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**CONTENTS:**

THE ROCOR AND HER DIOCESES IN RUSSIA AT A DEAD END  
ABOUT "PLENARY POWERS OF LOCUM TENENS OF ROCE" UNTIL ELECTION OF A NEW FIRST HIERARCH  
THE ATTACK UPON METR. VITALY ORGANIZED BY BISHOP MICHAEL  
DECLARATION BY BISHOP AGATHANGEL  
A FEW WORDS ABOUT AN INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP AGATHANGEL  
REACTION OF RUSSIAN PRESS TO ELECTION OF NEW FIRST HIERARCH OF ROCOR  
AN INVITATION WHICH MIGHT HAVE LONG LASTING EFFECTS  
SERGIANIST METHODS OF BISHOP EVTIKHY  
UNEXPECTED FASCINATION WITH MONOPHYSITES  
ABOUT THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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## THE ROCOR AND HER DIOCESES IN RUSSIA AT A DEAD END

The treacherous Council of Bishops of the year 2000 which decidedly turned from the paths of the former First Hierarch of the Church Abroad, despite the false statements that nothing has changed in the course of the ROCOR, immediately provoked a flood of protests addressed to the Council of Bishops and the Synod. There were protests on the part of individual clergymen and faithful, which then turned into group protests. Several hierarchs even gradually began to "remove" their signatures from especially scandalous decisions, but nothing helped. The protests were either ignored or those who signed them were suspended and accused of creating schism or being the enemies of the Church or something similar.

The Synod and the last Council of Bishops with its former stubbornness not only continue to maintain that, supposedly, no changes in the course of the Church Abroad were happening, and they continue to pretend to their trusting flock that they are continuing and will continue to pilot the ship of the church along the path of the former First Hierarchs. At the same time, the decisions of the Council of Bishops in 2000 were on several occasions reaffirmed by the contemporary hierarchy,

And even now we constantly hear from various persons that **at present** no unification with the MP is taking place, there is only some dialogue and that there is no reason whatsoever to be concerned and sever relationship with the present Council of Bishops. In order to determine how far the present Council of Bishops has directed the ROCOR into another direction it is essential that we recall the instructions of the Metropolitans Anthony, Anastassy and Philaret.

On May 6/19, 1933, Metropolitan Anthony, after sharply criticizing the Declaration of 1927, wrote to its author Metropolitan Sergius: "I implore you, as my former student and friend: free yourself from this temptation, renounce in the hearing of all every one of these lies which Tuchkov and other enemies of the Church put into your mouth, do not stop in the face of certain martyrdom. If you become worthy of a martyr's crown, then the earthly Church and the heavenly Church will unite in glorifying your courage and the Lord Who strengthened you, but if you remain on the broad road which leads to ruin (Mt. 7:13) on which you stand now, it will ingloriously bring you to the bottom of hell and the Church, to the very end of her existence, will not forget your betrayal!" ("Life of Metropolitan Anthony" by Archbishop Nikon, Vol. VI).

In the official publication of the ROCOR, "Tserkovnaya Zhisn" ("Church Life") # 8, 1933, was published a "Circular Epistle of the Council of Bishops Abroad to the Orthodox flock regarding the Epistle by the Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal throne, Metropolitan Sergius on March 23, 1933". This Epistle, over 21 pages long, in great detail criticized all his points.

In his last testament, Metropolitan Anastassy wrote: "And regarding the Moscow Patriarchate and her hierarchy: because they are in close and active friendly collaboration with the Soviet government, which openly confesses her total godlessness and has the goal of implanting atheism into the Russian people, the Church Abroad, to preserve her purity should not have any canonical, prayerful and even ordinary social relations with it, reserving, at the same time, the judgment of each of them, to a future Council of the free Russian Church".

The "freedom" of the contemporary Moscow Patriarchate, as in times of Metropolitan Sergius, consists of a deal with the "former" communist government. The Moscow "Patriarch" Alexis is a KGB agent with the code name "Drozdov" who like President Putin was an officer in the same KGB. The press in Russia constantly stresses their close relationship.

Regarding the elections of a patriarch in Moscow "The Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad on September 1/14, 1971, d e l i b e r a t e d: about the gathering in Moscow on May 30<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1971, which called itself a All Russian Church Council for election of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. This gathering announced Metropolitan Pimen (Izvekov) to be elected to the above-mentioned throne. After discussing all the conditions of this election, the Council of Bishops, representing the free part of the Russian Church came to the following conclusion": [which consists of four lengthy explanations which end by stating] "that the Council has d e c r e e d: "The election of Pimen (Izvekov) as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia at the Council which called itself an All Russian Church Council in Moscow on June 2<sup>nd</sup> of the current year, based upon the 30<sup>th</sup> canon of the VIIIth Ecumenical Council and other canons stated in the present regulations, is deemed unlawful and invalid as are all its acts and decisions as having no authority" (emphasis by "Ch. N").

"September 17/30, 1974, w e h e a r d: The resolution of the All-Abroad Council, affirmed by the Council of Bishops with the following wording: To address with a letter the Patriarch of Jerusalem, which will express our regret that the Mother of Churches, the Patriarchate of the holy city of Jerusalem is in prayerful communion with the enslaved head of the Moscow Patriarchate, which has totally submitted not to her conscience, but to theomachist Communist regime".

Metropolitan Philaret went much further than his two predecessors regarding the Moscow Patriarchate. In his letter to Archpriest Victor Potapov on June 26/July 9, 1980, regarding the acceptance of clergy from the MP he very resolutely wrote: "Of course in no way can we acknowledge the church of these cunning people to be bearing and preserving of grace. Because outside of Orthodoxy there is NO grace and the Soviet church has deprived itself of grace".

Beginning in 1987, the official section of the "Church Life" became gaudy with such cloudy statements as: heard the minutes # so and so, dated, then decreed: to confirm the minutes of the Synod meeting # so and so.

Still in 1989 from the magazine "Church Life" we find out that Metropolitan Vitaly received an offer from the President of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate to send a representative from the Church Abroad to an international church conference.

On July 29<sup>th</sup>/August 11<sup>th</sup> 1989 The Synod of Bishops decreed: "Recalling the former regulations of the Council of Bishops, since they all were made in accord with the guiding testament of the late First Hierarch of the Church Abroad, His Beatitude Metropolitan Anastassy, which have not lost their basis in fact, we will not send our representative to the above mentioned conference". (Emphasis by "Ch. N"),

However in the Epistle of the Council of Bishops of 1994, it is already stated, "the time has come to seek a lively relationship with all the parts of Russian Church, separated due to political circumstances". Since by 1993 there were already several bishops in Russia within the fold of ROCOR, then with whom was this lively relationship to be established?

In 1993 from the "Herald of the German Diocese" we learned that "Our diocese has never missed an opportunity to conduct a serious dialogue. The representatives of our diocese on numerous occasions participated in conversations with representatives of Moscow Patriarchate. While expressing our readiness to continue the dialogue, we went to the very uttermost limits, set up by our Council of Bishops". There were 9 such meetings and MP Bishop Theophan in Germany participated in them.

Alarmed by this information, on July 17/30, 1993, Bishop Gregory made a report to the President of the Synod of Bishops, Metropolitan Vitaly in which he asked: "Has there been any decision of the Council of Bishops or the Synod, which would permit Archbishop Mark, and in general any one, to meet with representatives of the MP in name of the Church Abroad?"

Asserting that he knows of no such decision, Bishop Gregory writes: "I believe that if they do not exist, then anyone of our hierarchs having dialogue in a personal manner -- may create a confusion among our flock abroad and mislead the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate who easily might presume that our Church is indeed on a path toward agreement with it. Such a dialogue might result in a radical change of all our former policies regarding the Moscow Patriarchate and in no way should it have taken place without a special decision on this matter by the whole Council of Bishops". (Emphasis by "Ch. N."). Bishop Gregory submitted two more memos regarding this issue, but did not receive any answer.

In his memo to the Synod of Bishops, dated March 7/20, 1989, Bishop Gregory defines the term "dialogue" in general and in regard to the Moscow Patriarchate in particular:

"Dialogue presumes the admission of various points of views regarding the same subject. At present it would be concern the Sergianists on one side and many thousands of martyrs and their adherents on the other. A dialogue in the present situation would lead to a discussion of how in the best manner and as little noticeably as possible, to trample on the truth for the sake of agreement".

From the above documentation it is absolutely obvious that, during the tenure of the three First Hierarchs, the ROCOR categorically rejected the legal standing of the Moscow Patriarchate and, therefore, any sort of negotiations with her. But after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, the connections with it became more and more intense and now the Church Abroad in responding by epistle to the Moscow Patriarchate's "Brotherly Appeal" asks it "without any hesitation" to point out all ROCOR's errors and transgressions in order that they might be corrected to find a common language! Can one trust the declarations of ROCOR's hierarchy that nothing has changed in her course and that they have and will continue to follow the path of the former First Hierarchs?

## **ABOUT THE "PLENARY POWERS OF THE LOCUM TENENS OF ROCE" UNTIL THE ELECTION OF A NEW FIRST HIERARCH**

From the declarations of various clergymen of the Western Europe Diocese and several representatives of the parishes in Russia, as well as declarations of the retired Metropolitan Vitaly (who twice signed his resignation) it is obvious that these clergy and Metropolitan Vitaly himself, through the "position of his deputy" Bishop Barnabas actually are creating a new hierarchy which has no canonical justification for its existence. The Western Europe clergy declare as one of the reasons for their departure (and not without some basis) that the leadership of ROCOR has violated a number of "church and moral canons". But can one correct the violation of the canons by another outrageous violation of the canons?

The canonical Letter of the Third Ecumenical Council regarding the case of Metropolitan Eustathius of Pamphylia has a remarkable analogy to the retirement case of Metropolitan Vitaly, who in July was indeed forced to retire. However, his second declaration about his retirement to the Council of Bishops in October of the current year was completely voluntary. In the epistle regarding the case of Metropolitan Eustathius we read that "there were certain disturbances... and as a result of unexpected circumstances, then, due to excessive inaction, wearied by the fight with his surrounding concerns and unable to deny the reprimands of his opponents, the man himself submitted his written resignation". Further the Council reveals that "...since he proved himself careless, though rather as a result of inaction rather than of laziness and indolence..." the Council declares that it thinks the old man could be pardoned, however, it recognizes the installation of a new bishop instead of the retired Eustathius in the person of a Theodore and the Council precisely and clearly elucidates the position of the retired bishop: "...we have decreed without any opposition, that he shall have both the name and the rank, and the communion of the episcopate. On this condition, however, only: that he shall not ordain, and that he shall not administer the Church of his own individual authority; but that (he shall do so only) if taken as an assistant, or when

appointed, if it would so chance, by a brother and fellow bishop, in accordance with the ordinance and love which is in Christ". (Emphasis by "Ch. N.").

Alas! In violation of this letter of the Third Ecumenical Council dealing with a similar case, Metropolitan Vitaly, along with Bishop Barnabas, has performed three episcopal consecrations: Archimandrite Sergy (Kindiakov), Priest-monk Vladimir (Tselishchev) and Archimandrite Bartholomew (Vorobiev).

At the same time, Metropolitan Vitaly "anathematized" Bishop Michael and has proposed he "voluntarily agree to defrocking" and even the loss of monastic status, and has promoted Bishop Barnabas to archbishop!

In his extraordinary declaration of October 14/27, 2001, Metropolitan Vitaly **renounced his "signature to my voluntary retirement and the consent to transfer my authority to Archbishop Laurus"**. And how easy it has become nowadays to "renounce (one's) signature" after some days and even a year. Until now, those who reneged on their words and even more so, a signature, would lose any respect of those around them. But at present it is possible (without repenting for a blunder or lack of civil courage) not only to painlessly revoke signatures, but even to become for some "heroes of the day"!

Considering the newest events within the ROCOR it is worthwhile to find out what kind of a person the new "Deputy First Hierarchy of the ROCE" in the person of Bishop Barnabas is.

Among the various memos submitted to Metropolitan Vitaly as the President of the Synod of Bishops by Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), there was one written regarding the situation of the ROCOR parishes in Russia from June 9/22, 1993.

"We know of only one accusation against Bishop Valentine, which came from the hands of Bishop Barnabas and was privately passed on at different times to the members at an extended meeting of the Synod in Munich. Bishop Valentin himself received a copy after the close of the meeting; at that time it became known also to the President of the Synod. I know only that it was received by Bishop Barnabas from the organization 'Pamyat' ('Memory'), against which Bishop Valentin had spoken publicly on several occasions.

"Bishop Valentin twice responded to these accusations: in July and December of the past year. These explanations were not presented to the Synod, but at the Council of Bishops the President accused Bishop Valentin of ignoring the information.

"It is amazing that in making the report to the Council about his activity in Russia, Bishop Barnabas began with an expression of his doubts about the sincerity of Bishop Valentin's joining the Church Abroad and presented him to us as an enemy. He said: 'The enemy wants to destroy us by discrediting and undermining us.' He did not present any facts against Bishop Valentin.

"It is not without reason that we read in the minutes # 5: 'The President asks Bishop Barnabas to present more detailed facts and fewer abstract expressions' (p. 4).

"The president also pointed out to him that all complaints should be forwarded to him and it is his responsibility to pass them on to the Synod for investigation. (Ibid.)

"It is amazing that opposing the correctness of accepting Fr. Adrian in our Church by another bishop, Bishop Barnabas immediately, after the reprimand of the Metropolitan, reported to the Council that he 'had decided to issue an Ukase of suspending Archimandrite Adrian and sent a copy of it to the procurator.'

"It is quite obvious that Bishop Barnabas wants to rule no more, no less than all the parishes in Russia. Mind you, he decided to suspend from priestly ministry an archimandrite who was in no way subordinate to him. At the same time, he is outraged that in admitting to his diocese the Epiphany cathedral in Noginsk, Bishop Valentin concelebrated with the rector of this parish. Considering the multitude of parishioners who pleaded to be admitted – Bishop Valentin decided first to take them in and then raise the question of an investigation. [The parish had no less than 10, 000 parishioners, "Ch. N"].

"It is not surprising that with such violations of the canons, we read in the minutes the following: 'Then Bishop Barnabas talked about the discords in his relationship with Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin.' Actually, Bishop Barnabas had become an enemy of all the hierarchs in Russia.

"Intruding into matters of other dioceses, Bishop Barnabas complained to the Council about Archbishop Lazarus' priest, because he forbade him to serve in his church without the Archbishop's permission. The President immediately explained to Bishop Barnabas that since the parish is within the jurisdiction of Archbishop Lazarus, this priest did the right thing.

"I personally have an inquiry from the priest of Archbishop Lazarus, who verifies his answer to Bishop Barnabas. When meeting with the priest of the Martha Mary Convent, Bishop Barnabas 'demanded that I go under his omophorion. When I abstained from this, Bishop Barnabas said: "you are a rebellious priest".'

"After reporting 'discords in his relationship with Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin' – Bishop Barnabas started to criticize Archbishop Lazarus.

"He admits that he 'hastily' suspended Archimandrite Adrian, the unlawfulness of which the President had pointed out.

"On the question of Archbishop Mark regarding the acceptance by Bishop Barnabas of Priest Peter Astakhov, who was suspended by Bishop Valentin for cohabiting with a woman. Bishop Barnabas as it is stated in the minutes that he replied 'he had to accept Fr. Peter, because the authorities wanted to take away his church.'

"Then Bishop Barnabas read a list of parishes that supposedly want to be under his authority.

"The further unlawful acts of Bishop Barnabas regarding other dioceses are listed in the same minutes. It states there: 'Another written report was read by Bishop Valentine, who complains about Bishop Barnabas and his connections with the organization Pamyat and acceptance by him of clergy without a letter of release. The acts of Bishop Barnabas are introducing discord into the parishes of the Russian Church and are putting their existence in danger.'

"This report, partially affirmed by the words of Bishop Barnabas himself, remained without any resolution

"Meanwhile, is it possible to cover up with silence all of the (acknowledged by himself) unlawful acts of Bishop Barnabas? He is obviously liable to the ecclesiastical trial.

Synod of Bishops' humble servant, Bishop Gregory"

Note: The case against Bishop Valentin, presented by Bishop Barnabas was dismissed "on lack of grounds" by the decision of the Council's Ecclesiastical Committee on November 18/December 1, 1994 #11/35/204 A.

How can Bishop Barnabas and those who are with him complain about violations of the canons on the part of anybody?

After a decade of watching the new ways of the Church Abroad ruled by Metropolitan Vitaly and her digression from her former path, Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) decided to warn the fourth First Hierarch in an extensive letter, dated March 24/April 6, 1994, in which, starting with the very first Council of Bishops after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, he described in detail a whole series of events in her life.

So, he wrote the Metropolitan regarding his memos on the status of church matters in Russia. His memos not only were not presented to the Synod but in one instance, unprecedented in the ROCOR, he was denied the possibility of presenting his report and participating in possible discussions. "If our Synod does not at once correctly evaluate the historical moment now taking place, then its prestige, interminably undermined as it already is (especially in Russia) will be definitely and ingloriously destroyed."

Bishop Gregory concluded his, one can say prophetic, letter with these words: "It absolutely behooves you to turn the helm of our administration sharply and decidedly in the direction of observance of the canons while it is still not too late.

"Do not permit, Vladyko, that in the history of the Russian Church your name be linked not with the continuation of the peaceful building up of Church life, but with her abrupt and disgraceful collapse both in Russia and Abroad".

At present we are witnessing the foresight of Bishop Gregory: the disgraceful end of the Church Abroad in front of all our eyes, while Metropolitan Vitaly, in retirement not only takes back his resignation, but also in violation of the canonical letter of the Third Ecumenical Council hastily creates a new hierarchy by ordaining three bishops and announcing it through Ukase of October 23/November 5, 2001: "To all the faithful pastors and children of Christ's Church". In part it says: "to restore the former name of our Church indicating her true condition and as of now to call her "The Russian Orthodox Church in Exile"!

The advisers of the aged Metropolitan (one would guess too young to know the Church's history) placed him in an uncomfortable position. A part of the Russian Orthodox Church, when forced to be abroad, in 1920 was called a "Temporary Supreme Church Administration on the South of Russia, but from 1921 – it had the official name of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (or Abroad). And with this name it remained until the last days. The term "in Exile" instead of Abroad was used by the OCA and Paris groups in hopes of denigrating the ROCOR.

However, on November 7/20, a new order was issued, signed by Metropolitan Vitaly and three of his newly ordained bishops. It stated: "Some measures which have been taken recently by the Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR, were met not synonymously by our God loving flock and have created among our faithful children alarm and emotions. For the sake of preserving unity and peace within our Church, we humbly admit, that they were hasty decisions. Our Church should, as before, be called the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and according to the regulations, the name of His Beatitude Metropolitan Vitaly, the Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York, Archbishop of Montreal and Canada should be the appropriate name of the ruling bishop"! (Emphasis by "Ch. N."). In other words, now there exist **two** Russian Orthodox Churches Outside of Russia with almost identical titles of the First Hierarchs (Canada added in one case) and with difference only in name!

The internet agency "Strana.RU" of November 9<sup>th</sup> when reporting the creation of the "new Russian Orthodox Church, very reasonably puts a real-estate question: now to which ROCOR in particular will belong this or that church. As it is said in the report, "The America judicial system will have to spend much time determining what belongs to which organization". One can add: not only the America, but also all over the world, where there are ROCOR churches and property.

Then there is expressed an interesting opinion: "Unexpectedly for herself, the ROC – MP 'cheaply' obtained a little chest with treasures, for which she fought for a long time and which was only to be opened... But after opening it, she discovered that in it there are simultaneously ROCOR with Laurus and ROCE (by now again the ROCOR, "Ch. N") with Vitaly. What a problem! What actually is happening before our eyes – is nothing else but a soap bubble, which is about to burst and spill as a dirty gray-murky puddle on the asphalt. After all, the ROCOR is no longer there – no matter under a new or the old name".

Unfortunately, we cannot but acknowledge the correctness of this opinion: the facts speak for themselves. The schism that was created by the hierarchy itself is of benefit only to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Metropolitan Vitaly, with his Synod on October 26<sup>th</sup>/ November 8<sup>th</sup> decreed also to discontinue communion with the Greek group presided over by Metropolitan Kyprianos. The communion with this group was opened upon the insistence of Archbishop Laurus on the Council of Bishops of 1994. The teachings of this group rely on very slippery theological opinions and they were strongly criticized by Bishop Gregory (Grabbe). This group claims to be Old Calendar and against ecumenism, but at the same time believes that since the New Calendarists have not been condemned by any Ecumenical Council, she accepts New Calendar sacraments as valid. They feel in no way confused by the fact that all New Calendarists are also ecumenists!

However, in the newly published Ukase of November 7/20, beside the restoration of the former ROCOR name, there is also information that the declaration regarding the relationship with the followers of Kyprianos was "accepted without the

appointment by the Council of Bishops of the proper theological committee, and her presentation to the Council, therefore the carrying out of this decision is to be on hold". (Emphasis by "Ch. N.").

In this case there is a question: the decision of which Council of Bishops is to be on hold, since there are two ROCORs: the one accepted by Metropolitan Vitaly in 1994 or the one from the hierarchy he just now created?

It is interesting that Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, which initiated the relationship with the Kyprianites, under the tenure of Metropolitan Philaret were very unfriendly toward the Greek Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston, which was part of ROCOR and in every way hampered cooperation with it, in particular in the field of translations of prayer books, church services and patristic literature. But they were constantly in touch with illegal Greek groups, especially while Archbishop Laurus was Secretary to the Synod. During lifetime of Metropolitan Philaret (with substantial proof of simony on the part of Archbishop Leonty of Chile) the friend of Archbishop Averky, Petros, was ordained. Later Metropolitan Philaret annulled his ordination certificate. Just recently, according to Jordanville's magazine "Orthodox Russia" Bishop Paul (the nephew of Petros) was received as a guest of honor although he publicly admits his love for New Calendarists!

## **THE ATTACK UPON METROPOLITAN VITALY ORGANIZED BY BISHOP MICHAEL**

On November 22, 2001, news was widely disseminated of a new outrageous attack upon Metropolitan Vitaly organized by Bishop Michael of Toronto.

According to testimony by witnesses of this scandalous event published via the Internet, at quarter to 9 in the morning during the breakfast of the Metropolitan with few others, right after a loud knock on the door, five or six persons, under the leadership of Bishop Michael, Priest Paul Iwashewicz and their lawyer, entered the room. They approached the Metropolitan and told him "we are taking you", to which the Metropolitan replied: "I don't want it". Then Bishop Michael declared that he wanted to talk to the Metropolitan and both of them went upstairs, followed by several persons of the Metropolitan's entourage.

From the conversation of one of the witnesses it was learned that the people who came with Bishop Michael were the employees of a security company. They insisted that they had the authority from American and the Canadian governments to bring the Metropolitan to New York.

Meanwhile he was taken outside by those people where they tried to force him into a limousine. There is information that under this force, the Bishop Michael's lawyer grabbed the Metropolitan by the throat and in the confusion in an effort to escape the attackers, he was knocked off his feet and fell to the ground. He was lifted up and pushed into the car. At that time one of the Skete's residents managed to call the police, who immediately arrived and stopped the attack. The residents of the Skete contacted the Metropolitan's lawyer, who appealed to the local courts and the unlawful effort to transfer the Metropolitan to USA was stopped.

Only after the scandalous third attack on the Metropolitan was made, and 11 professional photographs appeared on the Internet that became known worldwide, did the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Bishop Gabriel, react with the following declaration:

"The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia declares that what lamentably occurred at the Holy Transfiguration Skete in Mansonville on November 9/22nd, 2001, was a direct violation of the directives given by the Sobor of Bishops for the resolution of the difficult situation that arose as a result of the removal from the premises of the Synod of the retired elder, His Eminence, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Vitaly by a group of irresponsible and openly antagonistic persons.

The Sobor of Bishops during its sessions decided that in this matter it was necessary to act solely by peaceful methods, through calm and quiet conversations and persuasions, and absolutely not through the use of physical force with the assistance of official or private police personnel.

Synod of Bishops has already opened an official inquiry into what occurred in Mansonville, with the goal of making clear all the circumstances. Pending the conclusion on the inquiry, the Right Reverend Michael is relieved from the administration of the Canadian Diocese, and sent to reside at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. The temporary administration of the Canadian Diocese is delegated to the Most Reverend Laurus, in its Eastern part, and to the Right Reverend Cyril, in its Western part.

The Synod of Bishops declares to its flock that all of the right reverend archpastors of the Orthodox Church Outside of Russia categorically condemn and distance themselves from all actions that use force or duress regarding the person of the retired Metropolitan Vitaly and consider them to be totally unacceptable.

The Synod of Bishops hopes for the return of Metropolitan Vitaly, of his own free will, to the premises of the Synod of Bishops, where he will be provided with life long care, worthy of the dignity of his high office, and continues to strive toward the healing of the schism that has been created and the pacification of all who have enmity.

+ Bishop Gabriel, Secretary of the Synod November 10/23, 2001"

Priest Paul Iwaszewicz, who happened to be a participant in the outrageous events in Mansonville, via the Internet gave some additional explanations. He tells us that he was sent by the Synod of Bishops to persuade Metropolitan Vitaly to come with him to New York and meet with Metropolitan Laurus. Actually, his brother, Fr. Alexander, who was the Metropolitan's cell attendant until Mrs. Rosniansky managed to get rid of him, was to go to Canada.

Supposedly "on his own initiative", Bishop Michael came to the airport and there met Fr. Paul. They stopped on the way to pick up the guards, who were hired by Bishop Michael's lawyer. After their arrival in Mansonville, this group forced the

Metropolitan into the limousine, acting with outrageous crudeness. After the contact with the Metropolitan's lawyer, according to the court decision, the Metropolitan was permitted to remain in Canada. While those legal negotiations were in process, Fr. P. Iwaszewucz remained with the Metropolitan for a few hours. In his explanations, he stresses the extreme rudeness of Bishop Michael.

## **DECLARATION BY BISHOP AGATHANGEL**

Having become familiar with information relating to our recently completed Council of Bishops which is being spread on the Internet and through other means, I consider it necessary to make this statement.

First of all, what is obvious is the one-sidedness and bias of this information. If it is to be believed, then all the hierarchs of ROCOR as simply some band of criminals who have turned on Orthodoxy and are cruelly persecuting Metropolitan Vitaly. I would like to state that this is not so.

Metropolitan Vitaly himself, voluntarily and without coercion, made the decision to retire. He stated this both orally and in writing. The Council was called specifically according to his wishes. He is 91 years old, and for at least two years he has not been involved with any administrative issues – he made no assignment, no decisions, saw no-one, being completely and willingly isolated from all matters by his secretary. He had not served for three years. It turned out that his secretary, L. D. Rosnianskaya, had placed Metropolitan Vitaly in complete dependence on her care. She alone prepared his food, administrated his medicine (while completely covering up the illnesses of the Metropolitan, the names of the medicines and the identities of the physicians who were treating him), decided who could meet with him and which documents he should sign. Several years ago the Metropolitan was still able to not abide by her opinion, but lately she has completely controlled his will. This was shown when at the very start of the Council. Metropolitan Vitaly distributed to all a paper signed by him that stated that since he knew with certainty that this council would make a decision to unite with the Moscow Patriarchate, he considered it illegitimate. Orally he added that he knew that Vladyka Laurus and Vladyka Alipy had met with Alexei II and had already agreed to everything. His statement, therefore, was based on complete disinformation. After long assurances that no one was planning to join with the MP, Metropolitan Vitaly said that he would participate in the work of the Council and gave a sealed envelope with his vote for the election. That evening and in the morning after Liturgy, he said he would come for the election of the new Metropolitan. At the same time, five minutes before the procedure to determine the results of the vote began, L. D. Rosnianskaya phoned and announced that the Metropolitan would not be coming. In this way, whether the Metropolitan Vitaly would participate in the work of the Council was decided not by him, but by his secretary. It was in these circumstances that the decision to release L. D. Rosnianskaya as an employee of Synod and to ask her to leave the Synod building was made. The next day after the vote, Metropolitan Vitaly came to the meeting of the Council and congratulated Vladyka Laurus with his election as the new Metropolitan of ROCOR, expressed a warm send-off and said that he was fully transferring to him his authority as First Hierarch in connection with his retirement. He wished the Council successful work. This was free expression of the will of the Metropolitan when L. D. Rosnianskaya was not present in the Synod. Therefore, the election of Metropolitan Laurus is legitimate and is recognized as such by Metropolitan Vitaly himself.

The next day, L. D. Rosnianskaya arrived at Synod with several of her supporters, accompanied by police officers. She told the police that Metropolitan Vitaly was being held prisoner and, possibly lying unconscious. The police officer went to the third floor to the Metropolitan and was convinced, by the Metropolitan's own words, that the Metropolitan was completely free and needed nothing. Then they asked him to come downstairs so that the people who had come could see him. Understanding that they are attempting to take him away, all the hierarchs, priest and the synod's workers came down into the vestibule of the Synod building. They were all trying to convince the Metropolitan not to leave and stay with them. However, the Metropolitan said he was a free man, was retired, and wished to meet with L. D. Rosnianskaya. Having come out into the street and having learned from Rosnianskaya that she had been fired, the Metropolitan announced that he was leaving the Synod. The Metropolitan therefore, in deciding between all the hierarchs of our church and L. D. Rosnianskaya, chose in favor of the latter. This was also his free will. (By the way, the police, having been witnesses at the scene, on their initiative brought a legal action as they considered that Metropolitan Vitaly had been taken away illegally, and the court decided that L. D. Rosnianskaya was to return the Metropolitan to the Synod.)

Shortly thereafter a letter appeared on the Internet stating, in the name of Metropolitan Vitaly, that he had reconsidered his retirement. What was the Council to do in this case? Moreover, no documentation other than that on the Internet was forthcoming. There followed an elevation to the episcopate and an announcement of the establishment of a new church, which with finality made it impossible to normalize the situation.

Unfortunately, Metropolitan Vitaly has become very easily influenced, and can change his opinion several times depending on with whom he is speaking. One thing remains unchanged for him – the impossibility of union with the Moscow Patriarchate. It is this position that those who have surrounded him are vigorously exploiting, constantly stating that all the rest of the hierarchs of ROCOR will join with the MP. In addition, L. D. Rosnianskaya had taken into her complete control the sums that had been donated to the Metropolitan for the Church in the course of many years. She removes these sums from the books, by deceit obtaining the Metropolitan's signature on bank documents, taking advantage of the fact that he does not at all remember which sums, how much, and where are under his control. In this sense, the attempt to obtain a medical examination was the last, desperate action to protect him and the Church from being finally plundered.

If we are to talk about the morality of this matter it is completely clear that the abuse of the aged Metropolitan is being carried out by those who currently surround him, covering up the schism which they have created in the name of him, who fought against schism his entire life, sparing neither the honor nor the good name of the reverend elder who has done so much for the Church. They also hysterically shout in the direction of other hierarchs, blaming them for non-existent crimes against the Church, in the process not citing any convincing arguments, but pointing out only that possibly, something might happen in the future. We must fight for the Church and not against the Church.

By this I declare with full responsibility that I am not with these people.

November 11, 2001

+ Bishop Agathangel"

The statement of Bishop Agathangel in many respects corresponds with the sad truth, but there are also some substantial errors.

One may argue enough about the "voluntary" retirement of Metropolitan Vitaly in July of current year – there are still living witnesses to it. His first "voluntary" retirement declaration, (literally a day before the celebration of his 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee as bishop) was brought about by the rude yelling of his own "brothers" during a Synod meeting, when he left after telling that he has nothing more in common with them.

The suit initiated by the police because of abduction of the Metropolitan is a severe juggling of the facts. The suit was indeed started, but in no way by the police, who have no authority to do it, but by the Synod of Bishops' lawyer who was present there. It is an amazing "coincidence" that he happened to be handy at the proper moment! There was no final decision by the court regarding Metropolitan Vitaly. After affirming that the Metropolitan is leaving of his own free will, the police in no way prevented his departure.

Regarding the monetary matter, according to former practice of the Synod of Bishops, all the donations mainly were made through the "Fund for Assistance to the ROCOR" and not through the Metropolitans themselves. No bishop is denied the right to possess property in the form of money or real estate. He is obliged only to strictly separate in his will what belongs to him personally and what to the Church. The Brotherhood of St. Job of Pochayev, created by the Metropolitan, has in Montreal a three story building and with it an income from the publishing business. As with anybody else, he has the right to manage his property according to his wishes. Unfortunately it includes Mrs. Rosniansky too!

After making an analysis and summary of various testimonies of "witnesses" and the participants – one may state with the assurance, that each one of them "departs from the truth" (if in general today the truth is known) for their own benefit. However, with no doubt, the whole story stained the name of the ROCOR with perpetual disgrace!

#### **A FEW WORDS ABOUT AN INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP AGATHANGEL**

The Internet news agency Vertograd.Razsylka of November 8 published an interview that was given by Bishop Agathangel to another Internet agency "strana.ru".

Among various questions of the journalist regarding the election of the new First Hierarch to ROCOR, Bishop Agathangel was also asked about the credibility of news that the two Metropolitans: Vitaly and Valentin have met. To this question Bishop Agathangel replied: "I do not think it is so. They could not meet because Metropolitan Vitaly all his life was opposing the Autonomous Church, perfectly well knowing, who is Valentin and therefore, they could not agree upon anything. Vladyka Vitaly is now in such a state, that one can bring him any man, without naming him, and then insist that he had talked with Metropolitan Valentin. But if he were to know that this is indeed Valentin, he would not even talk with him".

Which Valentin it was – the Metropolitan knew and it was obvious that he had recognized him and indeed had a conversation with him.

However, one wonders in this reply of Bishop Agathangel not so much about his denial of possibility of meeting between the two Metropolitans, but his extreme malice against Metropolitan Valentin.

Bishop Agathangel had very tight connections with him. He received his bishop's rank from the hands of Archbishop Valentin and his ordination happened in no other place, but in Suzdal. He was a member of the first "Conference of the Russian Hierarchs" in 1994 and then, until 1995 in the "Temporal Supreme Church Administration". Then he decided to submit himself to unlawful suspension on part of ROCOR and lately, being accepted as a bishop, participated in the Council of Bishops in 2000 at which he signed the unfortunate letter to the Serbian Patriarch Paul (in which the members of the Council asked him to be an intermediate in union with the MP) and also the establishment of the committee for union with the MP. During this Council he declared that the ROCOR should not blame MP for not canonizing Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd in order not to complicate relations with her! Only in February 2001 (5 months later the conclusion of the Council of Bishops in 2000) – Bishop Agathangel "revoked" his signature under the letter to Serbian Paul by a memo to the Synod, but left open the question of the committee for union with the MP.

#### **THE REACTION OF THE RUSSIAN PRESS TO ELECTION OF THE NEW FIRST HIERARCH OF THE ROCOR**

The election of Archbishop Laurus (Shkurla) as the First Hierarch of the ROCOR was met by the media in Russia with a most favorable reaction. The Moscow newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" (Russian Herald) in the issue # 42-43 printed on the first page a photograph of new Metropolitan and his biography that, short of one column, filled a whole page. In this report

it is said, "Archbishop Laurus is a supporter of gradual rapprochement of the ROCOR with the Russian Orthodox Church. While in Russia he unofficially met and had conversations with the highest hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate, including His Holiness Patriarch Alexis" (emphasis by "Ch. N.").

In the end of the biography, as a separate paragraph, "The Russian Herald' congratulates Metropolitan Laurus with his election as the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and expresses confidence in that the obstacles on the way toward the unity of the Russian Church will be removed. We sinners ask for your prayers".

In the same paper, but issue # 44-45 on page 10, there is again a photograph of Metropolitan Laurus with his first interview, given to the Holy Trinity Monastery Monk Vsevolod. To the question: which problems confront the ROCOR in the nearest future, the new Metropolitan replied that: "...at the present time the Russian Church Abroad is subject to attacks and misunderstandings from the right and as well from the left for the very simple reason that she is foreign to extremes of liberalism, modernism and ecumenism, as well as extremes of fanaticism and militant fanaticism, and feelings of proud self-satisfaction. [?!] It is very, very difficult to keep to such a royal middle way of the Church Abroad, but this is the sure way and one cannot deviate from it". (Emphasis by "Ch. N.").

The press service of several patriotic organizations in Odessa and Ukraine, published in the "Russian Herald" their "Appeal to the ROCOR Synod of Bishops" in the name of "One Homeland". Advertising union with the MP, the authors of the appeal, among other things, declare that the "practice of common prayers with the heterodox is non-existent" and supposedly the ecumenist question is "at the point of solution". This is a very deceptive declaration! Then the Council is informed that "It is impossible not to pay attention to the fact that the opponents of a union between the ROC, the MP and the ROCOR happen to be openly anti-Christian powers which are frightened by the existence of the unified, mighty and influential Russian Church, and who oppose the very idea of an Orthodox renaissance. And as small change these powers exploit such little groups as the 'neo-renovationists' within the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the microscopic 'Autonomous Russian Church' presided over by the former Archimandrite Valentin (Rousantsev) defrocked by the ROC and ROCOR, also termed 'the Suzdal schism'".

This appeal ends with the frank declaration: "The election of Vladyka Laurus is evaluated by all as a sign from Above. This event providentially might be defining in the matter of unity of the ROCOR with the Moscow Patriarchate. It is common knowledge that Metropolitan Laurus is a supporter of unity as soon as possible of these sister Churches and therefore the adherents of Metropolitan Vitaly, an opponent of this grace-filled process, are very unhappy". The Agency NTV.RU inappropriately calls Vladyka Laurus 'liberally moderate' and in vain the conservative part of the ROCOR together with the Russian hierarchs 'Abroaders', Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Benjamin, oppose the trends of history. This process cannot be stopped and regardless of anything, we will be united!" (Emphasis by "Ch. N.")

The newspaper "Moskovskiya Novosti" ("Moscow News") in a piece signed by Alexander Soldatov notes the careful diplomacy of the new Metropolitan of ROCOR and states that "while in Russia he unofficially met several times with the highest hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church (MP) and, as witnesses state with no difficulties he finds a common language with them. However, those meetings were never advertised, but the opposite, were kept secret". (Emphasis by "Ch. N.").

## AN INVITATION WHICH MIGHT HAVE LONG LASTING EFFECTS

"Vertograd.Razsylka" # 169 on November 15<sup>th</sup> reported on the visit of President V. Putin to the USA and, in particular to New York, where he attended a liturgy in the St. Nicholas Cathedral (4 blocks away from the Synod building). The MP hierarch Mercurius thanked Putin for his historic visit, because for more than a century this was the very first visit of a head of the Russian government.

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of Putin's arrival in the Russian embassy in Washington, DC, there was a reception to which Bishop Gabriel, the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops was invited. As has been reported, it turned out that this hierarch happened to be in the inner circle of participants in the reception, one of those who met and spoke to the President behind the closed doors of a small reception room on the second floor. One of the results of this conversation was the information that the President Vladimir Putin has invited the new head of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Laurus, and Bishop Gabriel to visit Moscow".

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, in the Danilov Monastery in Moscow there was a meeting of Alexis Ridiger with journalists. There he declared, "If the invitation is accepted – during the stay of Metropolitan Laurus negotiations will occur about the means of possible union of the Churches". Then Ridiger said: "In the XXI<sup>st</sup> century there are conditions for the restoration of the Russian Diaspora with the Mother Church. The Epistle addressed by the Orthodox Church to members of the Council of ROCOR Bishops has a brotherly character. The Church Abroad, at the present time, is passing through a difficult period of schism. Eighty years of separation have left their trace, and therefore there is no point in forcing events". (All emphasis by "Ch. N.").

In connection with the received invitation (one must think it has already created alarm among the faithful) Bishop Gabriel had to make explanations, published via the Internet by "strana.ru —Vertograd, New York". He said that the question of the trip to Moscow, regarding negotiations of problem (uniting with the MP) of Head of the ROCOR, Metropolitan Laurus is not deliberated, firstly it has to be coincided on the Synod's level). No one can argue with that! However, Bishop Gabriel also explained that the invitation was not an official one. Since the invitation came from the head of the government and was made to the Head of the autonomous ROCOR and her Secretary – then to speak of its

unofficial character one may with the same success with which the Synod of Bishops in his Epistle declared that the letter, once written to the Serbian Patriarch and signed by the total body, except for one member – was of a “private character”! This raises sad suspicions because this “private” invitation by Putin was made on November 13<sup>th</sup> and already by November 21<sup>st</sup> Ridiger not only knew the details, but also gave an interview to the press about it!

From this information it also clear that in response to the ROCOR's creation of a committee for union with the MP, the latter is also creating one of her own. “If our Committees will sit at the negotiating table, it will be possible to talk about what separates us, can it be overcome and by what means. We shall see what comes out of this”, said the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops.

The very same Vertograd.Razsylka # 179 of December 1<sup>st</sup>, published a very laconic declaration by Bishop Gabriel in which he tries to downplay the significance of the meeting, which was already extensively described by other sources. Now he says:

Reports, which have been widely disseminated, about my meeting with the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, on the whole, do not correctly describe what occurred, and, therefore require correction and clarification.

The newly elected First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, His Eminence, Metropolitan Laurus, received an invitation to the reception held at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Washington, by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, on the occasion of his visit to the United States. Metropolitan Laurus, for reasons beyond his control, was not able to attend, but sent me to represent him.

At the reception, in front of some 250 guests, the President of the Russian Federation spoke for about twenty minutes. After this, certain specially chosen guests, perhaps forty in all, were invited to a different reception room where they could be received by President Putin personally. I was among these guests. It should be noted that there were no clergy or other representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate present at this reception.

When my turn came up, after mutual greetings, President Putin asked me to relay his congratulations and greetings to the newly elected First Hierarch, Metropolitan Laurus. I promised to relay these greetings to Vladyka Laurus, and, in turn, invited the President of Russia to visit our parishes in America, and, especially, Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. The President thanked me for the invitation and invited me to make a visit to Moscow, as well.

At this, the meeting with the President, which lasted not forty minutes, as some reports would have it, but some forty seconds, concluded.

Bishop GABRIEL

Secretary of the Synod November 17/30, 2001

At the same time, all the faithful who are alarmed by how the present leadership has violated the testaments of the former First Hierarchs, are persistently told that there is no reason for any concern, since no union happened as yet and it is unknown when will this happen.

It seems Bishop Gabriel has forgotten how shocked he was after the first days of the infamous Council of Bishops of 2000, when together with Bishop Barnabas he testified: “We have erased the border between ROCOR and the MP”!

The friendship of Putin and Ridiger is no secret to anyone; therefore the invitation to Moscow of the newly elected First Hierarch and Secretary of the ROCOR Bishops is an event of special importance, even more so, since no one is hiding the goal of this invitation. Not to respond to an invitation by the President of such a country as Russia is very difficult. However, does not Russian folk wisdom say: “Once the claw is caught whole bird is lost”?

## **SERGIANIST METHODS OF BISHOP EVTIKHY**

According to Vertograd internet information, the clergy of a parish in the city of Omsk on November 18<sup>th</sup> received from the Ishima Diocesan Administration the following form, entitled “Information for the Diocesan Administration”:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have familiarized myself with the documents of the Council of Bishops, namely:

- 1) The proclamation of the election of the new First Hierarch;
- 2) Epistle of the Synod of Bishops;
- 3) Epistle to the God-saved flock in the Fatherland;
- 4) An Appeal of the Council of Bishops to the flock;
- 5) Address of Metropolitan Vitaly to brethren Archpastors;
- 6) Interview by Metropolitan Laurus;
- 7) Letter to the Serbian Patriarch Paul.

I will accept these documents as guidance in my church activities and also pledge to inform the flock and other people interested in the church matters about the contemporary situation of our Church in concordance with the received material”.

“\_\_\_\_\_” (Signature)

It would seem during the entire history of the ROCOR there has been nothing more outrageous ordered by a church authority and not surprising that several clergymen of the parish of the Imperial and New Martyrs have already presented their resignations to Bishop Evtikhy.

## **UNEXPECTED FASCINATION WITH MONOPHYSITES**

A short while ago in our # 6(98) issue we reported that on the occasion of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the baptism of Armenia (which later fell into the heresy of Monophysitism) the Moscow Patriarch Alexis Ridiger participated with these heretics in the rite of preparing myrrh.

The Serbian Patriarchate's official publication "Pravoslavje" ("Orthodoxy") # 829 of October 1, unfortunately arriving only now, reported that 2 Serbian Bishops were also to participate in the Armenian festivities: Igatius of Branichevo and Pakhomiye of Vranje.

But bad examples can become very infectious. Thus, according to the official publication of the OCA, "The Orthodox Church" for October/November of the current year, a vesper service was held in which all the members of the Conference of the Canonical Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) and the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (SCOOC) participated. The Monophysites are now days called "Oriental Orthodox" or some times "Pre-Chalcedonites" in order not to scare off ignorant people.

The Greek Orthodox Archbishop Demetrios of the Ecumenical Patriarchate hosted this scandalous affair.

The newspaper reports, "The service was the first of what is hoped to become an annual event". This disgusting event was sponsored by the UN. At the service were present the representatives of the nations who participated in it, of course, many of those adhere to the Armenian-Gregorian heresy.

Quite unexpectedly, and deliberately secretly, the Vatican is in communion with the Monophysites. The newspaper "National Catholic Reporter" of November 16<sup>th</sup> reported that on July 20<sup>th</sup> a declaration was issued from the Vatican, published only on October 25<sup>th</sup>, according to which Armenians, Armenian Uniates, the Assyrian church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church may receive communion at each other's liturgies. This decision is justified with the term of the "pastoral necessity" to minister to the Assyrians who in the 16<sup>th</sup> century split in groups: Uniate-Chaldeans and Assyrians.

In this manner the Vatican acknowledges the validity of the Monophysite sacraments, who teach that in Christ's nature His humanity was "swallowed by the divinity," which makes the Eucharist a meaningless act.

This heresy was founded by the Constantinople Archimandrite Evtikhy who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This heresy was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 451.

## **ABOUT THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

A newspaper "The Jewish Press" on November 15<sup>th</sup> reported that the New York Public Library has received 38 volumes of just recently published "Dead Sea Scrolls", which were accidentally found by Bedouin shepherds more than 50 years ago. Two more volumes are to be added to this collection. It is believed that these Scrolls are hand written Holy Scripture as well as some historical notes that belonged to a Jewish sect and were written between 250 and 70 BC. This discovery became an international sensation and quite naturally all-important scientists rushed to decode them and to compare them with existing translations of the Holy Scripture. However, very soon many conflicts developed over the possibility of working on these Scrolls. In the beginning access to them was not restricted by nationality or religion: Jews, Catholics and Protestants participated as equals. But, under the pretext of the difficulty of studying the Scrolls, even ones that had already been decoded by this or that scientist, their publication was delayed for decades. Only during the very first years after the discovery of the Scrolls were fragments of them occasionally displayed at some exhibits. Gradually, the matter of the Scrolls was, so to say, hushed up. At the same time, the body of scientists who had access to them changed in a significant manner and Jews obtained a total monopoly in editing and publishing these texts.

The edited Scrolls published by Oxford University were brought to New York by the editor-in-chief of this publication, a Professor of the Jewish University of Jerusalem, Emanuel Tov and Amir Drori, a retired general and past president of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

This delay of many years outraged those interested in this matter. Therefore, Tov quickly did his best to prevent unpleasant questions. He explained "the delay was due to a lack of organizational concepts and also certain prejudices". He also said that for some 35 years only 9 people worked on the Scrolls, who would not permit Jews to participate in the work. This resulted in only 8 volumes being completed. But, as per the newspaper, Tov "graciously admitted the contribution of earlier scholars and said: 'we stand on their shoulders,' but it was only in 1990 that 'serious' was started work under administration of Amir Drori, of Israel Antiquity Authorities.

Tov, who took the over the matter of publication in 1991, said that in this task altogether 98 scientists directly participated and there were 60 additional workers at different times. The group of editors was a combination of scientists "from Israel, Europe and USA", with no indication of their religious affiliation.

The Israeli representatives presented to the Mayor of New York, Rudolf Giuliani, a volume containing the Scrolls of the Psalms.

It is very doubtful that it will be possible to establish how many forgeries the contemporary scientists have made during their editing these ancient Scrolls of Holy Scripture, which were found more than 50 years ago.

Many erroneously imagine that the Jews are monolithic in essence. But the fact is that they have several major sects, which are very hostile toward each other. One of them, established in 1937, has the name of "conservative" although it is, probably, the most innovative among them. They were the first to have women as rabbis.

This Jewish group, according to the newspaper "The Christian News" of November 26<sup>th</sup>, just recently published a new Bible, the goal of which is to "adopt it to the new culture".

In this new Torah (the 5 first books of the Bible) there are many commentaries and footnotes. In the foreword to this new Bible, written by David Lieber, it is said, "In keeping with our commitment to Conservative Judaism, we have sought to learn from the Torah, rather than judge it".

The book is supposed to be used in the synagogues of this sect and it has parallel texts in Hebrew and English, while the English has "gender inclusive language". The rules in Leviticus, regarding homosexuality (18: 22) explain the acceptance of sodomite sin as permissible in the present times.

According to a Rabbi Epstein of this "conservative" group (by the way, one of the largest in USA) "it provides a different perspective. Everyone reads Bible through his or her own eyes. It is important that the commentaries serve to nuance those different eyes".

Another rabbi, Ismar Shorsh declared, "You can't read Hebrew Scripture as if it's the only piece of literature which has survived from the ancient Middle East. You can't read it in a vacuum any more. To do this is simply an act of ignorance"

No one knows by now, what members of what sect "worked on" the Dead Sea Scrolls!