



CHURCH NEWS

An Independent Publication of Orthodox Church Opinion

July-August, 2001
Vol. 13, # 5(96)

Supported by the voluntary contributions of its readers.
Republication permitted upon acknowledgment of source.

CONTENTS

MEETING OF ST. SERGIUS PARISH IN SYNOD BUILDING
NEW THREATS FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
PROHIBITIONS AGAINST "UNSUBMISSIVE" CLERGY CONTINUE
WITHOUT SHAME OR CONSCIENCE
OPINION OF RUSSIAN MEDIA REGARDING RETIREMENT OF METROPOLITAN VITALY
A "FRIEND" OF ARCHBISHOP MARK
A JOKE OR BLASPHEMOUS MOCKERY?
REACTION IN RUSSIA TO THE METROPOLITAN'S EPISTLE
A GENTLE HINT?
FROM THE LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN AUTONOMOUS CHURCH
A CERTAIN VICTORY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LATVIA
A NEW JERUSALEM PATRIARCH
VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN FACTS FROM THE BIOGRAPHY OF PATRIARCH ALEXIS II
"ORTHODOX" CHURCHES IN RACE FOR AUTOCEPHALY

CHURCH NEWS
639 Center St.
Oradell, NJ 07649
Tel./Fax (201) 967-7684

www.orthodoxchurchnews.com

MEETING IN ST. SERGIUS PARISH IN SYNOD BUILDING

During the tenure of Metropolitan Philaret a parish, consisting of Americans converted to Orthodoxy would hold services in the St. Sergius Church (the lower church in the Synod of Bishops HQ building in NYC). On Saturdays, Sundays and major holidays there were services for them in English. On weekdays this church was used for daily Slavonic services. The American flock grew rapidly and the parishioners even formed a nice choir. The rector of this parish was Fr. Nikiphor, a hieromonk from the Holy Trinity Monastery. He was respected and loved by his parishioners.

Yet, very shortly after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, the new First Hierarch, giving no reason whatsoever, removed Hieromonk Nikiphor from the English speaking parish and in his stead appointed a former Anglican, who shortly before had become Orthodox, ordained him to the priesthood and appointed him as rector to the parish, although he had no idea not only of the order of services, but even of Orthodox theology! The parish very soon ceased to exist and for quite a few years there were no services in English in the Synod building.

A few years ago English services were restored in the St. Sergius church and as a rector Abbot Joachim (Parr), formerly an Episcopalian, was appointed who first had joined the Greeks (the Paissios synodia) and finally ROCOR.

On Sunday, June 23/August 5, in the church itself, he convened a parish meeting that was attended by some 50 parishioners who were joined also by a few Russians members from the cathedral who had heard of the meeting.

In his opening speech Abbot Joachim told the parishioners that he had recently visited Russia, had called Archbishop Mark and spoken to several important clergymen of ROCOR and even a MP Bishop Mercurius of New York. Based upon this data, he came to the conclusion that the Church Abroad should not remain in such isolation as it is at present, but has to enter into communion with "world Orthodoxy" and the Moscow Patriarchate in particular. According to Russian speaking witnesses who attended this meeting, this speech created an uproar. Some applauded Abbot Joachim and others started to ask "delicate" questions. The meeting provoked behavior unbecoming in a church.

His "liberal" views have been known for a long time: just a few years ago he was caught by a Greek Orthodox person in the chapel he established for the homeless people in one of the worst sections of New York concelebrating liturgy with a Roman Catholic priest and because of that he was suspended by Bishop Hilarion for a few weeks. This did not prevent the authorities from appointing him rector of the parish in the Synod HQ first floor church and even to the post of Director of Foreign Relations of the Synod of Bishops!

In an extensive letter to the parishioners of the St. Sergius church, dated August 19, Bishop Gabriel informs them of the suspension of Abbot Joachim, for from his conversations with this clergyman it was clear that on several occasions he had traveled to Russia and met there with Alexis II (Ridiger) himself and got a blessing to join the Moscow Patriarchate.

In this letter it is stated that "Our Council of Bishops will decide when and how we will deal with the Moscow Patriarchate, for the governance of the Church is their responsibility. They must be permitted to proceed at their own pace and the flock should restrict itself to praying that our Savior will guide them in their endeavors by His grace".

In other words, a relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate is in no way excluded. The issue is only in two important words: "when and how" to deal with it!

It is interesting that in this letter to the parishioners of the St. Sergius Church by Bishop Gabriel nothing is mentioned of whether the services in that parish will continue and if another rector will be appointed.

NEW THREATS FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

We have received a copy of "An Excerpt from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR" – "The decision of the Synod of Bishops of ROCOR on June 30/July 31, 2001 in which it is stated:

"In connection with retirement of Metropolitan Vitaly, the Synod employee Ludmila D. Rosniansky is to look after Metropolitan's rest and health. These duties consist of:

1. Taking care of the ailing Metropolitan, keeping metropolitan's quarters and a room temporarily occupied by L. D. Rosniansky in order.

2. Other household duties are to be divided among other employees of the Synod building and are to be left to the discretion of His Grace Bishop Gabriel.

3. In connection with duties performed by L. D. Rosniansky, to offer her a salary in amount of \$400 per month.

4. L. D. Rosniansky is relieved of all other household and administrative duties.

5. All bills presented by L. D. Rosniansky are to be paid only by the written permission of Bishop Gabriel.

Certified true copy + Bishop Gabriel, Deputy Secretary of the Synod of Bishops".

This excerpt from the Synod's decision had some unexpected results.

Mrs. Rosniansky asked the Synod's Deputy Treasurer (Mr. Tsemidis) when will she get the Metropolitan's household funds and received the answer that this money no longer will be available.

When she asked from which sources Metropolitan's household and medical expenses are to be paid, the answer was: this is why Metropolitan is getting a salary!

This is interesting: does Bishop Gabriel also pay for his meals? After all he also gets a salary! This decision astounds one for its meanness and hostility against the elderly Metropolitan.

The magazine "Pravoslavnaya Rus" ("Orthodox Russia") published in issue # 13 another "Excerpt from the meeting of

the Synod of Bishops”.

“The Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR on June 30/July 31 deliberated: about appearance of late of written publications as well as in Internet – of slanderous reports, which are often anonymous and consist of various materials, which do not correspond with reality and which have the goal to discrediting the good name of a whole number of bishops and clergy of the ROCOR and in this manner undermine the trust of their flock in them.

Resolved: to flatly condemn such acts of defamation as being obviously directed toward the undermining of the spiritual authority of our entire Russian Orthodox Church Abroad that can be of profit only to her enemies, seeking to weaken her and even totally annihilate her.

They should be reminded of what the holy canons of the Church say: the 55th Apostolic Canon says: “If any of the clergy insults a bishop, let him be deposed: for ‘thou shall not speak evil of the ruler of thy people’ “. (Acts 23: 5) and also the 9th Commandment of the Decalogue.

We suggest to the faithful children of the Church not to be scandalized by such writings and to try to abstain from any participation in the slander. Such phenomena undermine any effort to lead spiritual life.

Certified true copy + Bishop Gabriel Deputy Secretary of the ROCOR July 3/16th, 2001”

For the “forgetful”: the 9th Commandment is “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Ex. 20: 16).

The 55th Apostolic Canon (which has now become so popular with the Synod of Bishops) could be applied only in a case involving some personal sins or administrative errors by this or that hierarch. But when the problem is centered about a change by the whole episcopate of the 80 year long path of the ROCOR – to apply this canon can in no way be considered proper. The Synod of Bishops also completely forgot about the common principle: anyone’s authority is earned by behavior and works and in no way by threats and force. Not one of the former First Hierarchs of ROCOR ever had applied the 55th Apostolic (or similar) Canon in order to bolster his authority, not even during such troublesome periods as the Eulogy schism, the falling away from the Church Abroad by the American Metropolia or the mutiny started in the beginning of the 60’s by the “Laity Society” in San Francisco!

PROHIBITIONS AGAINST “UNSUBMISSIVE” CLERGY CONTINUE

The Internet “Otkliki” published the text of a Synod ukase received from the Lesna Convent (France) that suspends Archpriest Theodore Fedoroff. It reads:

“# 11/35/53/38/52

Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

On June 30/July 13, 2001 deliberated: about your case. To date you have not left the bounds of Lesna Convent, although you received an ukase concerning this more than 2 months ago.

Resolved: based upon your not fulfilling the ukase of the Synod of Bishops dated 12/25 of April, 2001, # 11/35/53/38/29 for violating ecclesiastical discipline (Canon [not legible], Apostolic 39 and Laodicia 57), for disobedience to the ruling bishops and for serving in a strange diocese without the blessing of the ruling bishops, you are suspended from serving. A copy of this ukase is to be issued to you.

Seal and signature +Archbishop Laurus, Deputy President of the Synod of Bishops”

At the same time also a clergyman of the Church Abroad, Fr. Seraphim Stephens, was suspended.

From a letter of Bishop Gabriel to Fr. Seraphim published on the Internet website “Otkliki” it is obvious that the main reason for this suspension was a letter by this American priest to Metropolitan Vitaly in which he warned him that “one of these bishops has claimed the archpastoral leadership of the New York and Eastern American Diocese... Your Eminence, your throne is being taken over by a deceiver and a shameless hijackers who lied about their position in our Holy Church”.

In the published letter Bishop Gabriel claims that on several occasions he called on Fr. Seraphim to repent and stated that if he did not, he would be suspended; he was also threatened with an ecclesiastical trial to defrock him. Then he writes: “Since the chapel of your mission is located in your house, please immediately inform me which of the priests I have to get in touch with in order that one might minister to your parishioners while you are suspended”

This “admonition” letter signed by the Administrator of the Eastern American and New York diocese is surprising for its naiveté. If the chapel is located in the clergyman’s house, it means he himself set it up and gathered the parishioners as well. Over asking Fr. Seraphim to advise His Grace the Administrator which priest is he to get in touch with so that this priest can minister to his parishioners in his own house, one can only shake one’s head. It is the manifest duty of an Administrator to know of himself whom is he to appoint and to where.

Priest Stephens stated on the Internet that he does not recognize this suspension as valid and is joining Bishop Barnabas.

WITHOUT SHAME OR CONSCIENCE

“Vertograd Rassylka” (“Vertograd Distribution”) # 96 of August 1st published part of an interview with Bishop Evtikhy of Ishima given to the newspaper “NG-Religions” published in Russia. We herewith publish excerpts from this material. The Editor in Chief of this newspaper, Maxim Shevchenko, asked:

"...How true it is that the retirement of Metropolitan Vitaly was provoked by the disagreement of the ROCOR's Synod of Bishops with his "Circular Epistle" as is reported by the Vertograd agency stating that at the Synod meeting he was reproached for the lawlessness of such an Epistle? What is the reason for the Synod's disagreement with the Metropolitan's "Circular Epistle"?

Answer: The retirement of the Metropolitan happened in accordance with his own wishes which he expressed on the very first extended meeting of the Synod of ROCOR Bishops in New York. Considering his advanced age (92 years) and the resultant worsening of his health, none of the Synod members objected to the announcement... He did not write the Circular Epistle, signed by the Metropolitan Vitaly. Even more: at the meeting the Metropolitan confirmed his adherence to the lawful order that is violated by this "Epistle". Namely: the decisions of the Council of Bishops can be rescinded only by the Council of Bishops and decisions of the Synod – either by the Synod itself or by the Council of Bishops. The signing by the Metropolitan of an "epistle" which contradicts church regulations and also the convictions of the Metropolitan himself [?!] who reveres the Church's canons is on the conscience of a group of provocateurs, who misused Metropolitan's old age and weakness and in this manner made public this weakness. We call it a sin of Ham, who uncovered the nakedness of his father. The members of the Synod of Bishops did not reproach the old Metropolitan, but only were clarifying his relationship toward basic principles touched by the unfortunate "epistle". [All emphasis by "Ch N"]

Question: Some media call what happened at the Synod's meeting a revolution made by the "pro-Patriarchal" powers within the leadership of the ROCOR. What would be your comments to such declarations?

Answer: The erroneous reports by the domestic media are the result of evil-minded people (possibly even organizations) who intend to produce a schism within the unity of the ROCOR bishops. It is sad that the media disregarded the easily available official information, presented by our Church, and puts more trust in pseudo-church sources, such as "Church News" published by Anastasia Schatiloff, "Vertograd" by Sasha Soldatov, "The Suzdal Diocesan Herald" of the defrocked Monk Valentin Roosantsov, "Thoughts about Russia" by Peter 'Hedgehog' Budzilovich and others.

On the one hand, these publications, quite in the spirit of tabloids, are always oriented toward negative information. On the other hand, it is impossible not to notice the extreme theatricality of their productions. Just a short while ago, Metropolitan Vitaly was the object of their criticism, now they step forward against the Council of Bishops. Their aim is to provoke a quarrel among the ROCOR Bishops. Also, the "pro-Patriarchal group" is their invention in order to achieve their goal.

Question: "Vertograd" insists that the meeting of the Synod that proceeded without Metropolitan Vitaly and without his blessing, according to the Statutes of the ROCOR, is not valid. Is it so?

Answer: Metropolitan Vitaly officially announced and asked his declaration of retirement be put in the minutes. The Synod of Bishops in no way can abolish this declaration, which is the second next instance of Church administration.... Accordingly, all members of the Synod, including the First Hierarch himself, have signed the documents. Therefore, it is the retired Metropolitan's legal right not to participate in the meetings. After all, the Synod accepted his resignation and did not object to it. In contrast, it would be illogical for the Metropolitan, after his resignation, not to leave".

It is interesting to note the unity of mind of the Synod of Bishops, which has disturbed the Church Abroad as well as her parishes in Russia.

OPINION OF RUSSIAN MEDIA REGARDING RETIREMENT OF METROPOLITAN VITALY

The Russian magazine "Strana.ru" on July 16th published on the Internet an article entitled "Metropolitan Vitaly No Longer Head of Church Abroad".

After briefly reporting to its readers some details about the last meeting of the ROCOR's Synod of Bishops and noting that the immediate vicar of the Metropolitan – Bishop Michael of Toronto was the one to support the immediate retirement of the Metropolitan – the magazine writes:

"Archbishop Laurus (Shkurla) of Syracuse and [Holy] Trinity Monastery is the key figure in the Russian Church Abroad, among those [sic.] taking a stand for union with Russian Church. Archbishop Laurus, a native of Carpatho-Russia, is the bearer and successor of the genuine spiritual and national consciousness of Carpatho-Russia, which from ages past has considered itself to be a part of the Orthodox Russian world, opposing the Galician Uniate 'independence movement' [samistiishchina].

The attainment of positions of leadership within the Church Abroad by supporters of union with the Mother Church permits us to hope that the (existing) divisions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad will be surmounted in the not too distant future".

The Newspaper "Moscow News" (according to the electronic version) on July 30th mentioned briefly that unexpectedly "Metropolitan Vitaly (Oustinoff) of the ROCOR suddenly announced that he is retiring due to 'weakness'. He declared this verbally and not in writing. The Metropolitan's retirement is surprising also due to its timing, (after all, jubilees are celebrated in a different manner), but is very logical...." (Emphasis by "Ch N") "On the agenda was a question about reconciliation with the Moscow Patriarchate"... "It is a mistake to view Russia through dark glasses. Just a week before his jubilee the Metropolitan issued his Epistle in which he viewed Moscow through very dark glasses..."

This newspaper also noted, "the position of head of a Church (be it a patriarch, metropolitan or archbishop) is considered to be life-long and in the history of Russian Orthodoxy the Head of the Church only once was deposed and

that was Patriarch Nikon in the XVII century”.

The newspaper “NG.Religions” of July 25th published a very long article by Maxim Shevchenko entitled “The Most Uncompromising Critic of the Patriarchate Retired. The dismissal of Metropolitan Vitaly does not mean the softening of positions of the Church Abroad toward Moscow”.

The newspaper gives extensive quotations from the statements of Metropolitan Vitaly and also quotes a very substantial portion of the Synod Epistle of July 10th denying the possibility of a union with the Moscow Patriarchate and any acceptance of Ecumenism. The very last paragraph of this article says: “The Church Abroad is not a marginal pseudo-ecclesiastical group as is believed by some in Russia. In the USA alone she has 150 thousand members. Among them there are influential politicians, businessmen, journalists and social leaders. The ‘Abroaders’ have parishes throughout the world with property. And this might be the most serious obstacle for union with the ROC, according to which, all property belongs not to communities and donors, but to the central patriarchal administration. Beyond the borders of our homeland, the situation with property is quite different: believers own what they have restored or built with their hands. And it is very doubtful that the citizens of USA, Germany, France, Australia would voluntarily hand this over into the caring hands of the Moscow Patriarchate”.

A “FRIEND” OF ARCHBISHOP MARK

In 1999 an important KGB officer and an Englishman Christopher Andrew published the book “The Mitrokhin Archive”. In 2000 this book was republished with some additions. For 25 years Mitrokhin gradually copied all the important documents that passed through his hands. Under the soles of his shoes he carried them from his office and hid them in his house. Finally, with the help of the English embassy he managed to get to England with all the documents he had gathered through the years and published them in England. This book, in the section documenting the infiltration of the KGB into the Orthodox Church, gives some interesting information about a priest who for 6 years has been a clergyman of Archbishop Mark of Berlin and Germany.

On page 646 of this book, as fascinating as a detective novel, it is reported that the Christian Committee for the Defense of Believer’s Rights, “afraid that it might be infiltrated by the KGB, restricted the membership of this committee to only four persons.” Nevertheless, in May of 1979 this committee was penetrated by Archpriest Vasily Fonchenkov who, unknown to them, nine years earlier had been recruited by the Fifth Directorate as agent “Drug” (Friend). According to Mitrokhin’s documentation “He was involved in the cultivation of specific individuals [in the Orthodox Church], carried out his assignments conscientiously and showed initiative”. Beginning in 1972 Fonchenkov taught in the Theological Academy in Zagorsk and also held a position in the Foreign Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1976-77 he was transferred to Berlin and was the editor of a German language magazine for the Patriarchate. It seems that because of his international connections he managed to infiltrate the Christian Committee.

From the roster of parishes of the ROCOR we learn that in 1995 he became the rector of the parish in Salzburg. In 1996-7 he was ministering to parishes in Salzburg and Fillach. In 1998 Vienna was added to his parishes. From 1999 – 2000 he served in Salzburg, Vienna and Fillach. After the scandalous behavior of Priest-monk Arsenii (Zubakov) that resulted in the closing of the Vienna parish, with 2001 Vasily Fonchenkov has again been serving in Salzburg and Fillach.

It might be possible that Archbishop Mark was not aware of the KGB career of Fonchenkov, but it is hardly possible that he did not suspect that he was a prominent member of the Foreign Relations Department of the MP (which is packed with KGB agents), especially keeping in mind that he has met with such high level persons as Metropolitan Cyril of Smolensk (“Mikhailov” in the KGB) and even Patriarch Ridiger himself (“Drozdov” in the KGB).

JOKE OR BLASPHEMOUS MOCKERY?

The news agency “Blagovest” on its Internet website on August 13th reported the glorification of Admiral Theodore Oushakov a contemporary of Catherine II.

The “glorification” festivities were held on August 4 and 5 in the Sanaksar monastery (not far away from Temnikov) in Mordovia. This monastery was “returned” to the Church rather recently (in 1991).

According to this report, the main merit of this “saint admiral” was that he, like Suvorov, never lost a battle, was distinguished by his bravery, was a kind commander to the fleet and was faithful to his loyalty oath. He died in a monastery that was established by his uncle.

This celebration was presided over by the odious Metropolitan Krill of Smolensk, the chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Foreign Relations Dept., Archbishop Eugene of Tambov, Archbishop Proclus of Simbirsk, Archbishop Barsanophy of Saransk, Bishop Philaret of Penza and Bishop Seraphim of Baltic.

We would consider this report nothing but an outrageous joke, were it not that the publication “Pravoslavnaya Rus” in # 15, 2001 (Jordanville, NY) devoted a whole page and 2 columns to this event. It is also worth noting that, in reading this article, there is no way to guess from the description given that this latest comedy was arranged by the Moscow Patriarchate – as if they were not present at this ceremony! Not a single one of these bishops is listed – all we read is that there was a very prayerful mood.

The article “written by K. V. Glazkov, from information off the website ‘Orthodoxy 2000’ and from ‘Radonezh,’ ” with great enthusiasm describes the arrival for “the canonization” of Admiral Oushakov, the Chief of the General Staff of the

Russian fleet, the admirals of the Baltic and Black Sea fleets, the Ukrainian Deputy minister of defense and many others.

"The fleet orchestra met the coffin with the relics of Righteous Theodore with a military march. The coffin, carried by the admirals, was draped with St. Andrew banners". The service was performed outdoors and was attended by some seven thousand participants.

The article reports that "among the saints of the Russian land we have the intercessor for those who are 'far out to sea' – the sailors and students of the fleet -- Righteous St. Theodore"

After the rite of canonization, the sailors gave a military salute and the orchestra played the "national" anthem (set to the music of the previous Communist version which, by the way, was personally approved by Patriarch Ridiger himself)!

Evidently, this was one of the more outstanding "glorifications" by this church!

"Blagovest" quotes Metropolitan Cyril as saying, "It is doubtful that Generalissimo Suvorov would be canonized", but according to the president of the Writers Union, even the atheist Marshal Zhoukov might soon be canonized. Will we live long enough to read also about his canonization in "Pravoslavnaya Rus"?

Naturally "a multitude of miracles" occurred at the graves of uncle and nephew Oushakovs, especially after the prayers of the sailors to them. The Moscow Patriarchate plans to publish a book describing those miracles.

After the repose of Metropolitan Philaret there were several cases of the ROCOR Synod of Bishops obediently repeating canonizations performed by the Moscow Patriarchate. But that they were already "glorified" by the MP is being concealed from the flock. In typically Patriarchal style, the Council of ROCOR Bishops on October 11/24, 2000, proclaimed it would "count among Orthodox saints – Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), commemoration day April 30/May 13; Bishop Theophan (Govorov) the Recluse, commemoration day January 10/23; Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow, commemoration day November 19/Dec. 2; and the elder Theophil of Kiev, commemoration day October 28/November 11th". Of course, very few know that a short while earlier the Moscow Patriarchate had canonized them. The actual "glorifications" by the Church Abroad were held in Munich, during the May session of the Synod of Bishops and the ordination of Bishop Agapit. It is obvious that no one was informed anywhere of this glorification. But simultaneous with giving the very touching details of the glorification of Admiral Oushakov by the Moscow Patriarchate, the Synod of Bishops has not once mentioned that the Russian Orthodox Church centered in Suzdal and the HOCNA in Boston have glorified Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky)!

REACTION IN RUSSIA TO THE METROPOLITAN'S EPISTLE

The Metropolitan's Circular Epistle, dated June 22, 2001, brought much joy to a group of parishioners of the ROCOR living in Vladivostok, Yeisk and Podolsk, whose "Open letter" to Metropolitan Vitaly was published by "Vertograd.Razsylvka" # 90 on July 1st.

The letter opens with the words: "May the Lord bless you for your Circular Epistle. It was for us like balsam upon a terrible wound. Unfortunately, this epistle was not announced from the ambo of the church dedicated to the Holy Imperial Martyrs when Bishop Michael was present. It was distributed among the parishioners, sort of underground, with the blessing of Benjamin, Bishop of Chernomorsk and Kuban. Some people tried to prove that the epistle has nothing to do with you. Matushka Maria Potapov, who had programmed a wide range of Moscow Patriarchate sites to be visited, told a parishioner Alexander from Diveyevo, that you are in an irresponsible condition...."

These people, who signed the letter to the Metropolitan, praised the action of Bishop Barnabas and the Western Europe clergy, and asked him to support the canonization of Metropolitan Philaret (already glorified by the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church), Emperors Paul I and Alexander II, and also Joseph Munoz, Theodore of Kazan and Emper Alexander I who presumably retired into hiding as Elder Theodore Kuzmich.

The authors of the letter sent to the Metropolitan a whole number of questions: Why is the Russian Church administrated from abroad? Why has a Pan-Russian Council to elect a Patriarch not yet been convened, while the leadership of the legal successor to Patriarch Tikhon's Church is governed from America? Why were there no ordinations of bishops for Russia? Why is the Russian Church in Russia called the ROCOR and several other quite reasonable questions on "touchy" matters?

Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), long before these questions were asked, tried to direct the question of parishes in Russia onto the right track – based upon Patriarch Tikhon's Ukase # 362.

Thus, when sending Metropolitan Vitaly and the Synod his report entitled "Thoughts about the cases of Bishops Barnabas and Valentin" with a cover letter dated June 26/July 9, 1993, he wrote: "I am very much worried about the situation being created in Russia, which we have to evaluate very soberly in order not to make a fatal mistake, lest Archbishop Lazarus be followed by other hierarchs. [Note: Archbishop Lazarus, upset by canonical transgressions of Bishop Barnabas in Russia, temporarily separated himself from the ROCOR, "Ch. N."]

"Not only in Russia, but also abroad, I have heard many criticisms, which consider our tactics inconsistent and confusing. At present, the attitude toward Bishop Valentin is strongly criticized. He is still holding on, but there are already those who would push him toward the path of Archbishop Lazarus.

"I have always been a supporter of consecrations [hierarchical -- "Ch. N."] in Russia, but I know that three of our Russian hierarchs for some reason do not trust our candidate, who was elected without their participation [Bishop Evtikhly]. "Ch. N.]. This circumstance and a feeling among many of our being unfair with Bishop Valentin and his clergy demand special care and conciliatory efforts on our part.

"In presenting to you these facts and to maintain the high level of your authority [as in original, "Ch. N."], I plead with you not to rush into doing anything before the meeting of the Synod".

Those who would like a copy of this report (in Russian) of Bishop Gregory, "Thoughts on the Case of Bishops Varnava and Valentin," may write to the editors of "Church News".

In the report to the Synod dated June 21/July 4, 1994 Bishop Gregory wrote: "In the issue of "Tserkovnaya Zhisn" ("Church Life") # 1-2 there was published a draft of the Statutes for representation of our Church in Russia, compiled by His Eminence Archbishop Mark. Although this project was approved in principle by the Synod, its decree foresees the possibility of addenda and changes by the Council of Bishops, and I feel it is my duty to present the following considerations regarding this project:

"In principle, from the very beginning, I have considered our representation in Russia, consisting of three bishops and amongst whom Bishop Valentin is even a member of the Synod, to be offensive to the Russian hierarchs and therefore unnecessary. The appointment of such a representative in person of Bishop Barnabas led only to terrible canonical chaos and scandal to thousands of the Orthodox souls."

In fulfillment of this testament of Bishop Gregory, Metropolitan Valentin tried his best to enlarge the body of his episcopate and at present has eight Bishops with himself as the ninth. Three of them minister to Catacomb parishes and communities.

On September 14/27, 1994, Bishop Gregory addressed "Their Graces, the members of the ROCOR Council of Bishops" with the following letter:

"I have been informed by the Deputy Secretary of the Synod I may no longer receive any information regarding the decisions of the Council of Bishops and even less the minutes themselves.

As I have learned from the others, none of my reports were ever read at the meetings, including the report regarding the approach of the moment foreseen in the prophetic regulation of the All-Russian Supreme Church Authority headed by Patriarch Tikhon dated November 7/20, 1920.

"Unfortunately, a gross misunderstanding has arisen regarding the interpretation of this decree and the administrative situation of more than hundred parishes in Russia, who have several of their own bishops.

"Thus since this is so much a matter of principle, I have decided to inform my venerable brethren of the enclosed article and of my opinion, in the hope that some one of them will raise these questions at the meeting.

I ask all the hierarchs to carefully reread Patriarch Tikhon's instruction and to be concerned for the fate of more than a hundred parishes in Russia of like mind with us. A whole number of them has already restored their churches. Is it possible that we will create an undesirable schism by disregarding the Patriarch's regulation that has directions on how to build anew a united Russian Church when the possibility arrives for this? And by now, doubtlessly it has arrived already".

When talking about the situation in the Russian Church independent of the MP, Bishop Gregory believed that after the restoration in Russia of a canonical hierarchy, the ROCOR and the Russian Church must coexist on an autonomous basis, but at the same time keep very close connections, so that at the meetings of the ROCOR bishops, a bishop from Russia would be present and vice versa – at meetings of the bishops in Russia there would be a bishop from abroad. And then, in the future, the political and inter-ecclesiastical situation would make clear when both parts of the Russian Church could unite and return to the status they had when the Russian dioceses abroad were under the direct supervision of the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg.

Following this line of thought, on March 30/April 12, 1994, Bishop Gregory sent to Metropolitan Vitaly, as the President of the Synod of Bishops the following report:

"I have received a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Synod of Bishops dated March 23/April 5 # 713, regarding the establishment in Russia of the 'Temporary Supreme Administration of the Russian Church' instituted at the Diocesan Conference on March 9/22 of this year in Suzdal. It states that the decision of the Russian hierarchs 'cannot be acknowledged as legal, since it violates basic Church canons and the Synod can not give its blessing to it.'

"These minutes call for a number of substantial remarks and objections.

"The Synod's decree quotes the 14th canon of the Second Council of Constantinople, which condemns a bishop who abstains from communion with his metropolitan and 'fails to recite his name, in accordance with consuetude, in the course of the divine services.'

"Yet the decree in Suzdal resolutely stressed that the name of the First Hierarch WILL be proclaimed.

"The 13th canon of the same Council refers to priests and deacons and not to bishops, as does the listed 31st Apostolic Canon, and the 18th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council refers to illegal assemblages of clergy or monks against their bishop.

"All through the Apostolic canons and canons of the Ecumenical Councils there runs the idea that the holy Fathers considered prayerful Eucharistic unity the most important and central element in the life of the Church. And this was exactly what our Synod of Bishops itself rejected.

"The declaration by the participants of the convention of the two dioceses (Archbishop Lazarus' and Bishop Valentine's) was quite properly assembled in order to discuss the sad situation of the Church in Russia. No 'illegal assemblage' can be seen in this conference. None of the clergy or monastics gave oaths to each other and nor conspired in some plot against their bishops. As is obvious from the Conference's resolutions, during its meetings everything was done in the spirit of love and mutual trust.

"While accusing the Russian bishops of the uncanonicity of the Temporary Supreme Church Administration created by

them and quoting some parts of their decrees, the ruling of the Synod completely ignores the accusation which motivated those bishops to force them to sever administrative ties with the Synod of Bishops.

"This Convention was a direct result of numerous and serious violations of canons by our bishops and unfortunately even of the First Hierarchy himself. Since all the appeals and requests for directions addressed to the Metropolitan and the Synod of Bishops for nearly two years received no response, in May of 1993 Archbishop Lazarus stated that he was discontinuing his administrative submission to the Synod of Bishops and in February of the current year Bishop Valentin was forced to do the same.

"The decision of the Synod of Bishops of March 23/April 5 contains a terrible mistake: it refers to the laws that have nothing to do with the matters at issue with the Russian Bishops and ignores the actual decision of Patriarch Tikhon of November 7/20, 1920, to which the hierarchs who signed the Conference's resolution refer (par. 2, 3, and 9).

"It is obvious that the episcopal authors of the Synod resolution have not read the Patriarchal decree, which was written together with the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council, in the event of the then expected destructive circumstances for the canonical existence of the dioceses of the Russian Church. The instructions in 10 points give detailed advice on how to create and restore the Supreme Administration of the Russian Church when it became free.

"This document, truly inspired by the God, beginning in 1920, served as a guiding star to all the children of the Russian Orthodox Church. Without it the Catacomb Church could not have survived for many years in Russia and the Church Abroad would have no canonical basis.

"It is very sad that our Synod in wishing to 'put matters in order,' issued a decree without actually knowing the privileges and duties of Russian bishops following the period of harsh persecutions. At present the Synod decree punishes a crime that did not happen. The Russian bishops also point this out in their resolution.

"The sentencing decree, based upon nonexistent documentation, cannot possibly be considered valid and the erroneous footnotes, cited to justify the sentence, should not be accepted either in Russia, or by us Abroad.

"From all the situation in Russia it is clear that being abroad we have demonstrated our total inability to discern the church situation in Russia and to it, our own "Statutes of ROCOR" in no way do foresee for us the possibility to govern dioceses in Russia. Events in Russia very often require immediate decisions on the spot and the last two years have proven that during this time we have not achieved anything constructive. Rather the opposite: the intrigues of the Moscow Patriarchate and the destructive actions by Bishop Barnabas sent to Russia, under the influence of the provocateur Averianov—resulted only in irreparable damage to the prestige of the Church Abroad.

"It is very sad that we did not want to listen to the laments of our brethren in the Homeland and due to pride and self-esteem would not recognize the errors made on our part, in order that we might live in brotherly unity under the protection of the Patriarchal decree which for 75 years we have been relying upon and which should have been used when the time came for free dioceses in Russia.

"Certainly, one cannot but regret that the Russian bishops hastened to turn to such decisive measures without the previous agreement of our Synod. But in fairness, the main fault in this case lies mainly in our inactivity and then the unfortunate action of our Synod.

"If I could have participated in the discussion of my last report to the Synod, I would undoubtedly have brought this situation to the attention of our bishops and the necessity of using the outstanding decision of Patriarch Tikhon of November 7/20, 1920.

"Herewith I enclose a copy of this Patriarchal Ukase which gives the Russian dioceses the full right to separate in order to develop their special status".

How tragic it is that among the episcopate of the ROCOR not even one bishop would take into consideration and share Bishop Gregory's views. The fate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia and Abroad might have been quite different.

A GENTLE HINT?

By an order of Bishop Ambrose of Western Europe, in Switzerland and Belgium (countries recently visited by the Kursk Icon of the Sign of Mother of God) leaflets were distributed in the churches with a short history of this icon in Russian and French.

On the end of the second page of this history it is related that under various conditions, this icon would always return to the place of its original discovery, sometimes even miraculously. Then follows an interesting paragraph:

"Let us hope that our Fellow Traveler in our wanderings around the world will not always remain in exile. From the history of this holy icon we have seen that it traveled much, but always inevitably returned to its place, no matter where it was brought. If it was not returned voluntarily, it came back to its place by itself. We also saw that all the efforts to destroy this holy icon led only to its greater glorification. And after sharing with us our difficult exile among foreign peoples and faiths, undoubtedly the holy icon, to preserve us from annihilation by our enemies, will return to its place of origin, the Monastery of the Root and the Sign in Kursk when the time comes as decided by our Lord God. Let us strongly believe that this will happen, as the history of the icon testifies. And it will lead us, who approach it with faith and love and seeking its assistance and intercession, with itself into the Homeland."

Perhaps in the near future the zealots for union with the Moscow Patriarchate will explain to us that the "time decided by our Lord God" already has arrived and, to confirm its history, the icon is to be returned to Kursk?

FROM THE LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN AUTONOMOUS CHURCH

The Internet news agency Vertograd.Razsylka # 94 reported that in Suzdal, in the Tsar Constantine Cathedral Archbishop Theodore ordained a reader Dionyssy McGoven to the priesthood. He will minister to the community of New Martyr Basil of Kineshma in the state of Virginia.

The new priest is married and has a family (a wife and 5 children). In Canada he entered a Uniate seminary. While studying, he got interested in Orthodoxy and turned with his questions to the OCA priest who was teaching there, asking what did he have to do to become Orthodox. The priest replied that there was no need to become Orthodox, since "Coca-Cola" and "Pepsi-Cola" are the very same drink. The future Fr. Dionyssy objected and told him that the first is the original drink, while the second is a forgery, based on its recipe. In 1998 he was baptized into the Orthodox Church.

The same Vertograd reported that at the request of local citizens on July 24th Metropolitan Valentin blessed a plot for building a chapel on the Znamensky Cemetery of Suzdal. The chapel will be dedicated to St. Vladimir and this time it will be erected with assistance of the city's government, since neither of Suzdal's cemeteries have a church or even a chapel.

A CERTAIN VICTORY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LATVIA

For a number of years Archbishop Victor, the head of a diocese of the Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church in Latvia, has been trying to get official status for his church. The Moscow Patriarchate exerted pressure upon all the political agencies in the country to prevent this from happening.

The persecution of Archbishop Victor's diocese included such minor matters as that he was forbidden to have even an icon or a cross on the exterior walls of his church. Yet, with the election of the city's new mayor a certain favorable change has come about.

The newspaper "Letgall" of May 22 reported that "on May 2 the Director for Religious Affairs, Ringold Balodis, visited Daugavpils and held some discussions regarding interfaith relations in the city. Mr. Balodis remarked that the resolution of the Duma permitting a private person to put a cross on a private house (at 18 November St.) is within the law and has precedents... The Duma had not taken up this matter for 6 years and, besides, the previous committee which was established by the previous Duma regarding church affairs was illegal, since the Church in Latvia is separate from the state".

This declaration was strongly opposed by the MP Priest Fr. George, who insisted that "the sect of Mr. Kontuzorov violates... many rights and laws. The urge to give the building an appearance of a church, where a handful of sectarians perform their ridiculous parodies of Orthodox services – is an unbelievable blasphemy".

The newspaper "Million" in regard to this case published an opinion of the manager of the legal committee of the Duma Dzintra Nikolaenko that:

"1. Orthodox symbolism is not prohibited in Latvia.

2. The symbolism is used correctly. The rituals and ceremonies performed in the building are those of Orthodox faithful.

3. The Zoning Committee of the Dauvapgills Duma decided to consider it possible to make alterations to the building according to Orthodox rules for houses of prayer."

The mayor of the city, Richard Eigim, said that "The Duma has not violated a single law. Everyone is equal before the law. We will carefully watch the progress of this matter to prevent lawlessness. I was very much surprised by the speech of Fr. George (MP) because, in the present situation, I see no reason for kindling inter-confessional hatred and intolerance in our city. I don't know who would profit from that. The Duma and myself personally have never interfered with church matters and we are not planning to do it in the future.... We would wish that all believers not to heat up matters without reason and not to yield to hatred".

This is the first time after a number of years (during which we have watched the unsuccessful efforts on the part of Archbishop Victor to legalize the status of the Latvian Orthodox Church) that the declaration of Mayor Eigim makes one hopeful that, finally, the church's problems will be justly resolved by the Latvian authorities.

A NEW JERUSALEM PATRIARCH

The Patriarch of Jerusalem Diodoros died on December 6/19, 2000. According to the statutes of that Patriarchate the election of a new Patriarch is to be held within two months after the repose, but this time it was not held until July 31/August 13, 2001.

In our May-June issue of 2001 # 3 (94) we reported preliminary elections by clergy and laity, according to which from a list of 17 bishops the Patriarchal Exarch in Athens, Metropolitan of Erapolis Eireneous (Kopellilis), received 8 votes. The Deputy Patriarch, Metropolitan Kornelios of Petra decided to send preliminary election records to the governments of Israel, Palestine and Jordan in order to have their confirmation of the candidates. At that time, the Israel and Palestine governments did not approve the candidate list and Jordan had no reaction.

But at present, understanding the urgent need to elect the Patriarch, the hierarchs set a date for elections from the candidate list and Metropolitan Eireneous I was elected. Israel considered him to be an anti-Semite. His "anti-Semitism" was concluded from the fact that he does not hide his sympathy toward the Palestinians (belonging to Semitic race just as well as Israelis). This accusation was also made of Patriarch Diodoros). But a month ago the Israeli government officially

ended its objection to this or that candidate for the post of Jerusalem Patriarch.

The election was performed at the Holy Sepulcher Church after two ballots. It is not known yet how many votes were given for the new Patriarch.

Patriarch Eireneous I is 62 years old. He was born in Greece on the island of Samos. In 1953 he came to Jerusalem and in 1963 graduated from the Seminary. Since 1972 he has been an Exarch of the Patriarch in Athens.

It is expected that the newly elected Patriarch will request approval of his election from the Jordan and Palestine governments. The new Patriarch has already sent his greetings to King Abdullah and to Arafat. At the same time, the Patriarch was to meet with Israel's Prime Minister Sharon.

In his acceptance speech the Patriarch said, "I will serve the Church and I support the Palestinian people and their just issues".

On August 7/20, the Vice-President of the Orthodox Palestine Society in Jerusalem Mrs. V. Kravchenko and A. Triandafillide (a member of OPS) personally delivered to the Patriarch a congratulatory letter of the OPS President, Bishop Anthony (Grabbe). The Patriarch received them very warmly, asked them to convey his gratitude and promised to send a personal letter to him. His Beatitude spoke with the representatives OPS in Russian and recalled how in the good old times he used to visit (at that time Archimandrite Anthony) in the Russian Excavations.

During this reception in the throne room Metropolitans Isikhios, Daniel, Damascene and Arkady were present. The official enthronement of the Patriarch was set for September 5.

Among the numerous persons who came to congratulate the new Patriarch was also the former mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek with his family. It seems, he doesn't consider the new Patriarch to be an anti-Semite.

VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN FACTS FROM THE BIOGRAPHY OF PATRIARCH ALEXIS II

The newspaper "Moscow News" in its Internet version of May 22-28, # 22 (1088) published an article dedicated to Alexis II Ridiger regarding his marriage.

None of the official biographies ever mention that he was married and then divorced his wife. Sometimes there was information that, after visiting the Monastery of Valaam, he supposedly at the age of 11, wanted to be a monk.

It is true, that there were some dark rumors about his marriage, but nothing definite was mentioned. Now the "Moscow News" gives interesting details about this marriage, which at the same time delineates the character of a person who managed to reach the post of head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The father-in-law of the current patriarch graduated from the Petrograd Ecclesiastical Academy in 1918 and in 1931 became a priest and was appointed a rector of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallin (Finland).

The marriage of Alexis Ridiger was performed on April 11th, 1950. The newspaper reports that the official records still exist in the Tallinn archives, but may not be made public, except by court order.

Yet "Moscow News" found out that two priests performed the marriage: the fathers of the bride George Alexeyev and the groom Michael Ridiger. The newspaper also noticed an interesting date of the wedding. That year Pascha fell on April 9th, which means that the wedding was performed in serious violation of the church rules, namely on Tuesday of Bright Week!

As it happens, there were very "serious reasons" for this.

Right after the wedding, four days later, on April 15th Ridiger was ordained deacon and after two more days – priest.

According to information preserved in the archives by the late Inspector of the Ecclesiastical Academy Leo Paraisky (died in 1972) presented to the Council for Religious Affairs attached to Council of Ministers of USSR, it is reported: "In the Leningrad Ecclesiastical Academy there was a case of ordination to the priesthood in order to avoid military draft for service in the Soviet army. Ridiger, A. M., (born 1929) was to be drafted in 1950. Being bridegroom of a daughter of the archpriest of the city of Tallin, G. Alexeyev, Ridiger, A., wanted to escape military service. Finding out that he was to be drafted to serve in the army, Ridiger, Archpriest Alexeyev and Roman, Bishop of Tallinn, prevailed upon Metropolitan Gregory to agree to permit Ridiger's wedding during Paschal week, when according to church rules weddings are prohibited".

As it happened, in 1950 the students of the ecclesiastical schools received a postponement of army service, which was abolished in that particular year. It is interesting to note that in the official biographies of Ridiger it is stated that he was "found to be not liable for call-up due to a heart condition".

The wedding of Alexis Ridiger with Vera Alexeyev, arranged in order to avoid military service, was held in the very same year. The deserted wife later married a second time. As the newspaper stated "the reasons for divorce are wrapped in mystery".

Nevertheless, all this in no way prevented further development of the "relatives' relationship". The former father-in law of Ridiger became a widower, in 1961 was tonsured a monk with the name of John and consecrated a bishop and appointed to Gorky (Novgorod) and his priestly post was given to his former son-in-law. In the same 1961 Alexis Ridiger was consecrated bishop at a liturgy presided over by Nikodim Rotov who is considered to be the main "sponsor" of his career.

An honorable biography, demonstrating that in Ridiger's character there is no place for human feelings, which are smothered by civil cowardice and careerism.

"ORTHODOX" CHURCHES IN RACE FOR AUTOCEPHALY

As we have previously reported, the Greek Exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America made an unsuccessful (so far) effort to create an autonomous church.

Now the Antiochians have imitated the Greeks. A newspaper "The National Herald" in the section "Community News" of July 21-22 published an extended interview of its reporter with Metropolitan Philip, the leading hierarch of the Antiochian Church in America. Of all the exarchates representing autocephalous and autonomous Churches in USA – the Antiochians are the most liberal and the most modernist.

The first parishes of the Antiochian Church in America were established in 1895 and at that time were under the jurisdiction of the Russian bishop, because before the Revolution America was considered to be Russian missionary territory. At present this Patriarchate in USA and Canada has about 500,000 members.

Metropolitan Philip personally is known for his numerous photographs surrounded by girls in ball gowns, when they have their coming out. In the early 80's he became famous for another photograph taken with Bishop Michael. Both are riding horses in cowboy outfits and with the pistols in their hands! Interestingly these photographs were published in the Church's official publication "The Word".

According to the above mentioned newspaper, the Board of Trustees who met on June 2nd have decided to officially request the Antiochian Patriarchate to grant the present exarchate in USA autonomous status. It has 235 parishes in USA, which are ministered to by 350 priests. Among them, -- no less that a half are converts to Orthodoxy from the "Evangelical Churches".

Metropolitan Philip has already mailed an appeal to the parishes asking them to vote for the plan of autocephaly/autonomy at the clergy and laity conference in Los Angeles. In this interview Metropolitan Philip said that if autonomy is refused, he is ready to establish autocephaly by himself. "We will get together all those in America who want autocephaly. I understand that in the Greek Archdiocese there is a strong movement for autocephaly," he said.

When the reporter asked Metropolitan Philip what would happen if Patriarch Ignatios refuses to grant him autonomy, he replied that, no matter what, the people in America will support the decision of the Board of Trustees.

To the question who will head this autocephalous movement – the Metropolitan replied that he hopes it will be the Greeks, but if not – there is still the "The Orthodox Church in America"

The reporter was also interested what would happen if Archbishop Demetrios (of the Ecumenical Patriarchate) refuses to join the autocephalists? Metropolitan Philip answered that at present he had not gotten in touch with Archbishop Demetrios, but even though it would be nice, it is still not that important, because there are many who insist upon American autocephaly.

And how do you visualize the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, was the next question? The Metropolitan answered: "Just autocephalous. We, the bishops will get together and will elect a patriarch. And we hope we can elect a Greek patriarch, because the Greek Archdiocese is a strong archdiocese. It has enough parishes to be strong, enough institutions. I have always said that the chairman of SCOBA should be Greek. When we had a problem with Spyridon, that time I begged him, I said let us follow the constitution of SCOBA because I want its chairman to be the Greek Archbishop. I think that our Mother Churches have everything to gain by recognizing our autonomy or autocephaly".

The journalist was also curious about the status of the "autocephalous Orthodox Church in America". The Metropolitan had absolutely no doubts that she will join the newly organized "autocephalies".

Metropolitan Philip also believes that it is necessary for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to move away from Istanbul and settle in some island in Greece, but preferably in America, because the "New Rome" has died. It would be desirable to reestablish it in America, and in particular in Washington.

This hierarch was also asked what does he think about a married episcopate. He answered positively. He also actively supports a second marriage for widowed clergymen.

One can easily imagine what kind of a church the future "American Autocephalous Church" will be!