

Российская Православная Автономная Церковь въ Америке
Епархіальное Управленіе



Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church of America
Diocesan Administration

95 Elm Street ♦ Elmwood Park, New Jersey 07407 ♦ USA
Telephone: (347) 321-4870 ♦ Fax: (208) 730-7551 ♦ Email: roacusa@gmail.com
Web Site: www.roacusa.org

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APPEAL

Of His Grace Andrew (Maklakov), Bishop of Pavlovskoye
Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church

I am a Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC), which now, in this twenty-first century, in full view of the whole world, is being subjected to constant cruel persecution by the civil authorities of the government of the Russian Federation.

Our parishioners and our clergy in the city of Suzdal, in other parts of the province of Vladimir, as well as in other towns and cities across Russia, are being insulted verbally, are the targets of psychological pressure of various kinds, and are often terrorized; even beaten. In 2002, for example, one of our subdeacons, Andrei Smirnov, was beaten up in the very narthex of our Tsar Constantine Cathedral in Suzdal, as he was coming out of church after the end of the Divine Liturgy. This incident came as a result of his categorical refusal to provide “compromising information” against the Chief Hierarchy of the ROAC.

On October 13th, 2005, unknown assailants broke into the headquarters of our Synod in Suzdal and beat our Chief Hierarchy himself, Metropolitan Valentine (Rusantsov), unconscious. The Synod headquarters is situated directly across the street from the police station (OVD). The assailants were never brought to justice.

Our churches are broken into, robbed of their icons and church utensils; they are set on fire, and covered with blasphemous graffiti. In 2002 and in 2004, unknown perpetrators set fire to the garage of the Synod’s headquarters, our convent on Vasilievskaya Street, one of our church’s properties on Slobodskaya Street, broke into the Tsar Constantine Cathedral, the Church of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, and also attempted to throw bullets into our Church of the Holy Dormition of the Mother of God (so that the police could come later and find them, and use this to accuse us). Several times, bands of hooligans broke into our churches during services. Not one of these cases resulted in the investigation, apprehension, trial or conviction of any of the perpetrators by the police or by officials sworn to uphold the rights of citizens and protect the innocent from harm.

Our Church and its members have been slandered, have been the object of false rumors, of various kinds of provocations, and have been smeared by the mass media. The campaign of lies, slander and denigrations reached its high point in 2002, when Metropolitan Valentine (Rusantsov) was accused of sodomy with minors. The initiator of this shameful slander was a certain A. Osetrov, a disgruntled clergyman of the ROAC, who was under suspension, and who would later be received back into the communion of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the process of interviewing the children who accused Metropolitan Valentine, Osetrov and his group of supporters used illegal, unfair and immoral pressure on them. After the trial was concluded, all of the child witnesses and their relatives recanted their testimony. They affirmed that they were forced to bear false witness against the Metropolitan, and asked him for forgiveness.

Neither the slanders of the mass media, nor the posters put up around town, nor the individuals dressed up like Cossacks, nor others like them claiming to be defenders of righteousness, who had all been brought in from Moscow by the busload, nor the guilty verdict pronounced against Metropolitan Valentine, had any success in turning away our faithful, priests or bishops, from him or from our Church. Our people understood that the Chief Hierarchy of the ROAC, together with them, were suffering for the Faith; for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord said to us, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake." (Matt. 5:10-11).

In 2006-2007, the government authorities in Russia shifted from a propaganda campaign of slander and lies against the ROAC to one of repression through administrative and juridical means. The many "check ups" into the financial and household activities of our Church, however, did not provide the desired results. So then, the government organization known as the Vladimir Territorial Authority (Rosimushchestvo), headed by a man called V. Gorlanov, with the support of the federal authorities in Moscow, began a campaign to take away all churches, chapels, and other objects of real estate from the ROAC.

These abandoned and half-ruined churches, as they were in the beginning of the 1990s, had been given over to the faithful of the ROAC for their permanent use on the condition that we would rebuild, remodel, and restore them, and use them only for religious purposes. The entire community of Orthodox believers in Suzdal, together with the help and support of Orthodox believers from around the world, took part in the great rebuilding campaign. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were invested in renovating these buildings; millions of rubles. For more than twenty years we prayed to God in these churches and glorified our Lord Jesus Christ. However, in 2008, the government decided that we no longer had the right to pray in them, and that we should be forced out of them.

The decisions of the court of arbitration, as expected in this lawless country, were handed down against the believers. Over the course of two years, from 2009-2011, ten churches in the city of Suzdal and several other churches in neighboring towns in the province of Vladimir were wrested from the ROAC. Appeals and complaints to offices having oversight of the courts remained without due lawful attention. At the same time that this was going on, the authorities mounted a campaign of groundless accusations, machinations and harassment against the clergy and parishioners of the ROAC, first requiring us to take all of our belongings out of these churches, and fining us if we didn't,

and then calling in the police with claims that we were “stealing” church property, if we did take everything out of the church buildings.

Later on, these churches were handed over to the official, government-affiliated, Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this way, they demonstrated blatant discrimination on the part of the government against the ROAC, based on religious convictions. The government, which according to the constitution of the Russian Federation, is separated from the church, tramples upon the rights of its citizens who belong to the ROAC, in favor of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, it became quite clear that the services in these churches were being performed for no one, since our people did not go to the Moscow Patriarchate along with the buildings, as expected. Most of the churches that were taken away from the ROAC are now standing empty, boarded up, without heating in the winter, and without the minimum of upkeep being provided for them. They have begun to fall into ruin again, and this is a quite telling symbolism for the anti-God government of the Russian Federation, which identifies itself as the successor to the atheistic USSR.

Our parishioners have had to return to praying in private homes, often secretly, just like the true Orthodox catacomb Christians during the repressions and persecutions of the Stalinist and Khrushchev regimes.

However, even this is not enough for the authorities of the Russian Federation. They have begun a new campaign of juridical and administrative repressions against the ROAC. This campaign coincides with the repose in January of 2012 of our Metropolitan Valentine (Rusantsov). The late Chief Hierarch of the ROAC was not yet even buried when local officials sent their representatives to inventory our Church's belongings, and to announce their intentions concerning our parishioners. They proclaimed that the next action that we should expect from the authorities of the Russian Federation would be the confiscation from the ROAC of the relics of Saints Euphemios and Euphrosynia of Suzdal.

Immediately, the harassment of the ROAC parishioners and clergy began through the auspices of the printed media and television. Our members were accused of not allowing access to the relics of these Saints to believing people who wanted to pray before them. This is an outright lie. The ROAC has always made full access to these Saints possible for those who wanted to pray before them.

In 1988, the relics of Saints Euphemios and Euphrosynia, which miraculously escaped full destruction during the anti-church wars with the Communist government, were given by the director of a local museum to three private persons. One of these three persons would later become Metropolitan Valentine, our Chief Hierarch.

How did the skeletal remains of these Saints come to be in the possession of a government-run museum anyway? Without doubt, it was the result of Communist pillaging of Russian monasteries and churches, which began in 1917.

The return of the relics of Saints Euphemios and Euphrosynia to the faithful in 1988 was an act of the return of fairness, and in all probability, even of repentance on the part of the museum director for those atrocities done by the government during the reigns of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. However, the present governmental authorities of the Russian Federation, through their discriminatory policies against the ROAC, are demanding the relics of these Saints back.

Concurrently with this legal action, the Vladimir diocesan administration of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church let it be known, that this campaign

is being waged under its control, and with the cooperation of the federal authorities of the Russian Federation. Even bureaucrats working for the government did not hide this fact. The deputy director of the Center for Political Technologies, Aleksei Makarkin, with open cynicism publicly announced that, "The separation of the ROAC from the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was nothing but a hateful schism. And right after the schism, the Moscow Patriarchate began to take definite measures against the ROAC. At present, the ROAC is being liquidated as an entity. For this to occur, it is necessary to take away from it its fundamental assets – the church buildings, and its sacred objects. If there are no churches and sacred objects, then it becomes an organization of no significance."

The result of this campaign was the decision of this same court of arbitration, on May 17, 2012, to confiscate the relics of Saints Euphemios and Euphrosynia from the ROAC, and award them to the plaintiff, i. e. the secular, governmental organization called the Vladimir Territorial Authority "Rosimushchestvo." The judge, Irina Butina, had already participated earlier in other court farces, when the churches of Suzdal were taken away from the ROAC.

This event has received a wide response from across the world. For the first time in history, a state has made known its claims to the ownership of "human remains," as they are called in the plaintiffs complaint.

The pre-arranged outcome of this case hearing was well known long in advance. First of all, the plaintiff brought suit in the court of arbitration, i. e. a court whose primary purpose, according to Article 2 of the Codex of Arbitration Procedures of the Russian Federation, is to defend the legal rights and legitimate interests of persons whose rights have been violated or are under attack, involving commercial or other economic activity.

What commercial or other economic activity was the ROAC doing with the relics of Saints? In what codex or commercial law can it be shown that the relics of Saints can become the object of economic activity? From the dawn of time, relics have been the object of religious faith, prayer and veneration. This is why Orthodox Christians go to churches and offer up their prayers to God before them. This is precisely what was taking place all the years that the relics of Saints Euphemios and Euphrosynia were in the possession of the ROAC.

The plaintiff itself, i. e. the Vladimir Territorial Authority "Rosimushchestvo" (the same V. Gorlanov) and the judges of the court of arbitration used the term "human remains." So, the government is asserting its claim to be the rightful owner of the bones of human beings who lived 600 and 800 years ago! Only then, there was no organization known as "Rosimushchestvo," nor was there any government known as the Russian Federation, which became the successor of the thieving USSR. There were no documents establishing or proving the ownership of "human remains" put forth by the state. Neither was there any attempt to show that the "human remains" had any historical or cultural significance.

The real motives behind this unconstitutional, discriminatory, and from the Orthodox Christian perspective, ungodly action of the authorities of the Russian Federation, are well known. They are the paranoid attempts of the authorities to destroy the ROAC, which stands for the Truth of Christ, and does not enter into compromise with the atheistic government of the Russian Federation. The ROAC brings its people the light of

Christ's truth, the eternal riches of Christian teaching, and leads them to the salvation of their souls for eternal life.

The very existence of the ROAC is a constant reproach to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, an organization, which is mired in the filth of corruption, Simony, heresy, moral decadence, and spiritual emptiness. The Moscow Patriarchate, of late, has been turned into a kind of ideological department for the administration of the president of the Russian Federation; it has become a partner in the government's repression and enslavement of the citizens of the Russian Federation.

It is absolutely necessary for the Russian Federation and its ideological apparatus, in the form of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, to destroy the ROAC. The argument over the relics of Saints Euphemos and Euphrosynia is not so much an argument over the "human remains" themselves. The goal of the state machine of the Russian Federation, of the federal and regional authorities is completely different – to destroy the parishes, and snuff out the faith of the people. It is not for nothing that the bureaucrats of the state, after chasing the people out of their churches, announced, "You have no church buildings. So that means that you have no parishes. And without parishes, there is no church."

But the parishes of the ROAC are made up of people, not buildings, and the Church of Christ exists in the hearts of the faithful. Persecuted for their faith in Christ, the parishioners only grow stronger in their convictions, and close ranks around the Church, about which Christ Himself said, "I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against It." (Matt. 16:18).

Today, on behalf of the Church of Christ, persecuted and oppressed by the Russian authorities, I appeal to all of the true Orthodox Churches of the Russian tradition. My friends, before your very eyes a blasphemous war is being waged against our Russian Orthodox faith. Not the differences between us, but our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ should serve as the foundation of our united stand in the face of this awful danger. Today, they have come for us, but tomorrow, they will be coming for you. I call upon you to help us for the glory of our Lord. Speak to your parishioners; speak among yourselves. Write letters to the mass media. Demand the cessation of these discriminatory policies by the officials of the Russian Federation against Orthodox Christians.

I also appeal to the national local churches of the true Orthodox. We need your help, your prayers, your support against a powerful, godless, and indifferent enemy. Every word that you write, every prayer, every publication, every synodal resolution in defense of the ROAC will be for the glory of our Lord. We eagerly await your assistance, your spiritual solidarity, your faith. May they all help us in our hour of need.

As an American citizen, whose ancestors have lived in the USA since the 18th century, I appeal to my own government, to the President of the United States, to the Congress, to the leadership at the State Department: the Russian Federation is carrying on a campaign of discrimination against the ROAC, against true Orthodox Christians, on the basis of our religious beliefs. The authorities of the Russian Federation are crudely violating their own constitution; their own laws, both civil and juridical; they are in violation of numerous international treaties and agreements; they violate universally recognized basic human rights, including the right of every citizen to freedom of religion and conscience, the right of every citizen to a fair trial, free of corruption; and the right to a life free of fear and threats. I call upon you to do everything possible to defend the basic human rights of people

in the Russian Federation, using international law, and the diplomatic, financial and humanitarian means available to our great democratic country.
May the Lord God help us, and bless us all!

+ Bishop Andrew

✙ Andrew,
Bishop of Pavlovskoye

