCH LIFE"

The magazine "Church Life" # 3-4 for May-August, 1997, mailed out to subscribers in mid-December only, published some resolutions of the session of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA on April 30/May 13th. The participants were: President, Metropolitan Vitaly; Anthony, Archbp. of West-America and San Francisco; Laurus, Archbp. of Syracuse and Trinity; Mark, Archbp. of Berlin and Germany; Barnabas, Bp. of Cannes; Gabriel, Bp. of Manhattan and Michael, Bp. of Toronto.

Among various matters, there was heard a written report from the Chief of the Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Archim. Bartholomew regarding the repair of the wall of Mt. of Olives Convent and then: "d e l i b e r a t e d regarding the arrival in Jerusalem of Patriarch Alexis with bishops and clergy of his retinue to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Mission. Through the chief of their Mission they unofficially requested permission to venerate the relics of New Martyrs Elisabeth and Barbara and also serve a memorial service at the grave of Archim. Antonin Kapustin on the Mt. Olives. The delegation will arrive during Pentecost, 1997. After considering all points of view, it was r e s o l v e d:

"1) To instruct His Grace Bishop Barnabas to go to Jerusalem before the holiday of Pentecost, to contact there the Chief of the Mission Fr. Archimandrite Bartholomew and Abbesses Juliana and Anna and to work out plans for receiving the above mentioned delegation from Russia. As the delegation headed by Patriarch Alexis will be guests of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Diodoros, therefore, to contact the Patriarch of Jerusalem and inform him in detail of the measures which will be taken in connection with arrival of the delegation from Russia.

"2) Commission His Grace Bishop Barnabas to take care that the reception will proceed peacefully, without any interference.

"3) After church to offer the visitors a cup of tea.

"To issue an ukaz to this effect to His Grace Bishop Barnabas, and Chief of the Mission Archim. Bartholomew to fulfill whatever needs to be carried out."

COMMENT: It is interesting, that not one of all the members of the Synod noticed that the Moscow Patriarchate is blatantly lying when referring to the 150th anniversary of Mission. The centennial of the Mission was officially celebrated in 1958 and was lead by Archbishop Alexander of Berlin in the presence of a number of local officials. In another words, the Moscow Patriarchate invented this "jubilee" at the 139th year and rushed to celebrate it a whole 11 years ahead of time!

"On the same date h e a r d: A verbal report of Bishop Michael about positive and negative phenomena in the MP. Much is published about the so-called renaissance in Russia. Initially there was an interest among Russian people for the faith, but now it has already cooled down. While visiting Russia, Bishop Michael tried to visit churches and sacred places and, unfortunately, in the churches of Moscow Patriarchate there is no sense of normal parish life; various people come, light a candle and leave. When questioning young people: if they pray for the sins of their parents who permitted the murder of the Tsar and the destruction of the country, the MP clergy became angered and would not answer such questions. In monasteries, even large ones -- there is no sense of monastic life. The episcopate of the MP does not protest in the name of the Church against abortions and so on. The MP does not lead this spiritual rebirth. They have just an appearance of services: the churches are being restored and so forth, but there is no Church taking care of the flock, therefore people seek something else, turning to sects or are lost.

"In deliberating this matter all the members of Synod participated. It was noted that we always awaited repentance from the MP, the glorification of the New Martyrs, departure from the WCC, all of which we have put in writing. Some bishops of the MP have declared their repentance and have written about it. They are supposedly preparing for the glorification of the New Martyrs, but they act circumspectly. But the major obstacle is Ecumenism in which the MP is becoming more and more deeply immersed. It is also noticeable that in Russia opposition is growing toward the episcopate among the clergy and laity; both clergy and laity write about it. In connection with this it is necessary to supply the believers with information. It is a must to help them get out of this difficult situation, and this takes time.

"On the same date h e a r d: a verbal report of Archbishop Mark regarding the real estate of the German Diocese. Russia is making an effort to have the pre-revolutionary property in Western countries returned. Two months ago Yeltsin was in Baden-Baden and met with the Chancellor Kohl. Articles appeared in the press that the Russian government will demand the return to Russia of all old churches and that created concern in the diocese. It is not known what the German answer was. Yet, there are treasures in Russia, which were taken after the war from Berlin, from Berlin museums, to Russia and so the question of an exchange arises: the Russians will return German treasures and the Germans would return to Russia its churches and properties abroad. Yet, as is known from the press by now, the Russian parliament refused such an offer -- to return to Germany her properties taken during the war. Therefore, there is no danger anything will happen."

A LETTER FROM THE CLERGY OF WESTERN EUROPE TO METROPOLITAN VITALY AND MEMBERS OF THE SYNOD OF THE ROCA

Your Eminences, Your Eminence Vladyko Vitaly, Venerable Bishops, members of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCA:

The undersigned loyal clergymen of the ROCA address the meeting of the Synod with the following troubled thoughts in connection with events which have recently occurred in the life of the Russian Church in the homeland and diaspora.

Following the recent important events in Jerusalem there is a noticeable *taking of liberties* in communications of nuns of our convents with nuns in Gorny Convent. Such "*fraternization*" will lead, we believe, to a gradual loss of a consciousness of those principles which were the foundation over the last 70 years **of the well-defined position of our Church toward the Moscow Patriarchate** and the loss of this consciousness is the first step toward an imperceptible, but real, slippage and negation of the limit which we have faithfully preserved until now.

This confronts all of us directly with a cardinal question: is this really the time for a possible, or inevitable, rapprochement or even blending with the Moscow Patriarchate, and this means: **HAVE ALL THINGS CHANGED IN THIS REGARD WHICH SO FAR WE COULD NOT RECONCILE WITH OUR ECCLESIASTICAL CONSCIENCE?**

Let us examine this point by point:

1) In the matter of the glorification of the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, not only has the Moscow Patriarchate not made one step that would reconcile her views with ours, but on the contrary, she has departed further from them by her recent blasphemous statement that all those holy Martyrs were outside the borders of the Church. Has not the Moscow Patriarchate with this renounced these lights of **her own Russian Church**, the "*flowers of the Russian spiritual meadow...*" [There is a play here on the words *cvetochei* (lights) and *tsvetov* (flowers).] This proves that she is **not** genuinely the Russian Church, **not** the Church of our holy Russian New Martyrs and Confessors.

2) In the matter of Ecumenism, the Moscow Patriarchate continues to behave unworthily of Holy Orthodoxy and in general oversteps the boundaries of Christianity.

3) The spiritual illness of "SERGIANISM" manifests itself no less than previously: the subordination of the Church to secular governmental powers, a spirit of bureaucracy and careerism by a majority of clergy (especially those of high rank), carelessness in observing the canons of the Orthodox Church, permission to cremate and other defects, are characteristic everywhere.

4) A malicious struggle by the Moscow Patriarchate for our parishes in the homeland and diaspora being carried out in a criminal manner, if not simply a mafioso style.

5) **New measures to garner material funds by receiving high interest from the sale of cigarettes and alcohol!!!**

From this brief description of the characteristics of the Moscow Patriarchate it is obvious that the situation not only has in essence not changed for the better, **but has even worsened.**

One should not forget to keep in mind, that besides all this, the fundamental position of the ROCA was based and well founded on the premise that, beginning with Patriarch Sergius, the MP is uncanonical.

It is with concern that we ask ourselves: **what kind of rapprochement can there be and in the name of what?**

We earnestly address you, our venerable Hierarchs, the members of the Synod, with a heartfelt petition to take the measures necessary to prevent any "liberties" and superficiality, which threaten us with very gravid consequences, and that those who originated them would give a full explanation.

We dare to express to you our faith in your wisdom, and our faith in the providential direction of the Almighty in your decisions.

Let us always remember that the thus far unshakable stand for God's Truth and for the purity of the traditions of the Russian Church by the ROCA was considered a mission laid by God's Providence upon our Church and was a bulwark and buttress for the ever increasing number of soundly thinking Russians in our homeland, for whom **a change in our position will be treason and ruin, for which our consciences will be held accountable.**

And they do suffer there; they are even killed. They are CONFESSORS and we are namely WITH THEM, and NOT with the false leadership of the Patriarchate, who's policies are far from those of the Church.

Your Eminences humble servants,

Bishop Barnabas  
Archpriest Michel de Castelbajac  
Archpriest Paul Puarie  
Archpriest Radu Apostolescu  
Archpriest Constantin Fedorov  
Archpriest Bozidar Patronogic  
Archpriest Nicholas Soldatenkoff  
Archpriest Benjamin Joukoff

Archpriest Michel Goudkoff  
Priest Christo Petko  
Priest Nicholas Semenoff  
Priest Quentin de Castelbajac  
Priest Nikolas Apostolescu  
Protodeacon Serge Vsevolozhsky  
Protodeacon Germain Ivanoff-Trinadzaty

October 4/17, 1997

## FROM LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX FREE CHURCH

Our editorial office received a copy of a report made by a representative of Reuters news agency, Adam Tanner, which was transmitted on the Internet. Tanner at the end of last summer visited Suzdal and interviewed Archbishop Valentin. The information was posted by "zhiwriter" with the subject heading "What Does the Press Write about Russia", and then follows a headline in bold print: "Russian Bishop, a Rebel Among Rebels, Against Orthodoxy."

Tanner relates that "From a garret above a picturesque church... in Suzdal, Bishop Valentin commands a rebel empire vigorously challenging the authority of the Moscow-based Orthodox Church."

As Archbishop Valentin said, "The Moscow Patriarchate is not involved in the rebirth of Russia and Orthodoxy. They just want to open up businesses, sell alcohol, trade oil, and deal in another items."

It seems, that this journalist is not sympathetic with Archbishop Valentin (in any case, as can be seen from the headline of his story, he has little understanding of Church matters), but still recognizes that some 100 parishes, scattered between Siberia and South Russia, indeed follow him. As Tanner says: "The 58 year old Valentin has mounted the most formidable challenge inside Russia to the Moscow based Orthodox Church since the collapse of Communism opened the way for a mass spiritual revival." He also informs us, based on his interview with Archbishop Eulogy (Moscow Patriarchate), that the latter complains about Archbishop Valentin saying that "for eight years he has poisoned his church. Valentin was nothing and a nobody in the church, but has given himself authority and a title. Instead of serving his church he wants to judge it, which is completely wrong and in violation of church canons."

Tanner concludes his report by saying: "Valentin's success in getting other congregations to join the Church Abroad posed a serious challenge to the Patriarchate, which was damaged by documents" showing its collaboration with the KGB, scandals with duty-free machinations, cheating, dishonest trade and stories with several banks, including even an Italian one, the Banca di Roma.

## CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN BISHOPS OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND THE LATVIAN FREE CHURCH

The Daugavpils city newspaper "Dinaburg" in ## 332-333 of November 11 published a letter of Archbishop Alexander of the MP to Bishop Viktor of the Russian Orthodox Free Church and his answer to it. The letter of the MP Archbishop is a reaction to an interview which Bishop Viktor gave to radio broadcasters in Canada. Below, we publish both of these documents. Both letters are accompanied by photographs of the hierarchs. Bishop Viktor has a nice broad, thick beard, while Archbishop Alexander has only a mustache and a small very short beard on his chin.

### A letter from Archbishop Alexander:

Brother in Christ, Viktor!

We sincerely appeal to you in the hope of reconciling you to Holy Christ's Church.

The time has come to stop the God-opposing attitude of your soul. Fighting against the Church is the path to perdition. Sadly, your slanderous "letters" and your stubborn activities, unrestrained by any morals or logic, are an obvious testimony to this. All your powers are directed not constructively, but destructively. The godless Bolsheviks slandered, persecuted and destroyed [buildings of] the Holy Church. Today it is you that does this. The Church is holy and blameless, although within her there might be sinful people. But the Church in her sacraments is in constant unity with the Heavenly Triumphant Church, because the Head of the whole Church is Christ. And "every branch" that breaks away from the true vine -- Christ's Church -- dries up. Every one who falls away from Holy Church -- no matter what he calls himself -- is spiritually dead and fruitless (Jn.15: 1,2,4,6).

You cannot create an Orthodox Church, because she is not created by man. She is created once and forever and to the end of the ages. "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16: 18). And this truth is visible even today. Dozens of icons stream myrrh in Hermitage of the Transfiguration of Christ, in a Riga monastery, in churches of Riga, Elgava, in Boris and Gleb Cathedral; many hundreds of witnesses have seen all this. Is this not a proof of the sanctity of our mother Church and the presence in her of plentiful gifts of the Holy Spirit? And you continue to insult and curse the Holy Church, yet the Lord said that "whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." Our Holy Orthodox Church is recognized by all the Patriarchs and the Local Churches.

Which Local Orthodox Church recognizes you personally?

During the three and a half years of your service to the Church you received awards, which are usually given for 15 years of service. Nobody offended you or insulted you, in contradistinction to what you are doing, and you know this well. And transfers in the Church always existed and will exist for sake of economia.

But most importantly, within your Mother Holy Church you have received a spiritual birth (a rebirth) through holy Baptism. The Holy Church is your spiritual mother, within her you have been tonsured and received the great dignity of priesthood.

So what believing person would dare to spit on his mother and throw stones at her? Unfortunately, you do. And our Spiritual Mother Holy Church has suffered so much, thousands of New Martyrs and Confessors, and destroyed churches and monasteries. Our Church was totally oppressed, but she revived and calls you to reconciliation and repentance. And where are those "churches," which were inspired by the godless government after 1917? Their memory "shall pass away with a great noise."

Think long and hard. Show humility and offer the Church your repentance. Be reborn and from Saul become Paul. The Holy Church, waits for you like a child-loving Mother and the Lord and the Holy Church will pardon you and will accept you repentance with love.

With love in Christ, Alexander, Archbishop of Riga and all Latvia, the Members of the Synod, 12 signatures.

**COMMENTARY:** This letter of Archbishop Alexander presents an interesting document, especially near its end. He quite correctly states that the Church in Russia suffered from atheists, speaks of thousands (and they are not thousands, but hundreds of thousands) of holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, but does not even hint that it is namely his hierarchy that refuses to glorify them and just recently declared them to be outside of the Church!

In asking Bishop Viktor "and where are those 'churches', inspired by the godless government after 1917" and answering that "their memory 'shall pass away with a great noise' " -- Archbishop Alexander presented a splendid proof of the spiritual vacuum and uncanonicity of the Moscow Patriarchate. The whole world (excluding only the hierarchy of the MP) knows that none other than he who was "inspired by the godless government", the atheist Stalin, in 1943 appointed the traitor to the Church Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky as Patriarch! One thing is certain: their memory has already started to perish and without doubt, in due time it "will pass away with a great noise."

#### The epistle of Bishop Viktor in reply.

Venerable Archbishop of the Moscow Patriarchate Alexander Kudriashev!

In August 1994 a group of Orthodox believers and clergy, guided by the 15th canon of the Second Council of Constantinople, left a jurisdiction under your leadership as heretical and considers this departure to be honorable!

Ten independent Orthodox communities have established a Latvian Orthodox Free Church in accordance with the indisputably canonical regulation of Patriarch Tikhon from Nov. 20, 1920 # 362.

Abbot Viktor, elevated to the rank of bishop by the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Free Church reestablished Apostolic succession in Latvia, which had been interrupted since the time of Patriarch Tikhon and Archbishop John (Pommer).

Previously, in 1992-1993, a spiritual community of Christians who did not agree with your methods of governing the Church, namely Archimandrite Cyril (Borodin), rector of Holy Trinity of Zadvinsk Church in Riga, Priest-monk Ambrose, Priest-monk Constantine, left you and established parishes under the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad; Assistant Secretary of the Synod, Priest V. Svist, after exiting, established Greek-Catholic parishes and so on.

All of them, since the day of their departure are in no way dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate and your authority does not include them and does not have ecclesiastical standing

In Orthodox jurisdictions, as with twin-brothers, there is one Mother, but the body and life are different.

In Germany there are 10 Orthodox jurisdictions, in England 15, in Russia 7, in Israel a multitude. This does not prevent believers from living in peace and tolerance. As is said: friendship is friendship, but service is service. Who of those are more zealous for God has been being proved for some 2000 years. There is plenty of room under heaven. The Lord has the right to judge, not we, human beings burdened by sins. The disintegration of Church structures, as well as of the superstructure of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Moscow Patriarchate, which was established by the Bolsheviks in 1943, is quite according to natural law. Everything that is not of God is subject to decay.

It is not by accident that your clergyman from the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Elgava, Abbot Theophan, remarked: "The myrrh that appears (on icons in your churches) is the grief that comes from not living according to Christian virtues, but according to materialistic views" (from the newspaper "SM" of June 6, 1997).

Your letter to me is not the result, I hope, "of great joy." The independent Latvian government gives the Free Church the opportunity of obtaining the status of a legal entity, according to paragraph 10, part 1, of the Law "on Religious Organizations" and to be equal with you. Protection of the government gives to believers the right not to violate the 30th Apostolic canon.

With gratification we note your willingness to agree to discontinue a senseless conflict, which has gone on now for more than three years, with brothers in the faith and your equals in legal matters.

Sincerely, Viktor, Bishop of Daugavpils and Latvia, Head of the Latvian Orthodox Free Church.

## AN INTERESTING STATEMENT

The newspaper "The Jerusalem Post" of Nov. 12, 1997, reported the arrival in Israel of a well known priest of the Moscow Patriarchate, Fr. George Edelstein, who is the father of the "Assimilation Minister" Yuli Edelstein. He came to participate in a symposium organized by the international Jewish organization B'nai B'rith and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The theme of this symposium was "The Impact of Religion at the End of Twentieth Century."

Fr. George Edelstein has a Jewish father and Russian mother, and became a Christian together with his wife, a Jewess, in the 70's. His son apostacized from Orthodoxy, became an observant Jew and has achieved a career to the level of minister.

While in Israel, Fr. Edelstein said that his philosophy is that of tolerance and, therefore, he has friends among Christians, Jews, Muslims and even agnostics. He became especially known for his sharp and well documented speeches and writings exposing the crimes of the Moscow Patriarchate. So he did not hesitate to criticize in Israel as well, where he said: "Our leaders are very corrupt and our brothers from the West help to corrupt our leaders by talking only to them. They never talk to the grass roots level." He also questioned the wide spread impression of the rebirth of religion after the fall of Communism, stating that at the beginning people went to church, but by now the number is decreasing.

Everyone who is acquainted with a number of fine statements by Fr. George against the corrupt hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate always involuntarily wonders: what keeps him for so many years in the jurisdiction of this very same corrupt hierarchy? What prevents him from leaving those whom he conscientiously and openly criticizes? One could say that previously he had no choice, but starting with the mid-80's there were more than enough opportunities for choice.

## THE MOST DIFFICULT SERMON OF THE YEAR FOR CONTEMPORARY PASTORS

"The New York Times" of Dec. 24, published on its front page an extended article entitled "Pastors Prepare the Hardest Sermon." This is referring to the sermon for Christ's Nativity. For this article a reporter talked to many pastors, who gave him their ideas about the greatest holiday of Western Christianity. Thus a pastor of "The United Church of Christ" in Hartford said: "I think it is the hardest sermon I have." He has to deliver 3 sermons on Christmas Eve. According to Pastor Kidd, his church fills up with people who are not interested in theological discussions; after all, they came just to listen to carols! Therefore he will talk about how "God has given talents to each person" and sermons should be as short as possible.

A Lutheran pastor in Atlanta plans to speak about "a child" in order to "connect with people's emotions." He will tell them a story about a boy who walked several miles so he can deliver a gift to his teacher and then, on his way back, gave his shoes to a poor woman.

A Presbyterian Pastor Shefer in New York said he will "choose a story -- maybe a classic, or a not well known Christmas story -- that I think conveys the Gospel." Last year he read a story by an Episcopalian pastor who spoke not only on Nativity, but also Good Friday. "If pastor has any acting talent at all, you can do variety of voices. That always amazes kids, and the adults too."

The minister of a "Christian Church on Park Avenue", Harris, during one of his services on Christmas Eve dressed himself as a shepherd who stood at the manger. The kids loved it!

A Catholic priest in New York will appeal to his parishioners "to believe in God and to believe in yourself as someone loved by God. Every individual person has something to bring to make the world a better place."

Rev. Rachel Simeon of "United Methodist Church" will talk about light. "Right after the last Sunday of Advent, we start to get incrementally more light. It fits so nicely within the Christmas story and the coming of the light in the religious sense."

These are just a few examples of thoughts from contemporary clergy of Western "Christianity." If these are typical of the beliefs of heretical ministers, what is to be expected from their parishioners?

It is interesting to note that the on day of the celebration of Christ's Nativity these ministers meticulously avoid mentioning His name in any way.

## A "DIALOGUE" OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE WITH THE MUSLIMS

A computer source reported on December 23 on the first "dialogue" of the Moscow Patriarchate with Muslims. In Teheran the first meeting of a joint committee was held, which on the part of the Patriarchate was chaired by Archpriest Victor Petlyuchenko (a prominent person in the Department for External Church Relations of the MP) and the head of the Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, Ayatollah Taskhiri.

The Iranian government, as well as the Moscow Patriarch, greeted this meeting. It discussed matters of proselytism, war and peace and also the continuation of dialogues between communities in Russia and the Muslims. Measures were adopted against "the non-admission of exploitation of religious feelings for fueling enmity."

The committee "condemned proselytism, the promoting of religion by means of violence, threats and dishonesty which ruin inter-religious peace and contradict human freedom." Both groups also condemned "pseudo-missionary activities" (interesting -- what does this mean) and economic and cultural elitism.

The next meeting for a "dialogue" (that is, instead of preaching Orthodoxy) will be held in Moscow in 1998. The theme will be: "Peace and Justice: Islamic and Orthodox Christian Views."

On St. Nicholas Day the Moscow delegates served in St. Nicholas Cathedral in Teheran, which was taken over by the Moscow Patriarchate when the ROCA could not find a priest willing to be appointed to this parish.

## A BLASPHEMOUS FILM IN RUSSIA

According to an article in the San Francisco newspaper "Russian Life" of December 13, an exceptionally blasphemous American film "The Last Temptation of Christ" was broadcast in Moscow. The television network which ran this film at the highest rated evening time belongs to a banker Gousinsky. The paper noticed, not without a reason, that the mayor of Moscow, Luzhkov, who used the taxpayers' money to erect the Christ the Saviour Cathedral and stands with a lighted candle during some solemn services, did not protest this outrageous blasphemy even with one word. Protests from believers started some 6 months ago.

The Moscow Patriarchate sharply criticized the showing of such a film and Patriarch Alexis in the name of the Russian Church issued an official protest and appealed to Yeltsin, Luzhkov and Parliament to take measures to prevent such an insult to believers' feelings in Russia. Yet, the contemporary press and so-called media, not only in Russia, but also throughout whole world, which for a long time has been almost totally in the hands of ferocious haters of Christ's Church, in no way paid any attention to the protests of the Church as well as those of tens of thousands of believers who gathered at "Ostankino" (the Russian tv network headquarters) on the day of the film's viewing.

"Russian Life" quite reasonably believes that this insult to the Orthodox Church with her millions of believers is reason enough to raise a Church-wide protest in the form of church processions and anathemas of the blasphemers. That far, the Moscow Patriarchate, certainly, will not go, and she restricted herself only to a very reasonable written protest.

## LIKE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE LIKE

Our editors received a translation of a letter to the Georgian Catholicos Ilia, written by four Mt. Athos Monasteries with the following content (The translation of this letter was made in Georgia and in the process of publishing it we have edited it for grammar.):

"To His Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch of all Iberia, Vladyka Ilia II, 18-6-97

"With filial love we inform your Beatitude that sad news has reached us concerning the unlawful actions of a would-be bishop, Cyprian of Fili and Attica, in a region which is within the authority of your venerable throne and that he has already persuaded a part of your monastic brotherhood to sever eucharistic communion with the Georgian Church entrusted to you and, in addition, has referred to the supposed support of the Holy Mountain. We feel obliged to certify by this letter and the seal of the Holy Mountain, with great sadness, pain of heart and indignation, that the above bishop has no ecclesiastical communion with the Holy Mountain. He departed from the Holy Greek Church in a schismatic manner. We inform you that this matter will be carefully considered by the brotherhood of Holy Mountain and will report to you in more detail in writing.

"Meanwhile we express our sympathy and solidarity with you, your flock and your God-preserved Church in this period of a difficult ordeal.

"We ask for the God-inspired prayers of Your Beatitude and with greatest humility: The government of the Holy Mountain of Athos: Protos (chairman): Proigumen of Iveron, Kalinik; of Pantocrator: Schema-monk Gevrasios; of Philotheos: Schema-monk Siluan; of Simonopetra: Schema-monk Justin."

COMMENTARY: This letter from the "Government of Holy Mountain of Athos" arouses a number of doubts. One can only consider it to be the letter of 4 Athonite monasteries, unfortunately known in Mt. Athos for precisely their liberalism, from among the existing 20 (and only all of them together comprise the Athonite "government"). Undoubtedly, they wanted to make clear that they do not recognize Cyprian, but their servile letter to Ilia, who cruelly persecutes the majority of Georgian clerics only for their stand in Orthodoxy, does not bring to the authors any honor, but just the opposite -- disgrace.

At the same time we received a copy of an interesting letter from Archbishop Abraham of Sagaredzho and Gurdzhaani, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations, Rector of the Ecclesiastical Seminary and Academy in Tblisi, to the Head of the village of Patardsueli dated Nov. 20, 1997.

About this archbishop the Protosyner Andrew Boroda (one of the leaders of anti-ecumenical movement) writes the following: "This man [Archbishop Abraham] was in his day a prominent leader (in Georgia) in the *Komsomol* (Leninist Youth League). Later he was Secretary of the Committee of the [Communist] Party at the large, secret, military electronics factory, MIION which fulfilled military contracts. I am not certain how he joined the Church, most likely 'on assignment from the Party.' He studied for two years in Regensburg (Germany) at the Roman Catholic Institute for the Eastern Churches... There are constant rumors of his collaboration with the KGB, and this seems quite possible, but I have not seen any documents confirming the fact."

This archbishop writes: "I wish to inform you of the following concerning some so-called clergy functioning in the village of Patardzeuli.

"On May 20 of this year the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church banned several clergymen from serving due to their lawless actions and attempts to introduce schism into the Church.

"Some of these suspended clergy have acquired a house in the village of Patardzeuli, from which they are continuing their anti-Church activities, which at the same time contradict state and national interests.

"It has come to our attention, that they have attempted to enter our churches and monasteries, which is absolutely inadmissible.

"As the ruling hierarch of the Diocese of Sagaredzho and Gurdzhaani, I appeal to you that you not permit their entry into our churches.

"It is likewise undesirable that any building or land be allotted to them.

"We have appealed in writing to the local officials of the Sagaredzho Region that appropriate measures be taken.

"Respectfully yours, + Abraham

#### DESECRATION OF A MOSCOW CHURCH IN OUR DAYS

The newspaper "Trud" of Dec. 24th reported that in Moscow on Butyrski Val St. # 26 a church attached to an orphanage for destitute boys and women was desecrated. The church of this orphanage, dedicated to St. Alexander of Constantinople, very surprisingly, remained in good condition from 1921 until now. Probably, in hope of better times, someone's careful hands covered the mosaic floor with tiles, and the frescoes were shielded with plywood. Today this ancient building including the church (listed as an architectural monument) has been sold in 1992 to some commercial company. It started right away "remodeling." Workers' hammers destroyed the domes of the church as well as all the frescoes. Inside a platform was constructed for a second floor. The barbarians also completely destroyed the unique mosaic floors. Despite numerous protests from Moscow citizens, the brutish alteration of this building continued. Even some publicizing of it in the American press did not help. The rooms of the church and orphanage were converted into an "international business center" with a restaurant, bar and conference rooms. Then this desecrated church was sold to a commercial bank, which converted both the sanctuaries into teller areas for their clients.

In this case not only a church was desecrated, but the graves of two honored citizens of Moscow - the merchants and benefactors Alexander Zolotorevsky and Gabriel Minaev, who were buried under the church floor. They donated to the city several apartment houses, school buildings, hospitals and almshouses.

How can this scandalous desecration of a church in our days remain totally unprotected on the part of Moscow Patriarchate and Mayor Luzhkov? It is impossible to assume that they knew nothing of this blasphemy.

#### ARCHEOLOGISTS FIND A STONE ON WHICH ACCORDING TO TRADITION THE VIRGIN MARY RESTED

A newspaper, "The Jerusalem Post" of Nov. 10th reported that Jewish archeologists Rina Avner and Yuval Baruch rather accidentally discovered the ruins of a huge octagonal church in the Holy Land with an stone in the center which is slightly above ground level and is 2 x 4 meters.

In 1992 while widening a road, workers found part of a mosaic floor, but did not attach to it any importance. Only now, when a contractor illegally put in water pipes, was this valuable archeological find discovered.

A church tradition from the 4th century testifies to a huge church at a place which became known as "kathisma" (seat) which was built around a stone on which the Holy Theotokos rested when she went with her betrothed Joseph to register in Bethlehem, prior to Christ's Nativity. This place is not mentioned in the Gospels, but we learn that even in the 2nd century it was known. Located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the stone is approximately 8 km from the latter and 5 km from Jerusalem. This site belongs to the Jerusalem Patriarchate and was considered a very sacred place, but was demolished in the 8th or 9th century and then completely forgotten, yet the mosaic floor has been very nicely preserved. Patriarch Diodoros visited these excavations, saying that "this great discovery has historical, religious and ethnic significance."

The leader of the excavations Rina Avner has no doubts that this place is indeed an ancient place sacred to Christians.

Most certainly, in view of the 2000th anniversary of the Nativity of Christ, this stone will again become a place of pilgrimage. At present 2 and a half million pilgrims come annually, but by the year 2000, the government expects that this number will reach at least 5 million.

The Israeli government started to worry quite some time ago about such multitudes coming and Uri Mor, a director of the Department for Christian Communities of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is quite surprised by the inactivity of Christians in the Holy Land. As he told a reporter of "The Jerusalem Post" as far back as October, 1997, "I don't understand why they aren't doing anything, such a short time before the year 2000." Mor pointed out that in many places there are no public facilities for such a multitude of pilgrims. The Ministry of Tourism offered financial aid to some religions to be able to make preparations, but received no response.

The spokesman for the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, Abu-Nassar, said that he agrees they are late in preparing for the jubilee, but time was needed to reach an agreement among different Christian denominations.

In connection with the forth-coming celebrations in the city of Bethlehem there will be some preparations and, most importantly, the Basilica of the Nativity, which is in rather poor shape, will be repaired. The last repairs were made in 1920.

#### EXPLOSION IN THE BUILDING OF ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

During night of December 3rd the residence in Istanbul of the Ecumenical Patriarch was attacked by a bomb, thrown by fanatic Muslims. The roof of the building was damaged and windows broken. It is the third bombing of the Patriarchate in the last four years.

Patriarch Bartholomew was not in his residence at the time of the blast, but one of the deacons who serves the Patriarchate was seriously wounded. Broken glass was scattered over the marble stairway all the way to the cathedral entrance.

The police believe that the Turkish extremists were upset by the success of the Patriarch's last trip to America.

#### A MASS GRAVE DISCOVERED IN NORTHERN KARELIA

The newspaper of the Greek Archdiocese in the US, "Orthodox Observer" for December, 1997, reported that some 240 km north of St. Petersburg in a forest a mass grave, in which were the bodies of 1111 victims, was found. All were killed by a bullet in the back of the head. Among those killed, according to the archives of the Moscow police, were Archbishops Damian of Kursk and Peter of Samara, also Bishops Nicholas of Tambov and Alexis of Voronezh.

It is considered that they were murdered between October 27 and November 4, 1937, on orders from Stalin. In this mass grave are also some bodies of Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy.

According to the authors of this article, in 1995, on the basis of the documentation of various locations, it was established that the atheists killed 200 thousand clergy of various religions. Yet this information is far from complete. In the summer of 1989 the Russian language newspaper "Novoye Russkoye Slovo" published an important and very well documented article by Okxana Antich. She reported that in 1988 Patriarch Pimen established a committee chaired by Metropolitan Vladimir to "rehabilitate" the clergy persecuted by the atheists, but the committee did not produce any results, and Metropolitan Vladimir, who gave an interview to a paper "Facts and Arguments", answered its reporter's questions quite unwillingly and tersely. Yet a reporter Lukyanchenko, who happens to be more "informed" on the question of the victims of Stalin's terror, said that between 1918 and 1938 250 bishops alone were subjected to "repression."

The writer Soloukhin declared that "there is data that before the Revolution in Russia there were 360 thousand priests, but by the end of 1918, only 40 thousand remained, and a historian of religion S. Korolev states that by 1919, 320 thousand priests was exterminated. In the same spirit of defense of the perished hierarchs and clergy, a whole series of writers and public figures came forth publicly, including the agnostic Sakharov." But, as Oxana Antich concludes in her article: "While writers step forward for the sake of the rehabilitation of Church persons and believers, the activity of the Church Committee so far has made no important contribution to this important matter of principle."

This she wrote in 1989, but one can say that "the train has not yet left the station." The Moscow Patriarchate stubbornly and insistently stays quiet about the unspeakable crimes of the atheists, starting with Lenin through the days of Khrushchev and his heirs. Is not the reason why it so stubbornly refuses to glorify the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church, that a substantial part of her hierarchy, starting with Patriarch "Drozdov" himself and a majority of his Synod during their collaboration with the KGB, participated in those crimes?

## A LETTER FROM THE MATUSHKA OF MURDERED FR. ALEXANDER ZHARKOV

When the martyric death of Fr. Alexander Zharkov from St. Petersburg became known, a collection was made in the ROCA parish of our Lady of Kazan in Newark, N.J. to help out the family of this priest. Just recently the Matushka of the reposed Fr. Alexander sent the following letter:

"Greetings dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

"This is Matushka Valentina writing to you. I want to thank you for your kindness, love and prayers. I believe, that your prayers helped us to cope with this sorrow. Truly, wondrous are the works of God. Following His holy will, Fr. Alexander joined the Church Abroad so he would have those who would pray for him after his repose. We often spoke with him, wondering how much longer the Lord will suffer our lawlessness. And because of his prayers He still patient with us. After he died, I received an answer to this question. While there are still people like all of you, the world will live. Once more I thank you very much for your spiritual and material support and I prostrate myself before all of you for myself and for Fr. Alexander. Please do not forget us in your prayers.

"Greetings with Christ's Nativity and the New Year. Wishing you good health from the Lord God,

"Sincerely yours, M. Valentina and Larissa.

"If anyone wishes to write, I would be happy to answer. My address is: 188350 Gatchina; Leningradskaya Oblast; Ul. Urizkago d.28, kv. 59; Zharkova, V. S

Some time ago, "Church News" reported on the murder of Fr. Alexander. As a result of this information we received the following donations from our readers to help out the needy family of this priest: from Christina Kapranopoulos \$10.00; from Vladimir Krivsky \$60.00 and from G. Glinka \$80.00. Total received: \$150.00. This sum by a secure means was already sent to Russia. Let us hope. Matushka will get it for the holidays.