

**THE REPORT TO SYNOD OF BISHOPS
BY BISHOP GREGORY 9/22/1994**

The action of the Synod of Bishops with respect to the regulation of church life in Russia is proceeding with great difficulties. At the present moment one may say it is at an impasse. This situation may be rectified only by extraordinary measures.

I will enumerate the most important points of this matter.

1) The first bishop who worked on Russian territory, Bishop Barnaby, committed a series of uncanonical acts and for his actions there should be brought to trial, as a result of which he loses his right to vote on this matter. In several cases Bishop Barnaby interfered in local diocesan matters in Russia, totally ignoring the local Russian bishops there. He unilaterally passed judgment on a clergyman who was not subordinate to him, and without the knowledge of the Synod of Bishops he sent out his own decree, forcibly retiring Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Valentine and placing ALL the parishes in Russia under his sole jurisdiction. He also, without informing the Synod, unilaterally raised a deacon (who, by the way, went over to the Moscow Patriarchate soon afterwards) to the rank of protodeacon, and for all this he was not reprimanded even after he admitted in his written report to all his wrongdoings before the Synod of Bishops and signed a protocol to that effect.

Only at one of these last meetings of the Synod was it decided to ask him for an explanation, but without placing any bans on him, which contradicted the previously-established procedure on conducting affairs and was punishable by defrocking. Despite all this he was even permitted to participate in bishops' ordinations.

2) The ruling Archbishop Lazarus felt that our Synod was disregarding him completely and for this reason conditionally separated himself from us. Our Synod reacted to his (Archbishop Lazarus') explanatory report not with an investigation of his complaint, but forcing him into immediate retirement.

3) Bishop Valentine likewise did not agree with this uncanonical interference in his diocesan affairs that was coming from the top. He complained to the Synod both about Bishop Barnaby and about our too easy attitude towards the violation of canonical diocesan borders, without, however, complaining about his superiors.

In addition to this, by violating the 6th law of the Second Ecumenical Council, we (i.e. Synod) accepted with great seriousness a complaint against Bishop Valentine that originated from a very questionable source – the organization “Memory”. Obviously, by accomplishing its task of stopping

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by means of provocation the successful development of our work in Russia, this organization (“Memory”) very clearly defined its affinity with the Moscow Patriarchate, not to mention the fact that the canons require two or three reliable witnesses with a blameless church reputation as witnesses against a bishop. Nevertheless, this sole complaint, issuing moreover from the enemy camp, was readily accepted and enforced.

The Reverend Bishop Valentine immediately replied to this accusation and indicated that it came from a provocational organization. Then he gave his reply to this slander for a second time, but, as our bishops may remember, at our Bishops’ Council meeting in May of this year (1993), the Metropolitan (Vitaly) announced that Bishop Valentine had not replied to the accusations against him. In replying for the third time now, Bishop Valentine added three notarized testimonies from relatives of the accuser, who unanimously testified to his (accuser’s) psychological unbalance, but we (the Synod and Council of Bishops) continued to ignore it and kept this case open.

Despite everything else, we should remember the warning of the Second Ecumenical Council about the need to be especially careful in troubled times, so that our enemy’s intrigues would not harm the work of the restoration of true Orthodoxy in Russia, which is already being incarnated in the hundreds of parishes of Archbishop Lazarus, Bishop Benjamin, and Bishop Valentine. In all these matters an attitude of prejudice against them (the bishops in Russia) on our part was clearly visible, even to the extent of open ill-wishing.

The 6th rule of the Second Ecumenical Council provides a detailed description of precautionary measures to be taken in conditions similar to the conditions that exist today in Russia, including the fact that “the accusers cannot insist on their accusation unless they place themselves in written form under the threat of the same accusation as the accused, if in their charges they should be found to have slandered the accused Bishop.”

As we know, the accusation was accepted, the slander continued to spread unimpeded, and nobody ever gave such a written guarantee.

In warning against injustice, Bishop Nicodemus, interpreting the thoughts of the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, wrote: “Such terms (providing a signed guarantee) were demanded both by Church and civil laws. The Nomocanon of John the Scholastic and also the Nomocanon in 16 titles devote special sections to this issue” (Vol.1, p.268 in the Russian edition).

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At our last Council of Bishops, several bishops were ready, without formal judgment, to condemn Bishop Valentine and deprive him of his Bishop's office for accepting a huge and flourishing parish in the city of Noginsk (taking it away from the M.P.), and they decreed to reject this huge parish without asking Bishop Valentine himself about the particulars of this case, but relying solely on an accusatory report by Bishop Barnaby.

As an act of supposed leniency it was decided to relieve Bishop Valentine of his office as if due to "illness," although the "sick man" himself did not mention a word about retiring and never requested it for such a reason.

In the meantime Bishop Valentine, not receiving any formal directions from the Synod and concerned with expanding and strengthening the parishes that had come to him from the MP, continued to manage the church life of his diocese and to accept new parishes.

Now it was no longer a question of him as a person, but a problem of what to do with a diocese of almost a hundred parishes? In all the parishes of Archbishop Lazarus and Bishop Valentine there are no personal accusations or special problems, but we, however, managed to retire both of them without any concern whatsoever for replacing them or for the many thousands of faithful who were being guided by them.

The personal affairs of our workers in Russia may complicate the general church situation there. If we continue picking on them who are now connected with thousands of faithful, we can easily bring the matter to a point where they will be faced with the inevitable question: should they and their much-suffering flock in Russia remain with us, or should they separate from the Church Abroad? If we continue to take such an uncanonical approach to the matter, we are running the risk of pushing them onto a path of administrative separation from us.

4) We have to keep in mind that besides the already existing difficulties in Russia, in case of any mistake on our part we may cause great problems also here abroad. Far too few of our bishops realize that among our faithful and clergy there are many dissatisfied critics of our hierarchy. Noticeable faults in our administration, having impacted the parishes in Russia, may also very easily transfer the illness here to our parishes abroad. For this to occur it would be enough for just one well-known rector to unite with the Russian Church, and many other malcontents would follow him.

5) For many decades we have commemorated in our litanies "the Orthodox Episcopate of the Persecuted Russian Church." However, at our last Council of Bishops, we deleted from the litanies and from the prayer for

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the salvation of Russia the word “persecuted,” thus formally attesting that we officially believe that the Russian Church is no longer persecuted.

And, in fact, our parishes in Russia are being squeezed in some places, but in general they have full freedom of action, especially if they do not ask for any old churches, which the M.P. then tries to take away. However, it is currently not very successful. Thus, the huge Theophany Cathedral in the city of Noginsk (with all its attendant buildings) was left to our diocese by court order. The M.P. has nevertheless filed an appeal.

In other words, we can say that if there is any desire on our part, we now have full opportunity of totally resurrecting the Russian Orthodox Church in our Homeland.

The very first paragraph of the “Statute on the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad” says that “ROCA is an indivisible part of the National Russian Church that temporarily governs itself on a conciliar basis until the abolishment of the godless rule in Russia, in accordance with decree No. 362 of the Holy Patriarch, the Holy Synod, and the Higher Church Council of the Russian Church, dated 7/20 November 1920.”

If we now force the Russian Hierarchs to cut administrative ties with the Church Abroad, will not our flock abroad then finally ask us – for which “bishops of the Russian Church” are we continuing to pray in our churches? If we delete these words from the litanies, we will just officially declare that we are no longer part of the Russian Church.

But will we not then end up on the dangerous and quite questionable canonical path of autonomous existence, but without the blessing of the late Patriarch and outside of the Russian Church of which we always considered ourselves to be part? Would such a step not bring us to a state of schism in the Church Abroad itself and even, God forbid, to the danger of becoming a sect?

Just as a physical illness often upsets an organism’s balance of health, so have disturbances such as Communism, Renovationism, and Sergianism, impacted upon the Russian people.

Therefore, we are now required to be extremely careful with our every interference in church matters in Russia. We must build and not destroy.

The church leadership should be guided by measures whose main objective is to correct administrative mistakes by various methods. The primary means in this case is to lovingly value the desire of many faithful to preserve the fullness of Truth in our troubled times. It is impossible to achieve spiritual recuperation in Russia by means of strictness, but it should be done, without breaking canonical laws, primarily with Christian love and lenience, which the Russian hierarchs, clergy, and many thousands of people

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undoubtedly deserve for their loyalty to the true Church. This method was used by all the Church Fathers and our great First Hierarchs.

6) Let us look, however, at how the bishops and priests from Russia have felt themselves in our environment up to now. Were they treated equally?

Unfortunately not! One may say that almost from the very first steps of their alliance with us we did not make any effort to let them feel that in all things they are equal to us, the bishops abroad.

In cases where there was interference in the affairs of their dioceses, they could not but feel a difference in the way our Center treated them and the native clergy. Thus, one of our bishops gave directions over the telephone to a priest in Russia not to obey an injunction placed upon him by Archbishop Lazarus! That same hierarch wrote an extremely nasty letter to Bishop Valentine concerning the tone of his summons to one of his priests for an inquiry into his parish affairs. In this letter our hierarch even said that if Bishop Valentine could not be as loving and as delicate as all the bishops of the Church Abroad, which was permeated by the love of Metropolitan Anthony, then he should leave. The question was: where to? Back to the M.P., or to the Old Calendar Greeks, or to the heretical OCA? Unfortunately, I personally did not see any signs of love in this letter. Since when has a diocesan bishop acquired the right to berate, and in an unacceptably nasty form, a diocesan bishop of the same rank as himself?

In a number of cases dealing with the internal affairs of the Russian bishops, the local priests there, regardless of the canons and bypassing their own hierarchs, applied directly to the First Hierarch or to other hierarchs outside of Russia and received directions from them on their issues. I have never heard of cases where our hierarchs reprimanded such clergymen or directed them to their own diocesan bishops.

I am also sure that none of our hierarchs abroad would ever think to interfere in the diocesan affairs of their co-bishops abroad or to reprimand them. However, in regard to the Russian hierarchs, we have for some reason decided that such censure was quite acceptable.

Such inattention towards the violation of the holy canons on the part of our hierarchs abroad, together with the use of strictness in regard to the Russian hierarchs, invariably creates in us the impression of the existence of a double standard among us.

7) We must familiarize ourselves quite attentively with the feelings expressed by the clergy of the Suzdal diocese, in order to appraise, in turn, the feelings with which our decisions here about the Church in Russia would be accepted by them.

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Will we not then see that it is one thing for the Church Abroad to offer assistance to the Russian Church in reestablishing its canonical hierarchy, and quite another thing for us to claim to govern the entire Russian territory from abroad, which was in no way envisaged by any of the articles of the “Statute on the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad,” nor was ever intended in any of our subsequent decrees?

In his time the Metropolitan Anastassy helped the Patriarch of Jerusalem to reestablish the canonical hierarchy in his Church by ordaining a number of new bishops together with him. But no one would ever conclude from such an action that the Church Abroad had received administrative rights in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Later our Synod provided the same kind of assistance to the Old Calendar Greeks, without claiming any administrative rights in their Church.

Having now begun the reestablishment of its hierarchy, with further successful development of this task the Free Russian Church becomes de facto the Supreme Church Administration of the Russian National Church. Unfortunately this may take some time, because, having wasted two years on personal matters, we have allowed the main goal to slip from view: to urgently continue the reestablishment of the canonical hierarchy in Russia. I have been constantly reminding of this at every possible moment. During this period there have undoubtedly appeared a number of qualified candidates for bishop.

8) With such wide perspectives before us, it would be most inexpedient at this time to exact any administrative penalties. In any case, they should be postponed until there is a complete re-evaluation of our entire “Statute on the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad”, which would be more correct to initially discuss in a small preliminary conference of senior and more experienced hierarchs, which should necessarily include Archbishop Laurus, Archbishop Mark, and Bishop Daniel, who have just studied the Church situation in Russia in situ.

As I mentioned above, if we do not treat with special attention and sensitivity this problem which is so absolutely new for us, we may place our flock, as well as all the hierarchs and clergy in Russia in a situation of great temptation, which will inevitably backfire upon us ourselves.

The independent existence of a Free Russian Church has become historically ripe. It has already become de facto inevitable. However, it is very important for this historic event to occur in the form of church construction and at the initiative of our First Hierarchy (Metropolitan Vitaly), who had earlier already made the first step in this direction by opening the first official parish of the Church Abroad in the city of Suzdal. On the

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contrary, the forced separation from us of the dioceses of the Free Russian Church will only lead to terrible upheavals, both in Russia and to some degree in our Church.

At the present moment our current First Hierarch has been granted an especially joyous historical role: he is to return to Russia that same torch of canonical and unblemished Faith which Metropolitan Anthony took out into exile, in order to return it in time to the resurrected Russian National Church.

In this case Church history will gratefully remember his name together with the names of his glorious predecessors, who had worked so hard to save our church and historical values, but whom the Lord did not grant the joy of seeing their duty fulfilled. They departed from us in the hope that their work for their native Russian Church would not be in vain.

We are now undergoing a historical moment when the labors and efforts of our spiritual leaders abroad are being summated, and when it has clearly become necessary to review the basic principles of our "Statute on the Russian Church Abroad".

Bishop Gregory
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