

From Sourozh Website:

English translation of the open letter of the Russian Patriarch to the Hierarchs, Clergy and Faithful of the Russian Orthodox Tradition in Western Europe:

THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

ALEXIS

1st April 2003

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**His Grace the Most Reverend Anthony,
Metropolitan of Sourozh**

**His Grace the Most Reverend Simon,
Archbishop of Brussels and Belgium**

**His Grace the Most Reverend Innokentii,
Archbishop of Korsun**

**His Grace the Right Reverend Gabriel,
Bishop of Komana,
Locum Tenens of the Archdiocese
of Russian Orthodox Parishes in Western Europe**

**His Grace the Right Reverend Amvrosii,
Bishop of Geneva and Western Europe
(Russian Orthodox Church Abroad)**

and all Orthodox parishes of Russian tradition in Western Europe

Most Reverend Bishops,
dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters!

During these forty days of Holy Lent we think constantly about the future of the heritage of the Russian Church which follows the traditions of Russian Orthodoxy in the countries of the West.

By the grace of God, through the intercession of the Queen of Heaven and the prayers of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, Church life in our country is being successfully reborn in all its fullness. Of course one must not yield to the temptation of a misplaced triumphalism: on the human side there are still very many shortcomings in the good ordering of our Holy Church. The Lord expects from us a greater depth of repentance, a greater readiness for sacrifice, a greater zeal in our work for the salvation and enlightenment of the millions of people, who though they have been baptised were not brought up in the Orthodox faith as children. However, the temptations and weaknesses to be observed in the Church community in our country are mainly due to "growing

pains". A spring-like awakening after a long and cruel winter of enforced god-lessness can be neither instantaneous nor painless.

The picture changes when we look at the Church life of our compatriots in the *diaspora*. The first question which inevitably arises is: how can one explain the continuing separation of the sundered parts of the Russian Church? Clearly it was brought into being by the historical tragedy of the Russian people, the breakdown of society as a result of the catastrophe that was the Revolution. Both Metropolitan Anthony [Khrapovitsky – Ed.] and Metropolitan Evlogii made it clear that their move away from full unity with the Mother Church in our country was motivated only by political rather than by any other reasons. These outstanding bishop-pastors, each in his own way, deeply loved the Russia they were never to see again, and each believed that Church unity would be restored as soon as the yoke of godlessness oppressing their country was broken. Their fellow bishops, who experienced the full ferocity of the persecution of the Church in the USSR of that time, believed this too. His Holiness Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, also believed this when, in 1931, he voiced his opinion that the temporary subordination of the Russian Exarchate in Western Europe to the throne of Constantinople would continue "until, God willing, unity and the unbroken image of the Holy sister Russian Church are restored." His Holiness Patriarch Athenagoras confirmed this when, in 1965, he gave his blessing to the Exarchate of Russian Parishes in Western Europe for their return to the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church.

We can hardly doubt that the time has come for a restoration of unity. We have already written on this matter in brotherly epistles, in September of last year to His Holiness Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, and in the preceding year to the members of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Church Abroad. We consider that the time has now come for us to address this epistle directly to our compatriots in the countries of Western Europe and to their spiritual pastors. Why is it that now, when the years of sore trials have passed, when the Mother Church can freely fulfil its calling and Russia aspires to restore continuity with its historical past, Church divisions still continue, though the reasons for them have long disappeared? Why do we not fulfil the hopes of our predecessors and spiritual fathers?

Apart from those reasons that have their roots in human sinfulness, there are other, more benign reasons for this. The grandchildren and great grandchildren of the 'first generation' émigrés feel that they have in every sense put down roots in the countries where they now live and where they play an active part in social and cultural life. While the heritage of their fathers is precious to them, many of these representatives of the Russian spiritual tradition who live in Western Europe wish to preserve the forms of Church life which have gradually developed over many years conditions quite unlike those in which the Church found itself in Russia, though these forms are rooted in the same canonical tradition, as set out in the regulations established by the Ecumenical and Local Councils and by the Fathers of the Church, traditions made manifest in the acts and decisions of the All-Russian Local Council (*Sobor*) of 1917-1918.

In addition to this, parishes founded by Russians and following Russian traditions have over the years acquired a multinational character and in liturgical practice make widespread use of local languages, which since the time of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Equal to the Apostles, has invariably been a characteristic of Orthodox pastoral and missionary work.

Therefore, so as to have a certain guarantee in the preservation of an established, familiar order, some of our compatriots living in Western countries - and some of the local Orthodox who form part of communities living according to the Russian tradition - wish to structure their Church life according to their own Statutes, which guarantee internal self-government and the election of their

own ruling bishop, on condition that the bishop so elected is then confirmed by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Such wishes have been expressed in particular by the Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of Sourozh and have found expression in their draft Statutes. They also represent a very significant element in the conclusions arrived at by the "Commission on the Future of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Parishes in Western Europe" established two years ago by the late Archbishop Serge of Evkarpia. Such an arrangement is also envisaged in the current Statutes of the Archdiocese.

Taking into consideration the combined weight of these wishes, I consider that they could be realised through the creation in Western Europe of a single Metropolia, consisting of several diocese and embracing all the Orthodox parishes, monasteries and communities of Russian origin and Russian spiritual tradition who would wish to be a part of such a Metropolia. In addition to this it is envisaged that such a Metropolia would be granted the right of self-government, including the election of its ruling bishop by a Council of the Metropolia consisting of bishops, presbyters and laity on the basis of Statutes to be worked out with the participation of all groups in the Orthodox Russian *diaspora* in the countries of Western Europe.

Until the first election of a Ruling Bishop (Metropolitan) takes place we consider it right to entrust the care of the newly constituted Metropolia to His Grace Anthony, Metropolitan of Sourozh, despite his previously expressed wish to retire. The immense pastoral experience and recognised spiritual authority of this universally respected Bishop will act as a guarantee of success for this new way of organising the life of the Russian Orthodox Church in Western Europe.

In the period preceding the election the Most Reverend Archbishop Simon of Brussels and Belgium, the Most Reverend Archbishop Innokentii of Korsun, the Right Reverend Bishop Gabriel of Komana, the Right Reverend Bishop Amvrosii of Geneva and Western Europe, as well as Archbishop Anatolii of Kerch, Bishop Basil of Sergievo and Bishop Michael of Klavdiopolis, whilst retaining their usual powers, are invited to become close collaborators and assistants to Metropolitan Anthony. At the next stage the Most Reverend Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain (Russian Church Abroad), the Most Reverend Archbishop Longin of Klinsk, the Most Reverend Archbishop Feofan of Berlin and Germany, and the Most Reverend Archbishop Paul of Vienna and Budapest should obviously also be invited to take part in the process, so that the restoration of Church unity in the Russian *diaspora* can be extended to the countries of Central Europe as well.

We hope that an autonomous Metropolia, uniting all the faithful of the Russian Orthodox tradition in the countries of Western Europe, will serve, at a time pleasing to God, as the foundation for the future canonical establishment of a multinational Local Orthodox Church of Western Europe, to be built in a spirit of conciliarity by all the Orthodox faithful living in those countries.

In a spirit of love I call upon you all, dear Bishops, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, to labour in the great work of healing the painful divisions of the Russian *diaspora*. May the God of love and peace bless your efforts.

(signed) + ALEXIS

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA