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A GROUNDLESS RESTRICTION OF THE RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH

In our first number for 1998 we gladly published the excellent letter signed by Bishop Barnabas and 14 clergymen of the Diocese of Western Europe addressed to Metr. Vitaly and the members of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. It very resolutely expressed concern about the dangers involved in the ongoing negotiations about a union of the Church Abroad with the Moscow Patriarchate. In connection with this letter we have received a page from the circular "Informational Communication # 3 to the Rt. Reverend Hierarchs of the ROCA" concerning the Hierarchical Synod session held in New York from October 20 to 22, 1997. It makes evident the disturbing reaction of the members of the Synod to the utterly justified and very correctly expressed worries of the clergy of Western Europe. The minutes of this session state:

"25. *We heard:* The written announcement by the Rt. Rev. Ambrose of Vevey regarding a letter of 4/17 October, 1997, from a group of clergymen of the Diocese of Western Europe, which was composed without his knowledge. When Bishop Ambrose learned of the existence of this letter, he required that it be sent to him and he in turn forwarded it to the Synod. In this letter concern is expressed regarding recent events in the life of the Russian Church [Abroad]. Bishop Ambrose regards *the above letter of the clergymen as out of place, poorly informed, and needlessly alarmist. It gives the impression of being mistrustful of the ecclesiastical superiors and has the odor of a sectarian spirit of impetuosity "for the salvation of the Church."* [Italics by "Ch. N."] *We resolved:* To accept the letter of Rt. Rev. Bishop Ambrose and note that he quite correctly points out that the clergy of the Diocese of Western Europe should first of all have received permission to write a letter from their diocesan bishop before even composing such a letter."

This "Communication" leaves the reader totally bewildered. First of all, the original letter of the clergymen was signed by Bishop Barnabas of Cannes and then by 9 archpriests, 4 priests and 2 protodeacons. Even though in disfavor in the eyes of the Synod for defending the monasteries in the Holy Land from the Moscow Patriarchate, Bishop Barnabas has the same status, vicar bishop to Archbishop Seraphim of Western Europe, as has the other of his vicar bishops, Rt. Rev. Ambrose of Vevey and according to accepted Church procedure, both of them have equal rights. In addition to this, the letter is signed by the senior clergy of the diocese and, one must note, by a majority of its clergy. One would expect that this alone would be sufficient reason enough to evoke a resolution regarding the essence of a matter that so troubles a bishop and clergy which would be in no way limited a judgement against the fact that those undersigning the letter had not received permission to do so from the superior hierarchy of the diocese.

The opinion of Bishop Ambrose that the letter "has the odor of a sectarian spirit of impetuosity 'for the salvation of the Church' " is nothing but an undeserved insult thrown by the bishop into the face of the entire body of the clergy of the Diocese of Western Europe.

This entire decree of the Synod of Bishops concerning a bishop and a majority of diocesan clergy regarding steps toward unification with the Moscow Patriarchate is summed up only by the completely justified opinion that as of now freedom of expression should not exist in the Church Abroad. Absolutely nowhere -- neither in canon law nor in the consistorial regulations -- are there any requirements whatsoever that in order to write any letter addressed to the highest ecclesiastical authorities (whether individual or collective) one must obtain the prior blessing of the local diocesan bishop.

This document, which reached us by accident, cannot be termed anything but extremely shameful of the Hierarchical Synod and not only from the administrative point of view. It is obvious from it that the Synod of Bishops is clearly evading any answer to the central question raised by a vicar bishop and the leading clergy of the Diocese of Western Europe concerning the approaching danger of a unification of the ROCA with the Moscow Patriarchate.

A CURIOUS DECREE OF THE 4TH CONSULTATION OF THE RUSSIAN BISHOPS OF THE ROCA

The information bulletin "Vertograd-Info" (published in Russia from the ROCA) in issue # 11-12 included an announcement that in November, 1997, there was a meeting in Yalta (in Ukraine) of the Russian bishops under the jurisdiction of the ROCA: Archbishop Lazarus of Odessa and Tambov and Bishops Benjamin of Chernomorye and Kuban, Evtikhy of Ishima and Siberia, Agathangel of Simferopol and Crimea and Michael of Toronto. This meeting discussed the organization of a school to prepare clergy for ROCA parishes, the selection of candidates for vacant dioceses, the acceptance of a number of clergy and disciplinary matters.

As the bulletin states, "The most important decision was to relieve the Rt. Rev. Evtikhy, Bishop of Ishima and Siberia, from the temporary administration of the Dioceses of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Suzdal"[?!]. (Italics by "Ch. N.")

Then it is stated that Bishop Evtikhy "already at previous meetings posed the question of the advisability of appointing to these dioceses one of the bishops of the ROCA. The Synod of Bishops of the ROCA by the end of October

of the current year has complied with this request of Bishop Evtikhy to relieve him of the temporary administration of the above dioceses, expressed its appreciation for his labors and appointed the Rt. Rev. Bishop Michael of Toronto *who is retain his former title.* [our italics] From now on all the churches of the ROCA belonging to the Moscow, St. Petersburg and Suzdal Dioceses will proclaim the name of Bishop Michael during services. Bishop Michael will assume his new archpastoral duties at the beginning of December."

The transfer of the administration of this Suzdal Diocese to Bishop Michael, apart from other things, is rather interesting. From the day it was formally established in 1991 it has been led by Archbishop Valentin of Suzdal and Vladimir. The hopes of the Synod of Bishops that the majority of his parishes would abandon him following the imposition upon him of an unjust suspension have in no way materialized. In neither Suzdal itself, nor in its immediate suburbs, is there a single parish under the jurisdiction of the ROCA. In other words, the transfer of administration of this diocese to Bishop Michael of Toronto is pure fiction.

Beyond this, the decree is astonishing in its administrative illiteracy. A bishop residing on the American continent is appointed to administer three dioceses within Russian territory, all the while retaining his title (and one must think, his obligations) as a vicar bishop of the First Hierarch of the ROCA!

Unfortunately, it is not clear from the information of "Vertograd-Inform" why Bishop Evtikhy considers it "expedient" that three dioceses be simultaneously administered by an utterly inexperienced bishop from abroad and not by those local bishops who have first-hand experience of the immediate circumstances of contemporary Church life in Russia.

A COMMON DECLARATION

We have received "A Statement from the Participants of the Ninth Conference of the Clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate and the Church Abroad) in Germany". We have italicized the, so to say, most "important" points.

Following the exacerbation of relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad by the end of 1997, the fact that we met at all and were able to continue our frank dialogue is in itself of no small significance.

In the light of *our mutual understanding*, we cannot abandon the hope that the further positive broadening of these initial steps is possible.

We are conscious of the new difficulties which have arisen as if anew. In this regard, the current arguments *remind us too closely of the confrontation of past decades* and we are aware that this confrontation today *undermines the witness of the Church as the Body of Christ*.

Thus far, in our small circle, we have spoken frankly with each other about all these problems and at present, in spite of everything, are able to continue discussing in this same spirit all that stands between us. If we deem ourselves to be children of the one Russian Church, then we bear a responsibility for *the future demonstration of its essential unity*.

I

We accept the fact that a division exists. This terrible disunity arose from the destruction of the Russian State, the destruction of the integrity of the living structure of the Church and of cultural traditions.

As long as the division persists, occasions will continue to arise that will serve to intensify it, since the division itself accumulates opportunities for new conflicts. There are forces at work that are interested in deepening the confrontation. Even people who ardently desire the best for the Church can involuntarily contribute to this confrontation.

Frequently that which divides us is based on ignorance and misunderstandings and this becomes evident in any serious dialogue; but this *becomes obscured, on the level of tabloid polemics, with inaccurate or hostilely formulated pronouncements or through differing usages of terms. Such trends, wherever possible, should be avoided.*

II

Throughout our previous eight encounters, we discussed the following topics: liturgical practices, the Sacraments, occasional services, *problems of translation, Canon Law and its application under current conditions, Church and State*, Ecumenism, the history of the Russian Church in the 20th Century -- and in this connection, St. Patriarch Tikhon, *the path of Metr. Sergius (Stragorodsky) and Cyril (Smirnov)*, the beginnings of the separation and the future relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad.

In this regard we shared our living experience gained in the course of serving the Church, both abroad and in the homeland, without closing our eyes to the fundamental problems involved.

III

We would direct the attention of Orthodox people to certain trends which we were able to clarify in our discussions:

1) The Russian Church found itself to be in the kind of extreme circumstances out of which divisions arise. People within Russia and without carried out their ecclesial ministries under completely different conditions, viewing and assessing the situation differently within Russia and abroad. This brought about the differing paths of the Russian Church. At that time this was unavoidable. Thus differing assessments and *inadequate understanding of the choices made by others* resulted in mistrust, reproaches, and hostility. This internal misfortune of the Church *was actively taken advantage of and the machinations of anti-Church forces sowed discord and disinformation. Today our efforts can be effectively directed towards the eradication of the seeds of poison.*

This can be accomplished by a mutual recognition of the ecclesial life each side and the positive aspects of its development. The representatives of the Church Abroad expressed the concern that the concept of "schism" and the demand for the return of the "splinter group" to the "bosom of the Mother Church" do not correspond to the essence of the problem nor are they helpful in overcoming the separation. The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate took this concern under advisement and it was proposed to place this question on the agenda of the next meeting.

Talk about "the various parts of the Russian Church" does not imply the fragmentation of the Body of Christ into some sort of portions, but on the contrary, *affirms a positive understanding of its profound integrity on the basis of which it is possible and necessary to overcome the hardening of the confrontation.* In this sense we all can consider ourselves to be children of the spiritual structures of the Russian Church. *She is the Mother Church for us all and manifests herself both in Russia and abroad and thus has already united us.*

2) The concept of "canonicity" can also be transformed into a weapon in a contest for self-assertion, but rather canonicity should be a constructive principle in our lives. In this sense there are problems both within Russia and abroad, although in different areas. We are agreed on this, and take note that *the presence of Grace in the Mysteries, in the priesthood and in Church life should not be put in question.*

3) If, at the present time, there is no Eucharistic Communion between the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad, *this does not imply "an absence of Grace" on either side.* Refraining from Eucharistic Communion should not be considered a hostile act: it is the consequence of a responsible approach to the spiritual nature of Church life. (An example of this is the position of Hieromartyr Metr. Cyril whose ascetic triumph (podvig) is beyond question.) *At present, historical causes are still at work which are connected to hierarchical discipline. We have come to the conclusion that those problems which continue to stand between us and require resolution do not present an absolute impediment to Eucharistic Communion.*

4) If we daily pray to the Holy Trinity with the words, "Master, pardon our transgressions," and to the Heavenly Father "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors": then we can in good faith mutually accept each other without hysterical recriminations for past deeds. Repentance on the part of others cannot be demanded, lest we place ourselves in the position of being judges. Repentance is a profound transformation within Church life and is realized in it, thus reconciling people.

5) The issue of "parallel structures" presents a difficult problem. We, a new generation, have inherited these structures from previous decades both in Russia and abroad. *The discussion of this question will take place at the next meeting.*

IV

We are not prepared to be silent about these problems and we recognize the tragic nature of the present situation and even its particular hopelessness. But secure in our common desire for unity we see unity only against the background of by means of the recognition of the fullness of Church life on both sides. without this we are not even in a position to speak openly about the real problems that arise, let alone their resolution. In this lies our responsibility before God and the people of the Church.

Archbishop Mark and Archbishop Theophan with representatives of the clergy.

Naila, 14-16 December, 1997

This document evokes no other sentiments than those of aversion and indignation and it is not surprising that we learn of the of the outcome of this, now the *ninth* such, meeting in such an accidental manner. In his diocesan "Der Bote"

("Messenger of the German Diocese"), Archb. Mark only on rare occasions hinted in one or two phrases that such meetings were taking place, without giving any details about his traitorous "dialogue" with the Moscow Patriarchate. After all, the laity has no need to know what sort of agreements their hierarchs are making behind their backs.

In addition to crossing out the entire history of the establishment of the Church Abroad and with it the principles of canonical and dogmatic issues, Archb. Mark in his notorious "dialogue" pretends that the Catacomb Church did not exist and does not exist today. Mention of the name of New Martyr Cyril is astounding: after all, he was one of the many who in numerous letters to Sergius Stragorodsky expressed their protest of his usurpation of the rights of the Locum Tenens, the enslavement of the Church to atheists and in February of 1938 demanded that the Church be organized according to the Ukaz of Patriarch Tikhon of Nov. 7/20, 1920 (cf. the "Suzdal Diocesan Herald" #2 of Nov., 1997.)

Metropolitans Peter of Krutitsa, Benjamin and Joseph of Petrograd and following after them the entire flower of the Russian Church in the persons of her hierarchs, clergy, and laity also vigorously protested against Sergius Stragorodsky's exceeding of his authority when he proclaimed in the name of the Church his criminal "Declaration" of 1927, for which they all paid with their lives. Archb. Mark along with his colleagues from the Patriarchate characterizes this confessional sacrifice (podvig) as an "inadequate understanding of the choices made by others"!

The determination not to depart from the path delineated by the St. Patriarch and the first three hierarchs of the Church Abroad is considered in this joint statement as merely "the machinations of anti-Church forces [which] sowed discord and disinformation" and as "a weapon in a contest for self-assertion." The hope is expressed that "Today our efforts can be effectively directed towards the eradication of the seeds of poison"! It would be nice to know which methods they have in mind for this purpose. The excerpts from prayers mentioned in the Paragraph 4 are a total disgrace for *both* hierarchs. It is common knowledge, even among people who are not too knowledgeable in Church matters, that the words "forgive our transgressions" (literally: "lawless acts") and "forgive us our debts" (often mistranslated in the West as "transgressions") have in mind only personal sins and offenses and by no means disagreements on matters of faith and canons!

APPEAL FROM A CONFERENCE OF RUSSIAN BISHOPS OF THE ROCA AND FROM BISHOP EVTIKHY

His Grace Bishop Evtikhy of Ishima and Siberia published his personal appeal "regarding the re-establishment of a united Russian Church which is desired by all".

Bishop Evtikhy begins his appeal with a declaration that "recently the union of the Moscow Patriarchate and the ROCA is discussed repeatedly. Unfortunately, since this question is most vociferously discussed in non-churchly circles or the 'almost-churchly ones', controversial rumors spring up. In order to avoid unsound opinions, I ask you to keep the following in mind:"

Then the Rt. Rev. Evtikhy in 5 paragraphs gives a very good explanation regarding the potential for union with the Moscow Patriarchate at the present time and points out a number of canonical violations on her part. Thus # 1 refers to the Declaration of Metr. Sergius Stragorodsky, # 2 to the non-acceptance by the Patriarchate of the New Martyrs, # 3 to the appointment of bishops by secular powers, # 4 to Ecumenism and # 5 to the increasing usury within the Moscow Patriarchate.

In his appeal Bishop Evtikhy explains to the faithful the principles of love, noting that it "commands us to be steadfast in the truth and to keep one's neighbor from falling. The path to unity lies only through a return to the Church canons, to a genuine Russian Orthodoxy, by means of overcoming the above mentioned apostasies".

He concludes his appeal with an offer to examine "if the means toward union of the Church actually exist at the present time."

On the reverse side of Bishops Evtikhy's appeal there is also the following very fine appeal from all the bishops who participated in a conference at Yalta:

Dear Brethren and Sisters!

Lately the persecution of our Orthodox Church has greatly increased. In violation of all canonical and civic norms of justice the Monastery at Hebron in the Holy Land was seized, the contract murder of a priest in St. Petersburg has occurred, the guardian of the Myrrh-streaming Iveron icon of the Theotokos was murdered, a priest in the Belgorod area was brutally beaten, threats addressed to others of our clergy have increased. All of this is happening against the background of hostility on the part of the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is part of the world system of Ecumenism and which participates in building a new world order. This graphically demonstrates that its subservience to the enemies of Orthodoxy for many years bore no good fruit, but threatens to annihilate the true Church of Christ.

What is revealed to exist in the Moscow Patriarchate is a novelty, which has nothing to do with historical and canonical Russian Orthodox Church. During the entire millennium of the history of Orthodoxy in our homeland, it was never characteristic of the Church to trade in the sacraments, extort

money, commit usury and dirty business practices. The most repulsive and unnatural blemishes never took root. Never in history did the Church confess the necessity to submit to atheists and unite integrally with heretics and apostates. Never did the Church prove her righteousness using lies, violence, confiscations and murders. Never in the history of Orthodoxy did the Church renounce her martyrs.

We observe with sadness how rapidly in our days the prestige of Orthodoxy is falling because honest and conscientious people cannot accept and understand either the criminal way of life, nor the apostasy of the Moscow Patriarchate.

We call upon the pastors and faithful children of our Church to witness the unimpaired Orthodoxy through their pure lives and true teaching among our people, to patiently explain the history and essence of the Orthodox Church, to unmask the forgery of Orthodoxy which is visible in the contemporary Moscow Patriarchate. We call upon our faithful children to take upon themselves a podvig of preaching, piety and missionary work in our much-suffering Homeland.

We do pray for the enlightenment of those who have lost their way, so that they will convert to the right faith and piety, and that the faithful would turn away from evil and do good.

May the Lord, His All-pure Mother and the prayers of the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia strengthen us on this hard and salvific path.

Signed by Archbishop Lazarus and Bishops Benjamin, Evtikhy, Agathangel and Michael.

In spite of this very fine public appeal by the hierarchs of the ROCA in Russia "to faithful children who are in Russia", some of the bishops of the Church Abroad by their conduct and different declarations give very serious reasons for concern to believers in the matter of a possible unification with the Moscow Patriarchate. Considering the very advanced age of the majority of the senior hierarchs of the Church Abroad, with Metropolitan Vitaly being 88 years old, and at the same time the very aggressive insistence on this direction of Archbishop Mark and some younger bishops sympathizing with him, this all gives a serious basis for concern that the Hierarchical Sobor which is to be held shortly after Pascha might easily be a very significant one for the destiny of the ROCA.

FIRE IN ST. NICHOLAS CATHEDRAL IN MONTREAL

According to telephone information from Canada, during the night of January 24th-25th the cathedral of the Montreal and Canada Diocese dedicated to St. Nicholas was struck by a major fire which resulted in its total destruction. The cause of this fire has still not been determined with certainty, but the latest reports attribute it to electrical surges in the old wiring during a recent severe storm.

This church, into which Metropolitan Vitaly had put all his energy and funds, was one of the largest in the Church Abroad. It was adorned with a very large iconostasis, filled with a multitude of beautifully painted icons in several ranks and had many icons about the walls. The cathedral also enshrined many different relics. The burned out cathedral was still smoking the following afternoon. Metr. Vitaly arrived when the fire was over. The only undamaged item found in the church was an icon of St. Nicholas. Most probably the church was insured, but there is no insurance that would cover all the expenses. It is doubtful that this cathedral can be restored to its former beauty.

UNREST IN HOLY TRINITY MONASTERY IN JORDANVILLE

For some two years now even a stranger could notice some disagreements within the monastery in Jordanville on matters of Ecumenism and the Moscow Patriarchate.

When the monastery's administration did not satisfy some monks of very conservative views, four fathers left the Monastery and were accepted by Metropolitan Vitaly. Three of them at present are in the Synod Hermitage in Mahopac and one went to Canada.

The protesting monks initially expressed their unhappiness verbally, then took more decisive measures and stopped taking blessings from some of the senior fathers or refused to concelebrate with them.

When one of the Monastery's priest-monks commemorated the heretical Ecumenical Patriarch proskomedia, the following left the Monastery in protest: Priest-monk Paisios, Hierodeacon Ambrose and Rasophor Monks Oleg and Boris. The last was disciplined by the monastery administration for sending to different clergymen and then publishing his excellent article "Union with a Harlot", referring to the Moscow Patriarchate.

One cannot but feel regret -- since Holy Trinity Monastery even while still in Ladomirovo (at that time known as the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev) rendered invaluable service to the ROCA, not only in Czechoslovakia but later in the USA -- that it is now in a situation where the poison of sympathizing with the Moscow Patriarchate and partly even for Ecumenism has penetrated within its walls.

A CELEBRATION IN SUZDAL

The year 1997 proved to be of importance in the life of the Russian Orthodox Free Church: in the very center of the city of Suzdal a very architecturally remarkable synod house was built. In this building, which became an ornament to the ancient city (more than 900 years old) are found: the residence of the First Hierarch, work rooms, cells for monks and two churches: on an upper floor one dedicated to Icon of Iveron Theotokos and on a lower one to the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. In the Iveron church there is an exact copy of the Myrrh-streaming Icon of Montreal, which was painted by the late guardian of this icon, Brother Jose himself. It was handed to Archbishop Valentin by the First Hierarch of the ROCA, Metropolitan Vitaly, as his blessing to the Russian land. Besides, in the new house there is a "Museum of the White Army" with the most interesting exhibits and the synod's library of several thousand volumes.

On Jan.21/Feb. 3, 1998 there was a very solemn consecration of the upper church. The interior of this church is striking in its appointments, with an iconostasis and walls aglitter with gold, with icons old and new, vigil lights, candle stands -- all of it pleasing to see and evocative of a prayerful disposition. The paintings in the altar area are especially noteworthy. They are excellent. On the very next Sunday the second church to the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia was consecrated. The major part in this church, including its iconostasis, was given to the diocese by the daughter of a Russian lady, who while married to a wealthy Swiss, some time ago purchased Russian icons and church vestments at auctions abroad with the goal of having them returned to Russia when circumstances would permit, having been sold by the Bolsheviks from looted churches. Only after several decades could the daughter fulfill the wish of her late mother.

The service was presided over by the First Hierarch of the ROFC, the Archbishop of Suzdal and Vladimir, Valentin who was joined by two Bishops, 8 priests and 4 deacons. In spite of the fact that the service lasted for five hours, neither clergy nor believers felt tired. After the end of service, Vladyka Valentin addressed the faithful with an inspiring sermon and then everyone was invited to participate in a trapeza.

FROM LIFE OF THE FREE LATVIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Diocesan Bishop of Latvian Free Orthodox Church on November 15th, 1997 sent to a representative in the 6th Latvian Seim (representative assembly), Mr. Juris Dobelis, the following letter (# 87):

"For more than three years the Ministry of Justice has refused to register the numerous communities of the Latvian Orthodox Free Church, which is independent from Moscow Patriarchate. This refusal of the Ministry of Justice is based on Article 10, Part III and Article 7, Part II, of the law "On Religious Organizations", in which the church canons, as understood and interpreted by the Moscow Patriarchate, are codified in civil law and have legal force requiring all Orthodox Christians in Latvia to be included in the church structure of the Moscow Patriarchate in Latvia and without regard for their conscience or convictions and in violation of the 30th Apostolic Canon.

"A great son of the Latvian people, Archbishop John (Pommer), rejected and had no ties with the Renovatianist Synod in Moscow. In 1945, along with the occupation forces, the Moscow Patriarchate, established by Beria and Stalin in 1943 and which in fact remains unchanged to this day, came into Latvia. As is evident from documents, the bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate were appointed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the KGB.

"In 1989 the Moscow Patriarchate ordered Alexander Kudriashev to become a Latvian bishop, and in 1992, with participation of the bishop-KGB agents and the assistance of former members of the Soviet structure, he became the head of the Latvian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of Moscow Patriarchate.

"In 1995 the church canons, as understood and interpreted by the Moscow Patriarchate, for some reason were codified into the civil law "On Religious Organizations" (Article 10, Part III).

"Whom and what the Moscow Patriarchate represents is grievously known throughout the world.

"Latvia became independent in its governmental order, the Soviet troops pulled out, but there remains a spiritual occupation of the Moscow Patriarchate. Why is this problem hushed up?

"Respectfully, the trustees for registration of the LOFC, Bishop Viktor (Kontuzorovs)

Inna Grigorieva, member of the Diocesan Council"

At the same time, on November 27th on the state-owned Latvian radio station "Alicé Plus" the Priest-monk Philaret (Romanov), Secretary of the Diocesan Council of the LOFC gave a report explaining to listeners the true situation, based on canons why the Free Church cannot be under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Radio reporter Olga Krivin said that at the beginning of December she hopes also to welcome into her studio Bishop Viktor.

On December 97, the president of Diocesan Council A. Valmus and Secretary of the of the Council Priest-monk Philaret sent to Mr. Chepanis, the President of the Saim of the Latvian Republic an inquiry entitled "About international Obligations and Documents". In this letter (# 90) the Diocesan Council poses three questions:

"1. Was (and when) "The Declaration on Ending All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination against Religions or Beliefs" (Resolution 36/55 of the UN General Assembly of Nov. 25th, 1981) ratified by the Saim of the Latvian sovereign state?"

"2. Are the international obligations and documents which have been ratified by the Saim, in particular the above Declaration, obligatory upon the executive of the government of the Latvian Republic?"

"3. Which governmental structures and who is responsible for carrying out these international documents and obligations which were ratified by the sovereign Latvian government?"

It seems that the former Communist rules of civil lawlessness remain in force even in the "sovereign" Latvian government, because these questions of the Diocesan Council, addressed also to a number of state departments of other nations, were never answered.

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

According to the newspaper of the Serbian Patriarchate "Pravoslavije" (Orthodoxy) of Nov. 15th, 1997 from 3rd to 5th of November an extraordinary Council of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church was held in Belgrade. The main issues discussed were: first, very significant reforms in structure of higher theological schools. Secondly, a highly important issue was the demand by the Serbian Church to have Orthodox religion classes in the state schools. Because of that, Patriarch Pavle escorted by Dragan Dragojlovic met with Jovan Todorovic, a Minister of Religion and Education in the Serbian Republic. As a result of this visit, at the recommendation of the minister, the Serbian Church requested in writing that a law be passed to permit classes on the Law of God (basic Orthodox religion) in the state public and middle schools in Serbia and Montenegro, as is already the case in the neighboring countries. At the same time the Sobor requested in writing that the Government return to the Church all property confiscated in 1958. In 1971 a law was passed requiring the return to the Church of seized property, but the Prime Minister told the Patriarch that this request cannot be honored on grounds of severe defects in the petition form and also because the return of confiscated property would place a hardship on the contemporary government, since the buildings have been state property for a long time. The Patriarch pointed out a lack of logic in the law, according to which the Church now has the right to own property, but that confiscated 50 years ago is not being returned.

It is worth noting that the Council of Bishops did not show any official concern regarding the catastrophic rise of perversion and criminality among Serbian youth, especially in Belgrade itself.

The New York Times published an extensive article entitled "Dejected Belgrade Embraces Hedonism, but Still Life is no Cabaret".

This article gives an horrible picture of a fall in the level of morality in Belgrade contemporary life. The heads of the families who have not been paid for several months vent their misfortunes on their wives and children, and crimes and assaults have become epidemic. According to a professor of clinical psychology Dr. Jivko Korach: "We live in a world of moral idiocy. I watch the smiling face of Milosevic... and wonder if he is not the Devil himself?"

In 1991 the government began to permit the production and showing of hard core pornographic films in contrast to the Communists, who did not directly forbid erotic scenes, but still criticized pornography as exploitation of women and forbade the mass production of such films. Yet now, according to the author of the article, a multitude of perverted films have shown their influence on small children, who imitate everything they see on the TV screen. A teacher in a Belgrade school complained about a group of 11 year old children brought to the capital on a three day class trip. Very soon a majority of the teachers abandoned the children and went drinking and gambling. Once she saw 12 and 13 year old boys and girls having an orgy in one of the rooms where the children were staying. As she said: "No one is attempting to explain to these children what it is they are watching and doing. The parents ignore the problem, and the teachers are so poorly paid they no longer care. How can I tell my students to be doctors or professors when they see that becoming a gangster means owning half the city".

In regions, controlled by Muslims, despite habitual poverty, there is still a more conservative way of life. Pornography has been introduced also in Croatia, but to a more limited degree than in Serbia.

A SITUATION OF SERBS IN KOSOVO

In beginning of January, on the orders of Artemije, Bishop of Rashka and Prizren, the renown Serbian monastery Vicoki Decani described via computer, over the name of Priest-monk Sava, the extremely difficult conditions for Orthodox Serbs in Kosovo area, which once was a center of the ancient Serbian kingdom and which, relatively not long ago had some 1,300 churches. Now this area is almost totally "ethnically cleansed" of Serbs and since Tito's time has been populated by fanatic barbarian Albanians.

Bishop Artemije, who heads the remnants of the Serbs in this region, constantly appeals to Albanian authorities and the government in Belgrade pleading with them to take measures for peaceful coexistence of mixed population in order to avoid a terrible civil war.

As has recently become known, Albanians cut off the electrical power and telephones connected to the convent Devic in Drenica region, which is not protected by any police. During World War II Albanian Nazis burned the monastery and slaughtered all monks. After the war ended, the sisters of one convent went to the location of the monastery and restored it.

Just recently Bishop Artemije visited this convent and informed Visoki Decani that the poor nuns are living under constant fear of assault and are afraid to leave the convent's walls in the evening. A short while ago a car with pilgrims in Devic was machine-gunned by the Albanian militia.

In response to the present persecutions of Serbs by Albanians, Patriarch Pavle has sent to a student organization an appeal that they understand the problem can be resolved only on the basis of God's law of justice. There was no answer to the Patriarch's letter.

FOR WHOM DO THEY PRAY IN THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE?

by Archpriest Michael Ardov

In the service book of the Orthodox Liturgy, after the Little Entrance, after the troparia are sung, a priest exclaims:

"For holy art Thou, O our God, and unto thee do we ascribe glory, to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever..."

And the deacon on the solea continues:

"O Lord, save the God-fearing and hear us, even unto ages of ages."

But if we open a service book published by the Moscow Patriarchate, the words "O Lord, save the God-fearing and hear us" would not be there. As it was explained to me once by a bishop, this exclamation is omitted because epithet "God-fearing" in liturgical texts referred mainly to Orthodox monarchs. And to pray for Tsars in the "Soviet Church" was categorically forbidden.

But times change, the Moscow Patriarchate became free of the micro-management of the state and finally, on July 17th, 1997 a resolution of the "Sacred Synod" stated:

"The exclamation 'O Lord, save the God-fearing and hear us' is affirmed and to be pronounced during the Divine Liturgy."

Seemingly, everything comes full circle. But a question arises: for whom in this particular case will hierarchs and clergy pray? Unfortunately, present day Russia is not an Orthodox country at all, and also is not a monarchy... But, it seems this does not bother the "Sacred Synod". Even more, the Patriarchate proves itself to be hostile to monarchy. This is clearly testified by her refusal to glorify the Imperial Martyrs or its participation in such a blasphemous act as the removal of the remains of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich (husband of New Martyr Elizabeth) from the Moscow Kremlin.

And the TV constantly shows us touching scenes. Here the Patriarch blesses the President, and the latter awards the first with a decoration... Here Alexis II walks with the Mayor to building sites; here again they together show up at "folk festivals"; there they stand side by side during absurd pagan festivities... And while observing this touching "symphonia" with the Patriarchate which arose with "treasury-pilfering-rule" [the Russian reads: "kasno-krado-kratiye!"], one has an urge to address the "Sacred Synod":

Really, gentlemen, what all this has to do with "God-fearing"? Be frank and openly pray for your VIP's, cronies and protectors! Well, maybe something like: "O Lord, save the corrupted ones and hear us..."

ABOUT THE MEETING OF YELTSIN AND THE ROMAN POPE

The New York Times of January 13 reported that during the month of February a meeting was planned between President Yeltsin and the Roman Pope. According to reports, the Moscow Patriarchate and the Roman Catholics jointly declared that they are reestablishing the negotiations which were temporarily interrupted last summer. At that time there were preparations for a meeting of the Pope and the Ecumenical and Moscow Patriarchs in Austria. It was canceled, but not on the Pope's initiative. The Moscow Patriarch felt himself to be under such heavy pressure from Orthodox believers that he had to cancel it. The Ecumenical Patriarch also refused a meeting with Pope under the pretext that "recent developments have revealed a tendency to superiority on the part of some which is not compatible with the spirit of reconciliation."(!) At present both parties declared that negotiations will be resumed shortly and will aim to eliminate the existing disagreements and again they are making plans for the Pope and Patriarch of Moscow to meet. Where this would be held has not been indicated as yet. It is common knowledge that the Pope has dreamt for a long time of visiting

Russia, but at the same time, strong anti-ecumenical sentiments are on the rise in Russia. Such a meeting between Pope and Patriarch on Russian soil could have a negative effect on the reputation of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is already badly undermined by a number of scandals. Yeltsin then visited Italy from February 9 to 11.

Yeltsin already had met the Pope in 1991. At this second meeting it was expected that they would discuss the new, recently approved law on faith and religious liberty, which was very vigorously protested by all the Western heretics, including the Vatican.

According to a report in The New York Times of February 11th, Yeltsin arrived at the Vatican together with his wife and daughter Tatiana, who is his right hand. The papal audience lasted for 50 minutes. Many issues were discussed, including the details of a celebration of the 2nd millennium of Christianity. Yeltsin's spokesman Yastrzhembsky said, "More than one of the world's burning issues were discussed".

After the customary 45 minutes allotted for interviews had passed, a papal servant entered the library to remind them that the President has many more business meetings to attend. The Pope began to rise, but Yeltsin stopped him saying that they had not finished their conversation. The subject was a papal visit to Russia, but no results were given to reporters.

Vatican's spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls raised the question of the law on "liberty of conscience." Yeltsin said during discussions on the first draft he took the Pope's objections into consideration, but when the time came to sign it he had to consider the protests on the part of the Moscow Patriarchate.

This didn't prevent Yeltsin's spokesman Yastrzhembsky from saying: "It is a sphere in which the state, including the President, does not interfere. Let us hope that the two leading branches of the Christian Church will find the wisdom, patience and good will in the near future to remove, and perhaps extinguish, their problems."

While Pope was talking to Yeltsin, the Vatican Minister of Foreign Affairs Msgr. Tauran and Russia's Prime Minister E. Primakov had a discussion in another room.

While exchanging the traditional gifts, Yeltsin gave the Pope a volume of the latter's poetry, especially translated into Russian and published for him and 2 silver enameled goblets. Pope gave him in return a two-foot high bronze medal of the Theotokos with the Savior.

It is self-explanatory that we will never find out the actual results of the negotiations between the Pope and Yeltsin.

OLD AND NEW CALENDARISTS

The New York Times of January 12th published an extensive report about an Old Calendar Greek parish in Astoria, N.Y., part of a small hierarchical group presided over by Metropolitan Paisios.

According to the paper this Old Calendar group created quite a furor when it reported some 7 years ago that the icon of St. Irene Chrysovalantou (to whom the church is dedicated) began to shed tears. A year later, Metr. Paisios's group announced that some masked bandits had stolen this icon. New Calendarist Greeks declared the alleged robbery to be a hoax. Metr. Paisios sued the New Calendarists and a Greek newspaper which had published this information, demanding 30 million dollars in damages. The case was settled out of court and the paper had to print Paisios's newspaper gratis for some period of time.

Metr. Paisios and his right hand Bishop Vikentios have some 20 parishes under them in different states in the USA. In the NY metropolitan area itself there are 3 parishes, including also a monastery in Astoria.

The icon was found quite soon afterward, but without the jewels which had adorned it, appraised at more than 2 million by Metr. Paisios. The insurance company protested this evaluation and demanded documentation which the parish could not present satisfactorily.

At the same time, in Astoria, where many Greeks still live, their population has started to decline within the last decade. This resulted in a practical need to prevent Greeks from dispersing into the suburbs of New York. Loss of Greek population began to affect the number of Metr. Paisios's parishioners, who numerically are smaller than those of the New Calendarists. With this in mind he sent a petition to the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Archbishop Spyridon, to be accepted into his jurisdiction while retaining the use of the ecclesiastical calendar. A final decision regarding this matter is expected only after several months. According to rumors, the New Calendarists are trying to clarify the unofficial circumstances of the court cases involving the theft of the icon and if possible even end the court case. Nevertheless, when the Ecumenical Patriarch visited New York and served in Madison Square Garden, his service was already also attended by Old Calendarist Greeks.

Bishop Vikentios explained this move to unite with the New Calendarists with a sentence which does not testify to a zealous attitude for the purity of Orthodoxy: "We didn't see any future to staying alone in the United States."

Archb. Spyridon on his part welcomed this move of Old Calendarists and said: "It would be, if not historic, a very, very important decision, because we will have overcome the major division that exists within the Greek Orthodox Church in America."

Because of these events, Bishop Anthony (Grabbe), who was member of this Old Calendar hierarchy, on Christmas eve informed Metr. Paisios that he would be leaving this jurisdiction and demanded a canonical release. According to Bishop Anthony, he received a very friendly notice from Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem agreeing to accept him in his jurisdiction, provided he receives a formal petition.

WHAT IS TO BE CONSIDERED A BLASPHEMY?

The New York Times of February 7 reported a disgustingly blasphemous advertisement used by the car company Volkswagen in France. This company on January 28th set up many billboards mocking the famous painting of the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci depicting 13 persons in modern dress. Under a figure, who is singled out at the table, which in the original is the place of Christ, is an inscription: "My friends, let us rejoice because a new Golf is born" (a new car model).

To everyone's surprise in France, the episcopate there reacted negatively.

The General Secretary of the Conference of French Bishops, Msgr. Bernard Lagoutte unexpectedly brought action against the Volkswagen Company, demanding about \$400,000. The most amazing thing is that while protesting against such an advertisement, the French Bishops decided that this billboard is NOT blasphemous, but only "ridicules a religious image which is particularly symbolic to all Christians and the basis for the Eucharist. Mockery is a corrosive like rust that gradually erodes everything."

The main purpose of the court request, as explained by the Msgr., was a wish to initiate a public discussion as well as a debate in order to define how much religious symbols can be used for commercial purposes. He noted that recently the use in Europe of religious symbols has rapidly increased. "Advertising experts have told us that ads aim for the sacred in order to shock because using sex does not work any more. There is no more mystery in using a naked woman. So they are turning for the sacred." At the same time Bernard Lagoutte said, "The experts have told us that advertisers will not touch Islamic images for fear of attacks. They will not touch Judaism for historic reasons, but they feel free to abuse Christians."

The Episcopal Conference received more than a hundred letters protesting against this sort of advertisement.

It seems that out of fear of pressure from the French episcopate, Volkswagen quickly stopped distribution of the billboards and the 10 thousand which have been already posted were quickly removed or covered with white paper.

The firm which prepared these advertisements said, "We did not mean to shock, we thought the work was done with humor." In the episcopate's opinion, the blasphemous advertisement of Volkswagen is only a part of a whole series of such insulting promotions of products.

In order to prevent the future production of such ads, the Conference of French Bishops created a new organization called "Beliefs and Liberties." The protesting letter of Msgr. Louis Marie Bille to the President of Volkswagen in France was signed by him as president of the Conference of French Bishops and as president of the Conference "Beliefs and Liberties." The motivation behind the protest in the letter of these Bishops is very creative one: "As far as I know, all car makers protect their models against counterfeit and industrial theft. How is it that one of them dares to appropriate what is not his? There is a language of sign and symbols that belongs to the Christian faith. They are certainly available to all, but not to be used for whatever people want."

The 400 thousand which French episcopate is hoping to get will be forwarded to an charitable organization in Sudan.

VATICAN OBSERVES THE JEWISH FEAST OF HANUKKAH

Greek Archdiocesan newspaper "The Orthodox Observer" of January 8th reports that for the first time Cardinal Edward Cassidy, who chairs a commission for Jewish relations, lit ritual candles on December 23rd, 1997, in the Vatican garden in observance of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah and also for the 50th anniversary of the independence of the state of Israel. This garden is a place where the Pope likes to go for walks. In 1965 an olive tree was planted in this garden as a symbol of friendly relations between the Vatican and Israel. For some reason, later this "symbolic tree was transplanted to some other place." Maybe not to plague his eyes?

A CATHOLIC PRIEST AND AN ORTHODOX BISHOP IN THE CITY OF KIROV

The newspaper "Evening Kirov" of December 18th published an interview with a Catholic priest Andrzej, of Polish nationality, who at his own request was transferred from Poland to Russia to conduct missionary work and to take care of a few Catholics, in particular in the Perm region. This interview reveals a severe decline within the Moscow Patriarchate in the Orthodox understanding of hierarchy and clergy.

Asked to explain the difference between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, he said: "...All of us Catholic priests respect the Orthodox faith. I, myself, personally not only go to pray in an Orthodox Church (in your city of Kirov, too), but go to confession to the Orthodox bishop of Perm and he, through the grace given to him, pardons my sins. Even more than this, when my Catholic pastor Archbishop Kondrusiewicz came to visit my parish and conducted a service in our Perm Roman church, our service was attended by the Orthodox Archbishop Athanasios, who not only stayed to the end of the Mass, but also participated in the service by reading the Gospel... To everyone of my parishioners I urgently recommend that in my absence they visit the nearest Orthodox church, since we recognize all Orthodox sacraments. It seems to me that probably there is more that unites us than separates us. With every day the approach and depth of mutual understanding between Orthodoxy and Catholicism is growing.... In 2002 for the first time there will be a celebration of Pascha on the same date by Orthodox and Roman Catholics. And from this moment on, the Holy Father plans to make the celebration of Pascha of Roman Catholics, the bright day of Christ's Resurrection, coincide with the Orthodox forever. I heard you have in Kirov an Orthodox archbishop who is a very enlightened and educated bishop, Mislav (a doctor of theology who has mastered 8 languages, including Polish), who wisely predicted that all existing differences in our faiths will be easily overcome only if there is good will on the part of the Patriarch of All Russia and the Roman Pope.

If the Catholic Andrzej does not lie and truly the Pope will make their heretical Easter coincide with the Pascha of Orthodoxy, this crafty satanic move might confuse quite a few Russian Orthodox souls.

A LETTER FROM ABBESS JULIANA

Mother Superior Juliana, wishing us all the best on the Nativity of Christ, related that her telephone number was changed to 562-321-5334. She writes: "Letters can be sent to: **Casilla 108, El Arrayan**. This is close to the place where we live and there is no need to travel to the center of the city."

At the same time the Abbess informs us: "Instead of sisters we are flooded with Russians [the names are listed -- altogether 14 persons...] **I do not know when the Lord will listen to our prayers and send us sisters and not people, with family obligations, to be paid.**"