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EVENTS IN SUZDAL

We arrived in Suzdal at the beginning of August. On ninth and tenth of this month the feast of "The Day of the City" was observed.

The program was split into two days: the official and public day and on the second day – a city wide fair. On the first day, August 9th there was a two-hour long meeting in the Central City Hall at which one after another, starting with Mayor Ryzhov, various officials of the city spoke. Very generously there were given out the awards even for such reasons as for having the most beautiful house, the best flower garden and even for a successful private business.

To the outsider the whole course of the festivities looked rather strange. It was obvious that throughout the mention of various activities in the city the name of Valentine Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir, who sat in the first row in white klobuk with staff in the hand and the sash of the Representative of the City Council, was intentionally omitted. The Mayor openly ignored his presence. The speech from the stage of Abbess Sophia (of MP Protection Convent) was especially ridiculous, for without any hesitation in the presence of the Metropolitan she spoke of the spiritual revival in Suzdal. This speech would more properly be classified a sermon. In it she totally "forgot" that as early as 1973 the present Patriarch Alexis II asked none other than Archimandrite Valentin to organize the parish life in Suzdal which at that time had only 2 churches open, but no priests.

In giving an award for the most beautiful house in the city, the Mayor declared that "first place was awarded to no one" and yet to some other person a second place certificate was nevertheless given! The house built by Metropolitan Valentin is without doubt the most beautiful and original in design in the city. It is a tourist attraction and they constantly gather in front of it to be photographed.

The stay in Suzdal from then on was a very tiring moral experience, since on Wednesday August 14th the lawless trial of the First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church Metropolitan Valentin started. It lasted through August 23rd.

The trial itself was absolutely illegal, because the four youngsters -- who testified at the hearings in February in the case of the accusations of the Metropolitan for immorality-- all retracted their former testimony as being coerced by fraud, bribery and threats. However, the judge demanded a psychiatric examination of the four youngsters who denied their former testimonies. They were taken under "protection" by the Revolutionary militia "Nashe Delo" (actually the local mafia) who would not let them out of their sights for a minute supposedly being in danger from an unidentified party.

The day before the new trial "unknown" young men posted on the fences in Suzdal appeals for citizen to join in efforts to eradicate "debauchery" in their city.

According to wishes of the judge, the hearing was closed to the public and no one was admitted to the courtroom except for members of the court, witnesses and lawyers.

On August 14th (the first day of the trial) the street for half a block was closed by the militia with dogs, mounted police and members of the militia "Nashe Delo". A rather wide street separated two groups: on one side stood some 20 militia groups, 4 cars of militiamen and a few women, obviously of easy virtue. Among them there were 2 daughters of the defrocked Priest Osetrov. Then, under the protection of 2 militiamen the son of Osetrov appeared. Despite the appeals, posted on the fences, the residents of Suzdal had ignored the calls "to eradicate debauchery" in their town.

On the other side of the street there stood some 70 people comprised of clergy, monastics and laity who met Metropolitan Valentin's car with singing "O Lord, save thy people..." The Metropolitan stepped from the car and proceeded into the courtroom.

During whole week about the same number of people, regardless of weather, gathered and accompanied their First Hierarchy singing prayers. However, the number of "defenders of morality" visibly diminished. During all the long hours of trial the faithful sang akathists and other prayers. The militia tried to muffle them with very loud music and once even demanded that they stop singing, but this was met with resistance: there is no law forbidding the singing of prayers.

The Metropolitan and his lawyers after every session of the court informed the faithful of the proceedings in the courtroom.

Thus we learned that Osetrov, Krassovsky and the former nun Sophia Morozova declared in the court room that they are willing "to forgive Metropolitan Valentin everything", "even kneel before him" if only he would "return to the Moscow Patriarchate"!

Osetrov group walked into the court room under escort, with hurried steps and some times they heard the singing of Holy Thursday's troparia: "When the glorious disciples were illuminated by the washing of the feet at the Supper, then was the mind of the impious Judas, ailing with covetousness, darkened."

As if intentionally, the defrocked Andrew Osetrov on Holy Wednesday was "ordained" a deacon by Archbishop Evlogy and on Holy Thursday -- a priest. We have learned that members of the Osetrov group have received very substantial amounts of money for their treason. Osetrov himself was openly bragging that he has now secured the well being of his 12 children for quite a long time. Krassovsky, who has no job at all, is now building a two-story brick house in Suzdal and has an apartment in Moscow. At the same time, he was able to purchase a new expensive car. Morozova also bought a good new house.

Now, there is no doubt that the Moscow Patriarchate is taking a very active part in the persecutions against the Free Russian Orthodox Church.

The faithful, who waited for the First Hierarch to leave the court building, noticed with joy that the abuses and slanders in no way affected his majestic manner of walking and with a gentle smile he thanked his flock for their moral support.

In the crowd there were conversations that eventually there will be a monument erected for him and some said that they hope to live to see his icon painted!

While waiting before the court building, a curious incident happened. On the first day of the court hearing, in the midst of the Revolutionary militia of "Nashe Delo" (which could be translated Casa Nostra or Mafia) a gentleman of definitely Semitic appearance and beard showed up and whose last name I was told was Nevolin. Since the newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" ("Russian Herald") in May published a very slanderous article about Metropolitan Valentin over the name of Nevolin and a few months later another of the same kind was published, but this time over the signature of "The Public Committee to Fight against the Activity of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in Suzdal", I wanted to meet him. To this foul article "Church News" will respond a bit later and a letter to the editors will be sent by registered mail return receipt.

Under a second article, entitled "History of the 'Peccadillos' of Valentin Rousantsov," in a separate frame an announcement was printed that "in issue # 17-18 in the article entitled 'Vampire', a harsh evaluation of the activities of 'Metropolitan' Valentin Rousantsov was included. The article provoked protests from the partisans of Rousantsov. Among them – Mrs. Schatalova [sic], publisher of a newsletter "Church News," in which she stated that the editor of "Ch N" had sent a letter with objections to 'Russkii Vestnik'. With regret we declare that this particular letter for some reason was not received, but upon receiving it, we will publish it..." (Underlined by "Ch. N.").

During the afternoon break I brought a copy of my letter to the editors of "Russkii Vestnik," walked up to a gentleman whom I was told was Mr. Nevolin and asked him if indeed he is Mr. Nevolin. He would not tell me his name, said that he is NOT Nevolin, but that he knows him. I then requested that he take my letter of response and forward it to the addressee. He briefly looked at the beginning of the letter and said that he is familiar with its content from the Internet, but refused to take the letter. In fact, I have never published it via the Internet.

At the very end of the court hearing, the same gentleman showed up on the scene, brought new uniforms for the revolutionary fighters and several persons told me, again, that this was Nevolin himself.

According to the agency Portal-credo.ru:

"Metropolitan Valentin was accused in accordance with paragraphs 132, 133 and 151 of the UK RF of 'the crime against the sexual inviolability of the person'. The former clergyman of the ROAC Andrew Osetrov, who was defrocked in May 2001 and reordained by the ROC MP in 2002, made this accusation against him. It was accepted for investigation by the Persecutor's office of the City of Vladimir during the summer of 2001. As victims of this case were recognized Benjamin and Eugene Kutsik, Andrew Panov and Yegor Derevenko. At the first session of the court in February of 2002, all four of the 'victims' renounced their statements and declared that they were given under pressure from Osetrov and the investigators of the city's prosecutors. However, later, two of the victims: Eugene Kutsik and Andrew Panov, who were under the protection of the revolutionary fighters of the group Nashe Delo, did reassert their former accusatory statements.

"The court decided to stop the criminal case according to paragraph 151, in which Yegor Derevenko was involved. The episode according to paragraph 132 in which Andrew Panov was involved, was dropped due to expiration of the period of time. The accused was convicted according to paragraphs 132 and 133 of the UK RF of episodes, the participants in which were Eugene and Benjamin Kutsik.

"The judge did not accept the denial of one of the victims, Benjamin Kutsik, and referred to the fact that according to the witness of the main accuser, Andrew Osetrov, as well as his relatives, Benjamin Kutsik renounced his testimony under pressure from the lawyers of the accused. In this way, the basis for the accusation was not the testimony of B. Kutsik, but his testimony at the preliminary investigation. In the accusation episodes are mentioned which are considered as impossible even by the participants of the process – in particular, the insistence that Metropolitan Valentine raped a victim in the Tsar-Constantine Cathedral at time when 15 witnesses were present. The judge rejected the many heavy illnesses of Metropolitan Valentin as being ones that do not prevent the actions of which he is accused.

"The crimes of paragraph 132 in connection with part 'D' were acknowledged as severe and especially dangerous to the public. However, considering the state of health of the accused and his age, the court has conditionally decreed the punishment. [Amazing logic on the part of the judge: in some way, the illnesses of Metropolitan do not prevent him "from committing the incriminating acts" and yet, "the court takes into consideration the condition and age of the accused"! "Ch. N."].

"Actually, the court has accepted the offer of the accession on conditionally punishing Metropolitan Valentin by imprisonment of 4 years and 3 months with the postponement of actual fulfillment for 2 years. The restriction given Metropolitan remains the same: the signature of not leaving.

"As per information of our informant: the judge was visibly upset as she read the sentence, her voice was constantly breaking and the text of the sentence could barely be heard.

"The lawyers of the accused have related that the sentencing was 'sown with white threads' [frayed arguments] and will go to the Court of Appeals within the required 10 day period. As declared by the lawyer Arcady Kolesnikov "it is even good that the sentencing is as it is, because the strained interpretations are obvious right away". Among such strained interpretations, according to the defense, is the total ignoring by the judge of Benjamin Kutsik as well as numerous testimonies of bribery and intimidation of Eugene Kutsik, which favor the Metropolitan. Another weak spot are the constant

references of the sentencing to 'witness Osetrov' who is the main interested person of the accusation and actually the organizer of the whole process. The lawyers have also stressed that the judge has demonstrated complete partiality towards the accusing party and the biased press and statements that all the testimony against the Metropolitan were given of free will, while all testimony in defense of the Metropolitan were given under pressure from the defense.

"Near the Suzdal court building a large group of faithful gathered, who constantly sang prayers. Metropolitan Valentin, upon coming out of the courtroom was met with loud greetings from the faithful and 'many years' was sung. The Primate of the ROAC calmed the people and told them that 'the ridiculous sentence will be appealed'.

"It is obvious, that the regional judge made not so much a correct procedural decision, as a 'political' one, when she sided with the accusing party which stands behind Andrew Osetrov and the city and local authorities whose aim is the moral destruction of the Metropolitan to 'oust' the ROAC from Suzdal. Thus, the sentencing will not be the last word — any party by all means will refer it to the Court of Appeals and the whole case is to be sent to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the more honest interpretation is that the obvious 'inclination towards the accusers' is primarily a result of the pressure upon the judge by the local authorities".

Suzdal is a small provincial city in which every one knows his neighbor. Even before the accusing sentence was made against Metropolitan Valentin, in Suzdal people were saying that Judge Mysiagina, who lives in Vladimir (it is a daily trip of some 25 miles) would love to be a judge in that city, but it was suggested to her, that if she does arrive at a conviction of the Metropolitan, not only will she never be transferred to Vladimir, but also loose her job in Suzdal.

Due to efforts on part of the Suzdal city administration, at the initiative of MP Priest Letka, the City Council raised the question of stripping Metropolitan Valentin of his status as Representative to the City Council and the title of Honorary Citizen of Suzdal. Yet, the proposal was met with such negative resistance, that the matter was immediately taken off the agenda. So, the Metropolitan remains a Representative member of the City Council and Honorary Citizen.

In this trial more than 30 witnesses testified in favor of Metropolitan Valentin, but the "judge" due to personal interests decided to take part of the clients of this outrageous case. It seems, that even the legendary "Shemiaka Judge" would have been fairer.

FINAL STATEMENT OF VALENTIN, METROPOLITAN OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR BEFORE THE VERDICT WAS ANNOUNCED

Honorable court: Let me begin my final statement with a short preamble. During my 40 years of service, I have received many ecclesiastical and secular awards and honorary titles. Of my 29 years of residence in Suzdal, 19 were spent in the service of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), and, during that time, services recommenced in two churches. Prior to my arrival in Suzdal, there was no permanent priest, and the Suzdal faithful were served by visiting clergy of the Vladimir diocese.

During the godless rule of the Soviet state in my motherland, I miraculously managed to raise from their ruins two churches: Tsar Constantine Cathedral and the Church of the Theotokos Joy All who Sorrow, and to build a church house. Upon my initiative and that of the Mayor of Rottenburg (Germany), Oscar Schubert, a friendly connection has been established between the cities of Suzdal and Rottenburg, which remain brother-cities to the present.

I was appointed to be the rural dean of the Vladimir region's churches, and a member of the Diocesan Council. I was responsible for receiving native and international visitors and served as the President of the Organizing Committee for celebrating the 1000-year anniversary of the Baptism of Russia in Vladimir-Suzdal region.

Upon the request of the chief medical officer of the Vladimir hospital, and upon my solicitation, a diagnostic center was established at the designated regional hospital.

Since 1965 I have participated in various activities of the Peace Foundation and have received six medals for this participation, one of them gold.

Over many years, I have contributed to arranging humanitarian aid for the people of Suzdal, which became a substantial means of support for families there throughout the difficult years of economic reforms.

We all remember in what terrible and dilapidated condition the many architectural monuments of Suzdal were. I was aware that not only our Lord, but also our ancestors, our descendants, and history itself would never be able to forgive us for letting these monuments fall into such a dreadful, almost ruined state. That is why the restoration of eighteen historical and cultural monuments in the city itself and in the Suzdal area was accomplished under my guidance, without any support from the State. Numerous books about Suzdal, and its sacred objects were written through my labors.

For my activities, I was awarded honorary diplomas, insignias, medals and orders from Moscow and foreign Patriarchates. I have renounced all of these awards, however, in protest against the persecutions raised against the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church.

After I left the MP, I immediately became subject to oppression and persecution both from the Vladimir diocese of the MP and from the special services involved. Now the state, in the persons of an investigator and the state prosecutor, has held a trial without observing the norms of law: a show trial based upon intimidation of witnesses and victims. I interpret this criminal case against me as persecution against the entire fullness of the Russian Church, as has already occurred in our modern history, after the terrible 1917 Revolution.

And now, about the essence of the accusation:

I deny every criminal action imputed to me.

All of these outlandish accusations emerged immediately after I had deposed the former priest Andrey Osetrov and his supporters. These false accusations are the result of his ambitions and devilish revenge. Andrey Osetrov has craftily manipulated the testimonies of mentally unstable people like Olga Morozova and mentally ill individuals such as Dimitry Krasovsky and Evgeny Kutsik.

I ask you to pay special attention to the fact that during the trial, it was acknowledged often that the witnesses and the victims had been bribed. For example, Egor Derevianko was paid for his false testimony; Veniamin Kutsik was promised money for similar false testimony; and Olga Morozova was bought a house for such testimony. We have information that Evgeny Kutsik was also promised a house in exchange for his false testimony. In view of such circumstances, the testimonies of the other witnesses and victims including Evgeny Kutsik are dubious, to say the least.

The court has no objective evidence that proves the accusations brought against me.

Moreover, the accusations fail to mention any specific times for the alleged events. For example, something allegedly took place in mid-spring, or in the summer; or something happened in the middle of December or at the end of November. In the absence of definite times, I am unable to defend myself or to give the court evidence that refutes the accusation. During any and all of the above-mentioned periods I could have been away: receiving medical treatment, going on an extended visit throughout the Diocese, or traveling. I received treatment in the Vladimir regional hospital, in Moscow, and in American and German hospitals. The absence of specific times in the accusations violates my right to rebut the accusations. According to the criminal law (article 73), the time a crime was committed must be proven. No actual time for committing any alleged crime was proven to the court, so we cannot call the investigation of the circumstances of this case full and complete.

Had I in fact committed the alleged crimes, all the victims would have ceased going to Church and would have remembered the exact time of such events. They would have told their parents about it, and would have gone to the militia. Yet, they did not stop attending Church services; they cannot relate the exact times of these alleged events; and their parents have never raised objections against their communication with me.

I have been ill for thirty years with diabetes mellitus. In 1996 I endured a difficult heart operation: coronary bypass. Such illness flatly disproves the allegations made against me. These facts, however, were likewise not evaluated at the trial.

I call your attention to the fact that my principal accuser, Evgeny Kutsik, has been under psychiatrist control since childhood with a diagnosis of innate oligophreny (retardation) in a moronic stage. The materials of the case contain a record of this fact. Due to such a diagnosis, he was relieved from serving in the army. Now, is the whole accusation to be based on the testimony of such a person? It happens that he is not trusted to use weapons, yet my future can be entrusted to his hands.

Such serious mental disease provides the basis for his imaginings, morbid fantasies, and unreliable evaluation of events. I assert that Evgeny Kutsik's testimony cannot be considered objective and full without a professional statement in evidence from his doctor, who has been keeping him under observation for many years. For this reason, I believe that it is a great omission on the part of the court that they did not question his doctor or investigate the documentation about the specifics of Evgeny Kutsik's illness. I consider it imperative, for the sake of full objectivity in the trial that a psychiatric evaluation regarding Evgeny Kutsik should have been performed. Therefore, according to article 294 of the Criminal Procedural Code, I claim the need to investigate new circumstances that are of great importance for the case: a medical investigation and expert medical and clinical testimony concerning Evgeny Kutsik. What is more, the interview that was conducted with Evgeny Kutsik in the psychiatric hospital cannot be called an objective and full investigation. I also ask you to consider the testimonies of Vera Schelkina, Varvara Hitrova and Anastasia Schatilova, regarding the fact that all testimony from Evgeny Kutsik and Andrey Panov was produced under pressure from Osetrov, the investigator Egorov, and, after February 2002, the members of the extremist organization "Nashe Delo" (Mafia). I feel compelled to point out that these victims are still under pressure and continual control, and since February 2002 have been literally stalked by Nashe Delo members.

Moreover, the written testimony of Veniamin Kutsik, submitted to the judge, Ms. Mysiagina, stated the pressure applied upon him. I contend that this declaration has not been properly emphasized.

Without investigation of the complete facts, we may not call the accusatory testimonies objective and true. For this reason, I insist that the court issue a special decision (or ruling) to make the law-enforcement agencies act properly to investigate fully the use of coercion against Evgeny Kutsik and Andrey Panov.

All circumstances described here are particularly important for the case and must be evaluated and properly studied by the court.

August 22, 2002

**DECLARATION
OF VALENTIN, METROPOLITAN OF SUZDAL AND VLADIMIR,
FIRST HIERARCH OF THE RUSSIAN AUTONOMOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH
REGARDING THE VERDICT ON HIS CASE IN THE SUZDAL REGIONAL COURT**

What has happened today is something we have been warning you about during the last one and a half years; but at the same time it was something we did not want to believe until the very last minute. The Suzdal regional court, Judge Isabella Mysiagina presiding, has committed a blasphemous anti-clerical crime: it has issued an absurd and groundless verdict on my case.

As a monk, I should not vindicate myself when I am slandered. Yet, it is obvious to everyone, especially the court, that this verdict directed against me has struck the Church of Christ and left a bleeding wound on Her body, already tormented by the persecutions of the twentieth century. The court found me guilty of even supposed "criminal" actions that were denied by the "victims" themselves. The testimony of one of them, Benjamin Kutsik, has been rejected by the court for the sole reason that it contradicted the words of the witness Andrey Osetrov.

This man, the former priest, is fully responsible for what has happened. It is especially hard for me to accept, because it was I who laid hands on him to give him the grace of the priesthood; and he now tramples it underfoot. For many years we worked side by side. He now, having found influential patrons who are exasperated by the open preaching in the Russian land of true Orthodoxy, which undermines the hegemony of the Moscow Patriarchate, has involved many miserable ones in his satanic, anti-clerical work. One of them is Judge Mysiagina, who carried out her evil work with evident exertion and a quaver in her voice, clearly unknowing or uncaring about the Last Judgment of God, to be expected by her and me and every mortal person.

Now, under these severe circumstances of lawlessness triumphant, I again call upon the faithful flock of the True Church to be courageous and firm. I witness before God that I am not guilty of these bizarre crimes; they were not proven by the court, so let your hearts be free of confusion. Although our faith in Russian justice has been greatly undermined, we shall follow the path prescribed by the law until the final outcome. Today's verdict will be appealed in every particular; and I, as First Hierarch, will protect the dignity of the Church entrusted to me until the end. I call God's blessing upon you and ask you to intensify your prayers for me, the unworthy one.

+ VALENTIN Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir

Suzdal, August 23, 2002, 6 PM