



CHURCH NEWS

AN INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION OF ORTHODOX CHURCH OPINION
December, 2000
Vol. 12, No. 9 (91)

Supported by the voluntary contributions of its readers.
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EPISTLE FROM METROPOLITAN VITALY, FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROCOR

Beloved brothers and sisters;

Now that the meeting of the Council of Bishops, or Sobor, is over, I consider it my duty as First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, to assure all of you that our Church, which has followed along the straight path of Christ these 80 years, will not turn aside into any dubious byways. On the other hand, we cannot be indifferent and silent as regards question affecting what is happening on the spiritual level in Russia.

The Moscow Patriarchate has now glorified the Royal Martyrs, whom we glorified long ago, and we have sent thousands of icons of them throughout the whole of Russia. In this way the whole of Russia became aware of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Now many people cannot help wondering why the Moscow Patriarchate did not simply recognize our glorification and adopt it for itself. The answer is very simple. To recognize our glorification would mean recognizing our Church Abroad as a lawful Church, which had left the borders of the fatherland and existed these 80 years beyond borders of Russia, with the blessing of the last lawful Patriarch of Russia, Patriarch Tikhon. This is something, which the Moscow Patriarchate to this very day cannot and will not do. Meanwhile believers in Russia demand a glorification. So, the Moscow Patriarchate decided to perform an act of political machination and undertake its own glorification, with the sole aim of quieting the voice of its believers and thereby managing to prolong its own existence. In other words, the Moscow Patriarchate, which is the direct heir of the Soviet executioners, arrayed in the fleece of an innocent sheep put on over its wolf's hide, is now glorifying the murdered and tormented victims of its own Communist leaders. Before that, for years the Moscow Patriarchate was in full concord with the Bolsheviki and the rulers in the USSR who exterminated hundreds of thousands of believers. Despite this it was clear that the Russian people could not be torn away from the Church of Christ. That Pascha would always remain the people's greatest festivity. The red Easter eggs, kulich and cheese-pascha would adorn everyone's table at Easter time and even the state bakeries would sell the special Easter kulich while calling it sweetened bread. Seeing all this, Stalin was brought to a state a wild fury and said, "Obviously we can't turn all Russians into Bolsheviki; so we and only we will give them a Patriarch, as well as all the clergy they need and we'll open churches, which we will sell to them and increase taxes the whole time until they have no more means to exist."

The silent answer of believers in Russia to this was that they started to pray in their homes, and in each such apartment they made a house church with an iconostasis and icons and even made their own incense using the resin from pine trees and drops of rose oil. Churches like this exist up to the present day. Despite the wonderful church buildings of the Patriarchate, the sumptuously arrayed clergy and splendid choirs, many believers prefer the crowded conditions of these apartments. Even at Pascha, when the processions are taking place in the official churches to the resounding peals of bells, there are people in apartment buildings, in corridors, quietly going single file with candles in their hands, and singing in whisper "Christ is Risen"! You cannot but ask yourself, "Who are these people"? They are believers who, while living in Russia alongside all the others, understand and feel precisely what the Moscow Patriarchate is, and what is its purpose and direction. These people look to us, seek our protection and understanding, Up to this day they have received this from us and I want to assure all the children of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia that nothing has changed. As we have continued fearlessly on our path these 80 years, so we shall continue further. Our path is a very lonely one, because we stand for the Truth, but fear not, little flock, the Lord is with us! And if the Lord is with us, who shall be against us?

Now I want to return to the questions which are so disturbing to many of you. Firstly I want to express my profound gratitude to all of you for your trust and love towards me, and in order to reassure you I want to explain the following. The Epistle from the Council of Bishops, in accordance with the governing of a Council – an Assembly, or Sobor (since the very word "Sobor" means a common decision) must be signed by all. If any of the bishops has his own personal opinion, he has the right to express it separately in writing. The fact that I signed the Epistle is far from meaning that I am in agreement with each and every statement in it and I know that there are other bishops who thought as I do, but to compose an Epistle with which all would be completely satisfied is virtually impossible.

There is one further point which is of great concern to many of you. This is the establishment of a Synodal Committee to discuss questions of unity of the Russian Orthodox Church. I myself questioned what unity could be under consideration, when it should be quite clear to all the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which has preserved its spiritual freedom these 80 years, will never proceed to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate.

And so, faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, know that our Church has not betrayed its path and that we also, if we desire our salvation, must follow her path. There will be many trails and temptations, but remain as always faithful to the Lord and His Church, and do not forget that the most terrible thing for us is to depart from the Truth – which is to say, from Christ Himself.

Metropolitan Vitaly

Feast of the Presentation of the Mother of God in the Temple

November 21st / December 4th, 2000

The above Epistle by the First Hierarchy of the ROCOR testifies indisputably testifies that **he himself** indeed in no way has changed his convictions regarding the Moscow Patriarchate. Yet it is tragic that this epistle quite clearly and definitely showed that **the Episcopate in all its fullness has departed from the former path and in no way any longer adheres to its former traditions and convictions.** It is very sad that at the moment when the ill-starred Epistle was to be signed,

there was not a single member close to the aged First Hierarch who would remind him that the signature under any kind of document is a statement of agreement with the proposed text. Those, who disagree with the content of the document **do NOT sign it and in such cases, there is attached to the minutes a "separate opinion"** which explains the reason for disagreement. Unfortunately, among all the Council's members, Bishop Barnabas alone refused to sign this Epistle, although, there were several of them who did indeed disagree with it. Some members of the Council committed this outrageous treason quite knowingly and some due to advanced age or simply for lack of civil courage signed the document, although they disagreed with it. When one rather young bishop was asked how could he sign on to such treason he frankly answered: "But they would have thrown me out"!

According to wishes of the First Hierarch this Epistle was to be given out on the day of Synod Cathedral's Feast on December 10th, immediately after the Divine Liturgy which was served by Archbishop Laurus and Bishop Gabriel. It seems, that according to their order, the pile of Epistles disappeared at the end of the Liturgy. On the insistence of First Hierarch's Secretary one of the servants in the Synod found it hidden in the Sanctuary. The Epistle was given out at the end of Trapeza in the Synod's hall.

REACTION OF MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE TO DECISIONS OF ROCOR'S COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

As could be expected, the decisions of the last ROCOR's Council of Bishops were met with the full approval on the part of Moscow Patriarchate. A recently established information agency "Interfax" in its report of November 8th called the decisions of the Council to be "revolutionary".

Quoting the words of Alexis Ridiger, the agency reported: "A possible dialogue and the subsequent reunification of the domestic and foreign parts of the Russian Church will be great events in the spiritual and national life of Russia. In this way the spiritual and national division of the Russian people will be overcome and a complete and definitive reconciliation will be achieved between the Russian people in Russia and the Russian émigrés".

A newspaper "Moskovskoye Vremia" ("Moscow Time") of November 9th follows in these footsteps in its approval of decisions of the ROCOR. The article starts with the words: "The Center of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, with its headquarters in New York, published a declaration which demonstrates that it has in a significant manner softened its position toward the Moscow Patriarchate".

The newspaper "Radonzh" in issue 15-16 (105) reported that when speaking at a Moscow Bishops' Council on August 13th, Ridiger pointed out the necessity "to overcome as soon as possible the separations which were resulting in a tragedy of our people in XX century." He also said that "today we turn our voice to all Russian people, who are in Diaspora, with a call for unity".

It seems, that the ROCOR's Council obediently answered this call of Ridiger/"Drozdv".

SIGNIFICANT DECLARATION "FROM CHANCERY OF SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF ROCOR"

Since the conclusion of the Council of Bishops, which met in October of this year, an unprecedented phenomenon has been observed: from various quarters one hears criticism, both of the Council's epistle itself, and of other documents adopted by the Council.

Such actions prompt us to remind all the members of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia of the meaning of conciliarity (sobornost) within the Church of Christ. It is impermissible for everyone laymen, clergymen, much less hierarchs to violate the spirit of conciliarity. The council of Bishops, the highest ecclesiastical authority within our Church, has given utterance to its conciliar word. Now it is up to us, the law-abiding children of the Church. The Council's word must be assimilated by us, pondered and accepted for fulfillment in our life. With time, questions may arise which require further examination. It may also become clear that the people of the Church do not accept one or another position. But at this moment, at the very beginning, one must not dispute the correctness of the Council's word, taking opposing positions, and thus undermining the authority of the Council of Bishops.

During the sessions of the Council, all the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church were fully able to express their convictions, to register their agreement or disagreement with any point under discussion. But after the Council, no bishop has the right to issue statements containing individual views, which have appeared since the Council. Now, when the common word of the Episcopal assembly has been accepted and promulgated, all personal views must be set aside in deference to the Council's judgment. Otherwise, statements containing individual views will bring about the destruction of the very bases of our conciliar consciousness. (It seems, that this whole paragraph is a remark to the First Hierarch, who issued an Epistle, contradicting the one of Bishops Council's). The storm which at present assails our Church is a temptation, a testing of our stand in Truth. This loyalty could be observed with true clarity during the workings of the Council, which were conducted with brotherly love, in the spirit of true conciliarity. Truth must not be encroached upon or belittled to please any ideological party. Every attempt to apply such pressure is, in and of itself, an anticonciliar action directed against the foundations of our Church, and is destructive to very order of the Church.

Over the course of 80 years, we have striven faithfully to preserve the Russian Orthodoxy handed down to us by our fathers. Now, when new developments may be seen taking place in the much-suffering land of Russia, we must all the more refrain from betraying it; we cannot remain neutral amid the multifaceted activity of the Church on Russia in the homeland and in the Diaspora. During such a period of responsibility it is impermissible to make irresponsible statements

which might trample upon conciliarity, casting the faithful into an abyss of confusion and instability. For then they may rightly ask us: "Whom should we, the children of the Russian Church Outside Russia, believe; what positions should we take?"

For this reason, we ask everyone to calm their passions and pray for our Church, that our Lord, the Chief Shepherd, may grant all of us the strength to stand fast in Truth and righteousness to the end.

Archbishop Laurus, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

28th November/11 December, 2000 # 6/47/117

The whole tone of Archbishop Laurus' declaration in the most obvious manner testifies that the last October ROCOR's Council has drastically altered the entire 80 year course of the Church. Even during most heated period of the unsuccessful effort to destroy the Church Abroad through organizing in San Francisco a lay people's mutiny against the hierarchical principles of the Church, neither Metropolitan Anastassy, nor his successor Metropolitan Philaret never made a declaration which hardly makes a secret of Roman Catholic- or Moscow Patriarchate-like threats to impose sanctions upon the protesters. So long as the Council of Bishops followed the 80 year path of the ROCOR -- the lay people, with extremely rare exceptions, had no reason to be concerned for the future of the Church Abroad. But the last Council with all its resolutions gives ample reason to sound an alarm over the new course of the ROCOR. Actually, a schism in literally every parish of the Church Abroad and as well as in Russia is to be expected and no threats on part of the contemporary hierarchy will be able to stop it. Archbishop Laurus admits "an unprecedented phenomenon" and "criticism from various quarters" in the midst of the flock in Diaspora, but he draws no conclusions about it except to demand an unconditional obedience.

A decision of a Council has an obligatory significance only when it is based upon the confession of the faith of the Holy Fathers of the Church and a scrupulous adherence to canon law. Does His Grace want to tell us, the clergymen and lay people, that the radical change of the ROCOR's course and the acknowledgment of the Moscow Patriarchate as a canonical Russian Orthodox Church as well as the degrading appeal to be accepted into eucharistic communion with one of the most prominent ecumenists next to the Ecumenical Patriarch -- does indeed correspond with the teaching of the Holy Fathers?

His Grace Archbishop Laurus is concerned that we, the faithful children of the Church Abroad are "taking opposing positions, and thus undermine the authority of the Council of Bishops"! Alas! It has been long since anything is left of that. He hopes that "With time, questions may arise which require further examination". And when, according to the author of this declaration, will all the protesters acquire the right to contend the "common word of the Episcopal assembly"? Only when in the Synod cathedral Ridiger/"Drozdov" will be openly commemorated? Archbishop Laurus also believes, that "It may also become clear that the people of the Church do not accept one or another position". Is it possible that as yet it is not clear to the hierarchy of the ROCOR, that the "church people" actively refused to accept the conciliar decrees and in almost every parish of the Church Abroad there is "unrest and turmoil". It seems that Archbishop Laurus doesn't know that many ages before the council in October there were numerous Councils which were not accepted by the faithful, even when the entire hierarchy betrayed the Holy Fathers teachings. That is exactly what is happening now in the ROCOR. It is very characteristic for the latest Council that, as is clear from the minutes, while changing the whole course of the ROCOR, even one Hierarch would remember his three former First Hierarchs of blessed memory: Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret, who in no way recognized the lawless and heretical Moscow Patriarchate.

If the latest Council had followed the Holy Apostle's instruction: "Remember [your instructors]... who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow" (Hebrews 13:7) it would not have tempted a multitude of faithful Orthodox Christians in Diaspora as well as in Russia. It seems that their Graces, the members of the Council of Bishops didn't give a thought to Christ's word about seducers.

TWO APPEALS FROM THE WESTERN EUROPE CLERGY

We received two appeals from the Western Europe clergy: one is a letter by one of the senior clergy members of this diocese, V. Rev. Benjamin Joukoff and the second -- signed by 10 priests and two protodeacons of the very same diocese. Below is a complete text of both of them.

Beloved brothers and sisters!

The acts of the ROCOR's October Bishops' Council of the current year drove to despair many of the faithful children of our Church causing a difficult temptation. What happened and how could it happen?

The following has happened: at the Council the most important acts were taken to please the Moscow Patriarchate. After a wave of protests on part of the faithful, some members tried to assure us that there was nothing decided regarding the rapprochement with the Moscow Patriarchate. Yet, the reality is quite different. This can be concluded mainly from the Council's Epistle, which was based upon the report of Bishop Evtikhy and also from the appeal to the Serbian Patriarch.

These documents were studied by many, among them stands out the work of the brother/priests Alferoff "A Great Temptation and Disturbance" and "A Letter to Vladyka Metropolitan" by Abbess Mother Juliana.

From this analysis it becomes clear that at our Council there were accepted some particular measures for rapprochement toward the Moscow Patriarchate, as the genuine Russian Church. Moreover, there was applied a wrong evaluation of her acts. As a result, there appeared a callous Epistle in which assurances of our stand in the God's truth

became unconvincing. If one adds to it a move toward sanctions against the troublemakers, then before us there is a picture of actions typical of the Patriarchate itself. And so what does it matter if we do not have a direct indication of uniting with the Moscow Patriarchate, when the Patriarchate is already among us.

One may speculate that many bishops of the Council didn't thoroughly think over what happened, had no chance to analyze the terminology used. Maybe for some there was an unexpected psychological pressure ("My signature," wrote one bishop, "is affixed to the Epistle not because on the Council part of the bishops behaved fresh and a refusal to sign it was equal to creating a schism"). And therefore we have to hope that the Merciful Lord will direct the called bishops to "rightly administer unto thy Churches the word of thy truth" and how to in the future to act properly and not permit our Church to be in the end trampled upon and be deprived of the essence of what is most valuable, with which she so far has been illuminating the whole universe: her spiritual freedom.

How could it all happen? Already in May of 1993 on the Council which was held in Lesna Convent, there were introduced hardly noticeable changes in our relationship toward the Moscow Patriarchate. The bishops decided that the Church in Russia had become free and changed the long used commemoration of "the Orthodox persecuted Episcopate of the Russian Church" into "Orthodox Episcopate of the Russian Church" Which Church was then being referred to? Uncertainty was revealed and a confusion established between the "persecuted Russian Church" of Tikhonites, Josephites and all the catacomb members on one side and the Moscow Patriarchate on the other. It seems very few understood the meaning of what had happened. [Bishop Valentin of Suzdal and Vladimir immediately protested against this change, but with no result, "Ch. N"]. You already know that at that time the MP with assistance of OMON (the militia) already began to seize in Russia the churches which came over to us and our Church became persecuted by the MP. Therefore, the Metropolitan and a number of clergymen never changed the former formula, testifying, that for them the Russian Church is not the MP.

Then the Epistle of the Council held in the same Convent in 1994 clearly established a new course toward the MP.

"We believe," the Epistle stated, "that time has come for seeking a living relationship with all parts of the only Russian Orthodox Church. Moreover, there can be no talk of our unification or submission to the Moscow Patriarchate, but, for the time being, only about the improvement of relationships". Here, as also later, there were used soothing words: "The goal of these conversations in no way can be a compromise between the truth and lie. The unshakable corner stone of our faith is Jesus Christ, the Lord Himself. There can be no communication of the light with the darkness". In other words, we appeared to use a language of double meaning. That was for the very first time in history of our Church.

All these components we find in the latest Council's Epistle of October 2000. But here, the grade of the dislocation toward the MP becomes much more visible to all.

What was the goal of this action? To officially express and insinuate into the mind of the people (this is why, in particular, a special committee was created) that the MP is the genuine Russian Orthodox Church. In return we would receive recognition of our existence on a basis of autonomy. For the first time this concept appeared in 1997 in the "Herald of the German Diocese" and such a perspective was verified by Archbishop Laurus in Villemoisson on July 17th, 1999. Then one thing will follow on another. All the official Churches would recognize us. But we would be deprived of our spiritual freedom and the confessional essence of our Church, as it had been maintained during the length of almost the whole 20th century in the persons of our spiritual leaders and our faithful people, in our saints. Our miraculous icons, and especially New Martyrs with pious Tsar the Martyr Nicholas.

Many do not see it, because they are not used to healthy reactions to lies. Many wholeheartedly believe in the slogan "Ecumenical Orthodoxy", which is spreading among us. In Ecumenical Orthodoxy we would be in communion with the MP and all sorts of Patriarchs who widely commune with the heterodox. Let it not happen!

We may not calm down ourselves by saying that the Epistle of 2000 had just some unfortunate expressions. If we look back over the previous path and the first resolution of 1994, that the MP is a part of the Russian Church, if we remind ourselves that Archbishop Mark twice met with Patriarch Alexis, and that he signed in 1997, together with Archbishop Theophan of Germany a "Declaration" in the name of the Russian Orthodox Church (putting in brackets as the only members the MP and ROCOR), we will be easily convinced that the new course which appeared at our Council is in no way by chance, but a result of prolonged and consecutive acts, no matter what declarations were announced in the mean time, such as "An Appeal to the Russian people," etc.

The action introduced at the last Council also resulted in ecclesiastical re-organizational measures. So, Bishop Michael, who disliked the MP, was retired from the ruling St. Petersburg and Moscow dioceses. While Archbishop Ambrose, a convinced follower of the new course was appointed as ruling Bishop of the Western Europe diocese.

In 1998 Fr. Michael Artzimovitch expressed to a common acquaintance his opinion that the Church Abroad no longer exists, that it is all gone and that now we should follow Archbishops Mark and Ambrose. But we will pray and hope for Lord's mercy, prayers of His Mother and all the Martyrs and Confessors of Russia that the Lord God will not leave us without a consolation.

If we will be accused of disobedience to the conciliar decision regarding the appointment of the ruling bishop, about which we delivered an impassioned appeal, we feel we have a right to say that a decision made in accordance with the new course which has become permissible in our Church does not allow us to carry on the obedience either in abnormal circumstances of Church life or with blind obedience and indifference toward the Church's truth.

We know that according to the indications of the contemporary world, that today for a true Church there awaits the fate of being a tiny flock, and not at all "Ecumenical Orthodoxy" shining with the world's light.

Archpriest Benjamin Joukoff

Dec. 15th, 2000, The Church of All the Saints of Russia, Paris

A CALL FOR JUSTICE AT BISHOPS' COUNCIL (Second letter)

Your Eminences, Your Graces!

With fear of God and a feeling of love toward our Church and her hierarchs we address to you the following concerned appeal:

We humbly beg His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly and Holy Synod of Bishops to understand that we were confronted by a severe question for our conscience and therefore we ask them to listen to our grief and the great disarray in our flock.

It is not for the first time that we have expressed anxiety over the extreme danger at today's Church situation. Unfortunately, the Council has remained deaf to our appeals.

An Ukaze of appointment of Bishop Ambrose as a ruling hierarch for the Western Europe diocese, despite the fact that this Ukaze as yet is not mailed out, we, the undersigned clergymen of the diocese categorically declare our refusal to accept this appointment and, according to the Church canons (Apost. 74 & 75: II Ecum. 6; Carthage 61; Ant. 18) seek the justice of the Bishops' Council at which there could be arranged a confrontation of representatives of clergy and lay people of the diocese and Bishop Ambrose.

We are ready to commit to paper before the Bishops' assembly all the accusations, upon which we base our refusal to commemorate Bishop Ambrose.

1. Bishop Ambrose did not observe the decision of Council of 1983 regarding Ecumenism. These decisions were verified at the Bishops Council of 1998 in which Bishop Ambrose did participate. By this Bishop Ambrose confused the minds of the faithful clergy and violated the authority of the Synod and Metropolitan, which opposes the 34th Apostolic rule.
2. Bishop Ambrose did not fulfill his Episcopal responsibility (episcopos = overseer), which could have prevented treason by a part of the Geneva clergy, despite clear warnings of which he was aware. Just the opposite, he increased it with his ambiguous declarations and acts, which promoted this tragedy (Apost. 58; Cart. 137).
3. Bishop Ambrose in his public declaration contradicts the established principles, in particular, which are stated in the "Normal Parish Statutes" regarding the direction of parish and its organization (see p.II, 7; III, 11; III, 13; III, 14).
4. While ruling the part of diocese which was assigned to him, Bishop Ambrose did not cooperate with his clergy, did not consult with them, but rather, with an impermissible hunger for power, systematically kept them in ignorance regarding his decisions, refusing the necessary information and explanations regarding current matters, by this on many occasions leading the clergy and lay people into confusion and disarray (Statutes of the ROCOR, directive rules for the clergymen IV, 65; VII, 77)

Since this appointment creates today such a reaction in our diocese, would not it be proper to finally consider the clergy's opinion, which was officially consulted during Summer of 1999 and which beforehand expressed a refusal regarding possibility of Bishop Ambrose's appointment.

In view of the above mentioned, we in a spirit of justice hopefully expect a settlement of our case (in sense of 74th Apost. Rule).

We dare to hope for understanding and goodwill on part of our Archpastors, in order to preserve holy Orthodoxy and unity of the Christ's flock.

Asking for your holy prayers and blessing: Archpriest Michel de Castelbajac; Archpriest Paul Puarie; Archpriest Radu Apostolescu; Archpriest Benjamin Joukoff; Archpriest Constantine Fedoroff; Archpriest Michel Goudkoff; Priest Nicholas Semenoff; Priest Christo Petkoff; Priest Quentin de Castelbajac, Priest Serge Wsevolojky, Protodeacon German Ivanoff-Trinadzaty. Nov. 16/229th, 2000 Apostle Mathew.

The Council of Bishops was literally flooded with protests coming from clergymen and laity. It is also known, that of some 5 clergy of the Church Abroad in St. Petersburg the following left: Dean Archimandrite Alexis (Makrinov), Priest Paul Simakov (a publisher of a parish newspaper) and Abbot Varsanophy (Kapralov), a clergyman who left the MP about two years ago. Priest Paul Simakov, in particular, returned to Metropolitan Vitaly the outrageous Epistle with a well-justified covering letter.

The above mentioned clergy stated on the Internet that while asserting "de facto cessation of activity by the First Hierarch, the Synod and Council Of Bishops of the ROCOR, as canonical organs of the Supreme Church Administration" they refuse to accept as ruling Bishop of St. Petersburg appointed over them Bishop Evtikhy, "a bishop, who is inclined to union with the false church"; they proclaim St. Petersburg diocese to be widowed. At the same time, on the basis of Patriarch Tikhon's decree of Nov.7/20th, 1920, they temporarily establish a Diocesan Council, which has in mind to "find a canonical Bishop to hand over to him the rule of the Diocese".

Until the last Council, the St. Petersburg diocese of the ROCOR was considered to be a "bastion" of her parishes in Russia.

"THEY FELL UNDER THEIR OWN ANATHEMA" -- OR THE INGLORIOUS END OF CHURCH ABROAD

In the spring of 1994, the late Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) wrote to the First Hierarch of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Vitaly a sad letter, which started with the words: "For quite some time, actually from the very first days of your leadership of our

Church Abroad, I have followed with much anxiety and pain of heart and watched how fast she started to slide down into the abyss of administrative decay and canonical chaos".

Then Bishop Gregory listed a number of facts which proved his conclusions, and at the end of his letter he turned to the First Hierarchy with an appeal: "It is absolutely necessary for you to turn the rudder of our administration to the direction of observing the canons, while it is still not too late. Do not permit, Vladyko, your name to be associated in the history of the Russian Church not with the continuation of the peaceful construction of church life, but with her rapid and infamous destruction in Russia as well as Abroad".

Alas! His brother bishops did not accept this sound voice of a person who for 55 years was the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops... and the final confirmation of it came at the last Bishops' Council (October 2000) when it was declared that ROCOR was ready to capitulate before her most vicious enemy and merciless persecutor - the Moscow Patriarchate. At the meeting of October 11/24th, Bishops of the Church Abroad resolved:

"The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia considers it to be expedient at present to create at the Synod of Bishops a permanent acting committee for questions of unity of the Russian Church". This is a typical euphemism. Actually this resolution means: It is resolved to create a "committee for matters of union" of the rabbit and boa constrictor. The Moscow Patriarchate does not conceal and never did conceal her intention to swallow the Church Abroad.

Here before us is the "Epistle" which the members of the Council addressed "to the beloved children in the Homeland and Diaspora". It seems that within the whole history of ROCOR there never was published a document which is so cunning, so treacherous toward its own history. Here we read: "...we fervently welcome the prayer of the whole Russian people to all the holy New Martyrs of Russia, and especially to the martyred Imperial Family, henceforth becoming possible thanks to the recognition of their sanctity by the Council of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate."

Every person even a little knowledgeable about the situation in our unfortunate country will see in this passage not a "benevolent sympathy" but ironical pity for the authors of this Epistle. In their "welcoming" the Bishops from Abroad we find the lie of Moscow Patriarchate's propaganda, which has never tired of insisting that her flock consists of up to 80% of Russia's population. While the independent researchers give different figures: the parishioners of "Sergianist" churches hardly amount to 5%, and this is not, by any means, "the whole Russian people".

And in the same paragraph we read such an uneven phrase: "We are likewise encouraged by the adoption of a new social doctrine by that Council, which crosses out the 1927 "Declaration" of Metropolitan Sergius by acknowledging the supremacy of God's commandments over those temporal demands which lead to the violation of religious and moral principles."

And meanwhile, neither Metropolitan Sergius nor his "Declaration" was ever mentioned at the "Jubilee Council" of the Moscow Patriarchate. Moreover, while glorifying the New Martyrs, the "Sergianists" in addition to their "podvig" blasphemously attribute to themselves their own "labors and prayers."

"The Council sends up praise to the Lord for the 'podvig' of the Martyrs and Confessors, through whom Christ's Church became established. Due to this podvig, the self sacrificing labors and prayers of hierarchs, clerics and lay people, our Church was able, in circumstances of need, to revive her confession and ministry" (Resolution of the "jubilee council" of the MP "regarding the internal life and external activity of the ROC").

Besides the "Epistle to the beloved children," the bishops from Abroad also composed a letter addressed to the Serbian Patriarch Pavle, the head of one of the official Churches most involved in Ecumenism. This is even more surprising and sad, since in the summer of the current year the very same Patriarch, in his flattering letter to the Moscow Patriarch, called ROCOR a "church" uncapitalized and with quotation marks, accusing her activity as "uneconomical and deserving of condemnation".

As in the "Epistle to the children", in the letter to the Serbian hierarch there are some words concerning the supposedly "improved church administration in Russia," and on top of this there is a degrading appeal: "We beg Your Holiness not to push us away from liturgical communion with you, because we seek to be able with you to glorify our Savior Christ God with one mouth and one heart."

It seems that while signing this disgraceful document, the ROCOR Bishops simply forgot that it was namely their Church which at the Council of 1983 condemned Ecumenism and proclaimed against it "anathema"... And consequently the authors of the letter to the Serbian Patriarch in the direct sense of the word "fell under their own anathema."

In the letter of Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) to Metropolitan Vitaly which we quoted above, he wrote: "During all the years of the existence of the Church Abroad we enjoyed glory and respect for nothing else but for the uncompromising truthfulness to the canons. We were hated, but no one dared not to respect us. Now we have shown to the whole Orthodox world that the canons for us are an empty sound, and we became a laughing stock in the eyes of all those who have at least something to do with church matters."

And he further writes: "I was a witness and participant of the glorious period of the Church Abroad, and now with pain of heart I look toward what I consider to be her inglorious end."

Archpriest Michael Ardov

THE DIOCESAN CONFERENCE OF THE CLERGY AND LAITY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Archbishop Valentin opened the Diocesan Conference of the clergy and laity of the Russian Orthodox Church on

November 23rd in the city of Suzdal. Participating in the conference, which lasted for three days, were seven bishops (the eighth did not attend due to sickness), more than fifty clergymen, and some seventy-five lay people. Meetings were scheduled between the early Morning and the Evening Services in which the attending clergy took turns participating. In order to mark the "Jubilee Year" a very large number of clergy received some awards. Their Graces Bishops Theodore, Seraphim and Victor were made Archbishops.

The Conference was opened with a heartwarming speech by Archbishop Valentin, who informed the participants of the scheduled consecration of the newly built church and the glorification of the Holy Women of Diveyevo.

Hierodeacon Theophan read a report, supplemented with the commentary of Archbishop Valentin, concerning the ROCOR Council of Bishops. In a short report His Grace Archbishop Victor of Daugavpils and Latvia spoke of his endurance of his diocese's persecution, carried out by the state administration at the instigation of the Moscow Patriarchate. Among the several reports there especially stands out one on the MP Council by Archpriest Michael Ardov. In answer to questions raised by the speakers several clergy and some of the laity came forward.

Two bishops were consecrated during the Conference. The first was Timothy Bishop of Orenburg, in the world Anatoly Sharov, born in 1954 in the Orenburg region. He is a graduate of the historical faculty. The other was Ambrose of Habarovsk, in the world Nicholas Epifanov, born in 1963. Until 1996 he was a clergyman of the MP, when according to his request he retired but was looking for spiritual refuge. In April 2000, being convinced of the uncanonical status of the MP, he applied to be received by the Russian Orthodox Church. With these two consecrations the Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church has at present eight hierarchs.

The high point of this Conference was the festive glorification of the Holy Women of Diveyevo. In connection with this decision, the Synod of the ROAC proclaimed the following act:

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

The acts of the Synod of Bishops concerning the glorification of the Holy Women of Diveyevo among the hosts of Saints:

Our God-loving flock, beloved in the Lord our Savior!

During these concluding days of the end of the twentieth century and the dawn of the new one, we the Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church are called by the will of God's good providence to accomplish now the rite of glorification of the Holy Women of Diveyevo among the hosts of the Saints .

Before the proclamation, desired by all of us, of "It pleased the Holy Spirit and us..." we want all of you to carefully consider the meaning of the glorification of these holy ascetics, that you would preserve it in your memories. The Holy Women of Diveyevo lived in times which in the first place set the stage for our godless twentieth century which is dim and cruel in every respect. Therefore the example of their sacrificial, holy life has also inspired and set the stage for the magnanimous, martyric and confessing feats of many of our co-citizens during times of ferocious persecutions.

During the last decade all of us were witnessing the arguments in our society in connection with the glorification among the hosts of the saints of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. Special arguments were concerned with the glorification of the Imperial New Martyrs and those who were martyred for the sake of the Faith, who refused to accept Sergius's "Declaration." But we have to remember that these arguments and misunderstandings arose and happened in the depths of the Moscow Patriarchate. They were foreign to our faithful Orthodox people who deeply venerate the whole assembly of the Holy New Martyrs of Russia and who had no doubts about the sainthood of the Imperial Martyrs.

At the same time we have to take notice of the fact that these arguments distracted the faithful from the memory and the pious veneration of many zealots of the XIXth and XXth centuries.

We find confirmation of this in that until now the ascetic women of Diveyevo have not been glorified among the hosts of the Saints. Thanks be to God that the consciousness of God's glorification of these women and their indisputable sainthood did not vanish from the memories and hearts of the Church's people.

The beginning of the prayerful veneration of the ascetics of Diveyevo was laid down by the great staretz of the Russian land, St. Seraphim of Sarov. The prayerful appeal of the holy staretz to the blessed first Nun Alexandra was as follows: "Lady and our mother, forgive us and bless us. Pray that we would be pardoned as you were pardoned, and remember us at the Throne of God."

The Staretz on several occasions stated that Mother Alexandra of blessed memory is resting in the Saints and that he himself, according to his words, "kissed her footsteps until now."

As the Schema-nun Martha (Maria Semenovna Miliukov) reposed he said, "Those who will attend her burial will receive forgiveness of sins if they fall before the coffin of the blessed one with the words, 'Lady and our mother Martha, do remember us at God's Throne in the Heavenly Kingdom.' "

The blessed nun Helen (Elena Vasilievna Manturova) for the sake of holy obedience sacrificed her life and died instead of her brother. St. Seraphim called her "the lady-in-waiting of the Queen of Heaven" and predicted that in time her relics, as well as those of the schema-nun Martha, will be resting in the convent. On account of their holy life were glorified also the toilers who erected a spiritual way of life in the Fourth Lot[*] of the Mother of God - the nuns Eupraxia and Capitolina, the Abbesses Maria and Capitolina, as well as the blessed Fool for Christ Pelagia, who received a blessing for this podvig from St. Seraphim himself, and her followers Natalia and Parasceva.

Following the established rites and traditions of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, by the mercy of God we the humble Hierarchs of the Russian Autonomous Church dare to exclaim for all to hear:

It pleased the Holy Spirit and us to perform now the glorification among the saints of the Holy Women of Diveyevo. The flock of the Russian Church is to turn prayerfully to these holy righteous women in their needs.

Paint their icon according to the traditions of the Holy Orthodox Greek-Russian Church. Compose a service in their honor. Venerate their memory with the singing of akathists.

Declare to be holy relics their holy remains resting at present in the depths of the earth.

Through the prayers of our righteous mothers, the women of Diveyevo, may the Lord grant His mercy and blessing upon us who with faith, hope and love beg for their heavenly intercession.

May the glorification of the Holy Women of Diveyevo, according to the word of the great Staretz and instructor St. Seraphim, "during the summer they will sing Pascha," be the same to us during the deep autumn.

Archbishop Valentin, Bishop Theodore, Bishop Seraphim, Bishop Anthony,
Bishop Victor
Secretary to the Synod, V. Rev. A. Osetrov

[* Four areas in the world were considered the "Lot," or under the special protection, of the Theotokos, one of which was Diveyvo Convent]

The Eighth Convention in Suzdal approved the following document:

Address Of the 8th Congress of the clergy, monastics and laity of the Suzdal Diocese of the Russian [Rossijskaya] Orthodox Church
to all Orthodox Christians in the Fatherland and in the Diaspora

We, participants in the 8th Congress of the clergy, monastics and laity of the Suzdal Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, being zealous for the glory of God and the preservation of the patristic Orthodox teaching, address all those to whom Orthodoxy is dear. And first of all we address those clergy and laity of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), both in Russia and abroad, whose Christian conscience cannot be reconciled with the treacherous course of action chosen by the hierarchy of the Church Abroad.

In spite of difficulties and obstacles raised up on the path of our salvation, the Suzdal Diocese and the whole Russian [Rossijskaya] Orthodox Church strives to go by that path which was trodden by the Russian Orthodox Church headed by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon. By the mercy of God and the prayers of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, our parishes have increased the numbers of their members and continue, as far as they are able, the work of regenerating Orthodoxy in Russia.

For us a huge significance attaches to the blessing and instruction of Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) that was given by him before his blessed end to the parishes of the Suzdal Diocese that were in the process of regeneration.

10 years ago, the Parish of the Emperor Constantine left the Moscow Patriarchate. This became an important event in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, since in Russia for the first time there appeared a legal Orthodox community not entering into the structure of the Sergianist hierarchy.

Much has changed in the past years. But the saddest thing for us has been the clear apostasy of the Church Abroad from its own confessing path. That which has been taking place there in the last years witnesses to the fact that power in the Hierarchical Synod belongs now, not to the zealots of Orthodoxy, but to people who are not ashamed crudely to violate the canons and wills of the Blessed First Hierarchs Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret. An eloquent witness to this apostasy from true Orthodoxy has the acceptance by the Church Abroad in 1994 of the heretical ecclesiology of Metropolitan Cyprian of Fili.

The results of the last Hierarchical Council of the ROCA vividly witness to the fact that the hierarchs of the Church Abroad intend to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate, and this perplexed many representatives of the clergy, monastics and laity.

The situation that has developed is fraught with schism, which threatens to become the last event in the life of the ROCA: a part of her will be swallowed up by the Moscow Patriarchate, while another part will disperse amongst various jurisdictions.

Many have been deceived by the council of the MP which took place in August, 2000, at which the following documents were approved:

- 1) "The Basic Principles of the Relationship of the ROC to Heterodoxy"
- 2) An Act glorifying the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia
- 3) "The Bases of the Social Doctrine of the ROC"

An analysis of these documents shows that no substantial change in the Sergianist-Ecumenist course of the Moscow Patriarchate can be foreseen. Ecumenism has not been condemned as a heresy, and the Moscow Patriarchate remains a member of the World Council of Churches and other Ecumenist organizations.

The glorification of some of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia was not done without omissions and

cunning, that is, it was not done in an ecclesiastical manner. In particular, the Moscow Patriarchate did not repent of its own many years of slander against the Holy New Martyrs, who condemned Sergianism.

In the "social doctrine of the MP" many have seen a renunciation of the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius and his course of action. But not only is there not a word about repenting of the heresy of Sergianism in this document: the name of Metropolitan Sergius is not mentioned at all. The document, like many previous Sergianist declarations, is without substance.

The Moscow Patriarchate for many decades faithfully served the Soviet power, and now it serves the New World Order. And it is with this "church" that the hierarchy of the Church Abroad wishes to unite.

All heretics in all ages have, under the guise of serving Christ, served Antichrist and prepared his coming. But most of them, on falling away from the Church, have departed from Orthodox tradition. Sergianism is particularly dangerous because it strives to preserve unchanged the external forms, using them as nets in which to catch, if it were possible, even the elect.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, brothers and sisters!

Many today are faced with the question: is it possible to preserve one's faithfulness to True Orthodoxy while remaining in the Church Abroad, which is consciously hurling itself into the embraces of the Ecumenist "World Orthodoxy". We all very well understand that a significant part of the ROCA will not follow its clerical leadership along the false path.

The Congress of the Russian Orthodox Church invites all these zealots of Orthodoxy to come under the omophorion of the Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.

We wish to emphasize that we are far from a striving to lord it over whomever it may be. We only want to help those who need help in acquiring a canonical ground for their ecclesiastical existence.

The Russian Orthodox Church is not striving to close in on itself. On the contrary, we desire communion with the True Orthodox Christians of all countries and peoples. We intend to take practical steps to establish full canonical communion with sister True Orthodox Local Churches.

November 12/25, 2000.

Archbishop Valentine, President of the Hierarchical Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church

Members of the Hierarchical Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church: Bishop Theodore, Bishop Seraphim, Bishop Victor, Bishop Anthony, Bishop Timothy, Protopriest Andrew Osetrov, Secretary of the Hierarchical Synod

And the signatures of many other participants in the Congress

Item #16 of the minutes of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church held on November 27th 2000 explains the last paragraph of the above "Appeal." It is written:

Heard: The President of the Synod of Bishops, who decided to resolve the question of the relationship with the Greek Old Calendarist jurisdictions.

Resolved: Since all the Hierarchs unanimously expressed the opinion, regarding the matter of considering prayerful communion with the Old Calendarist jurisdictions, to be premature. While seeking communion, the need exists to know each other better, but not for the sake of uniting or subordinating one side to the other. ROAC does not seek isolation and with much attention is watching everything that is happening in the Orthodox jurisdictions in Greece. Yet, at the present time, it is necessary to note that there is no mutual Christian love among them, and that this is a serious obstacle for ROAC as far as rapprochement with them is concerned.

The very same minutes show that Archbishop Valentin presented to the Synod a petition for retirement, motivated by his poor health. The Synod of Bishops resolved: "To deny Archbishop Valentin his request, leaving him in the position of President of the Synod of Bishops and Administrator of the Suzdal Diocese. At the same time [it resolved] to ask Hierarchs to assist him in any way in matters of ruling the Russian Orthodox Church and the Suzdal Diocese."

The minutes of the meeting held on November 21st 2000 related the report of the President of the Russian Orthodox Church on the decade-long activity of the diocesan center. It is known that the diocese had 152 parishes, yet a large number of them had lost contact with the center of the Diocese. Therefore it was undertaken to put in order the parish lists, and as a result there remained only a third of the parishes. Now, however, they are "legitimate" parishes, having obtained their registration. The parishes which had lost contact with the diocesan center were on that account deprived of their legal registration. At the same time, the minutes show that "in Podmoskovie (under Moscow) a convent with its archimandrite and forty sisters entered our jurisdiction. A school for clergy was established, there are teachers, and churches are being restored. A new diocesan house was built, with a hotel for thirty people, and a new church was built in the sub-region.

The official publication of the ROAC, the Suzdal "Diocesan Herald" reports that on March 4th the Diocesan office received a request from a parish and several clerics in Khabarovs to be accepted into ROAC. Archpriest Eugene Starostin, the rector of the church in the village of Zimenki, Novgorod region, was accepted into ROAC on March 12th. The petition of the parishioners of a community in Taruss came on March 23rd, and appointed as rector was the Hieromonk Nicholas (Pashkov) through whose efforts the parishioners came to realize the heretical ways of the MP. Recently a new parish was established in Serpukhov, Moscow region.

REPOSE OF PATRIARCH DIODOROS I OF JERUSALEM

On Tuesday December 6/19th, the day of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Diodoros I passed away. The deceased patriarch had been ill for quite some time with kidney failure, but died in the hospital from a stroke which occurred three days before his death.

According to tradition, the election of a new Patriarch will take place after the fortieth day of his repose.

The deceased Patriarch was of conservative principles, and at one of the consultations of the Greek Patriarchs he even gave a splendid report demanding the exit of the Orthodox Churches from the WCC. But rather soon thereafter the "Orthodox" hierarchs threatened him with suspension and managed to secure the recantation of his former principled positions.

Until the new Patriarch is elected, the Church of Jerusalem is preside over by the Locum Tenens, Metropolitan Cornelios of Petra.

FESTIVE PROGRAMS IN BETHLEHEM CANCELED

An International Bulletin of November 29th reported that since the uprising of Palestinians against Israel has not stopped, the municipal administration of Bethlehem had to cancel all plans for the celebrations of Christ's Nativity, as was done last year. Despite the fact that a trip to Bethlehem from Jerusalem takes only some ten minutes by car, almost no one is willing to take the chance because of the tight control of the Israeli border guards, who very rarely give permission to cross the border. At the beginning of the uprising the city almost came to a halt; nearly all the stores closed.

The mayor of the city, a Roman Catholic, expects no more than two hundred tourists for Western Christmas, while usually there are some 20,000 - and this despite a prepared and well-advertised special festive program. It had been expected that a whole number of choirs from abroad would come. At present the possibility of performances by local choirs was discussed, but even that was considered to be impossible because of such a troublesome situation.

Miguel Murado, a spokesman for the Bethlehem 2000 project, sadly said: "We cannot celebrate under this situation."

Meanwhile, large gatherings of embittered Muslim Palestinians participate in political meetings on the square, where stands the Nativity basilica which, in expectation of the Nativity festivals, was specially decorated.

VATICAN FLIRTS WITH ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

According to the Orthodox Christian News Service, Inc. of November 30th, the Vatican published the text of the Papal greeting to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the feast day of Apostle Andrew, who is considered to be the protector of Constantinople.

The Pope wrote: "After a long suspension of its work, the Mixed International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches was able to meet in Baltimore for its eighth plenary session. Such a meeting is in itself an important event and was an occasion to underline the complexity of the questions being studied; however, we must note, to our great regret, that it did not allow real progress to be made in our dialogue".

However, after expressing his regrets, the Pope declared that wishing to follow the Lord's command to seek total unity, he is happy "to have been able to place at the disposition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate the ancient and beautiful church of St. Theodore on the Palatine Hill in Rome, so that it might be used for the worship and pastoral activities of the Greek Orthodox community of the city, which will have the spiritual assistance necessary for its growth and for dialogue with all Christians living in Rome".

As is obvious from this letter, this is not by any means a disinterested favor on the Pope's part.

A CONTRADICTING PAPAL DECLARATION

In September, the Vatican issued a document, signed by Cardinal Ratzinger, titled Dominus Iesus in which it was categorically stated what the Catholics have always believed, namely that Roman Catholicism is the "mother church" and that outside the catholic church no salvation is possible and that there exist no "sister-churches". We reported in detail in our October issue # 7 (89).

One should not exclude the possibility that this document was published without the involvement of the visibly aged Roman Pope about whose retirement there is constant talk. Yet the Vatican quite categorically denies these rumors. Nevertheless, the Ecumenical News International of October 18th reported that the Pope fully supports Cardinal Ratzinger's document, and even that it was "approved by me in a special form". Ratzinger's document met with a strong storm of disgust not only on the part of non-Catholics, but even within Catholicism.

Now, just recently it became known that there is a new Papal personal declaration, of quite a different opinion. A newspaper The Christian News of December 18th reports that on Wednesday, December 6th the Pope, addressing 30,000 Catholics in St. Peter's Square, declared that "The Gospel teaches us that those who live in accordance with the Beatitudes - the poor in spirit, the pure of heart, those who bear lovingly the sufferings of life - will enter God's Kingdom. All who seek God with sincere heart, including those who do not know Christ and his church, contribute under the influence of grace to the building of his kingdom".

The newspaper speculates that this papal declaration was made in order to neutralize the September document of Cardinal Ratzinger, which caused tremendous damage to Catholicism.

There is no limit to the self-contradictions the Vatican is willing to use in order to retain its power over millions of ignorant people!