

Orthodox Christian
comment

CURIOSITIES

THREAT TO PATRIARCHATE OF MOSCOW ?

It has been published in the Web Site www.sourozh.org.

**EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
DIOCESE OF SOUROZH
1st FEBRUARY 2003**

The EGM was called to consider the implications of Metropolitan Anthony's wish to resign and his desire that the Holy Synod should appoint Bishop Basil of Sergievo as the ruling bishop of the Diocese of Sourozh.

Two motions were put forward and voted on. The first accepted in sorrow and understanding Metropolitan Anthony's wish to retire on grounds of failing health. It was passed with one abstention.

The second motion stated that 'the Diocesan Assembly supports Metropolitan Anthony's desire to see Bishop Basil appointed by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church as ruling bishop of the Diocese of Sourozh, and furthermore expresses its own wish to see him appointed to this position.' After numerous expressions of support for Bishop Basil and appreciation for the work he has done in his ten years as Assistant Bishop, the motion was passed by an overwhelming majority. This decision is naturally subject to confirmation by the Holy Synod. Archbishop Anatoly declined a proposal by one or two members that he should become ruling bishop. He accepted, however, Metropolitan Anthony's proposal that he should exercise special oversight of the pastoral care of the Russian-speaking community in the Diocese of Sourozh.

www.sourozh.org/news/EGM_en.htm

Announcement by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh – made after the Liturgy on Sunday 2nd February, 2003

We have had a meeting yesterday of our Diocesan Assembly, representatives of all the parishes and all the clergy in order to face a new turn in the life of our diocese. First of all, I announced that I am going to ask the Patriarch to set me free. I am coming in a year and a half to ninety years of age. I am now the oldest in age and the most ancient in consecration of all the bishops of the Russian Church. I have tried to work as best I could, not well, but as I could, for fifty-four years now. And I cannot continue. Age is breaking me down. But not only age. My health has been brutally shaken in the last months. And I have to undergo both operation and treatment. And I will not be able to continue to work as I worked so far. These reasons the Assembly has accepted with love, with warmth, with the love and warmth which, I believe, I do not deserve but which I accept with deep, deep gratitude.

The next step is the appointment of my successor. I have suggested, only suggested to the Assembly the name of Bishop Basil. He is my choice. He has been for me a help for me for a number of years. He has been faithful. He has been loyal. He has worked hard to fill the gaps which I left right and left because of age and health. The decision is not ours. It is for the Patriarchate to decide whether he will or not be the ruling bishop of this diocese. So we are offering him, I was about to say, as a victim, because to rule means is to carry a very heavy cross. We offer him as a victim to the Patriarchate which is to decide. Whatever the decision, we will take it as an act of God. The acts of God are very strange at times. I never thought that God could have an idea so weird, so unexpected, as to appoint me to this place. Bishop Basil will accept the nomination. But he will also need a great deal of support if someone else is appointed instead of him. Because he is prone to think that he is not worthy of the functions he fulfils, that he is not worthy of being of what he has been for us and with us all these years. And the appointment of another man he will probably take as evidence that he is not worthy. We must then give him all the support, all the courage, all the inspiration we can because he is worthy of them. He has been faithful, loyal and inspiring to many.

these changes, with the local autonomy that they implied, even if this meant separating themselves from Moscow.

It is against this background that one can understand what has taken place in Britain. It is important to notice that there are only two jurisdictions here: the Moscow Patriarchal jurisdiction and the Church in Exile. This is because Metropolitan Anthony was able to reconcile in his own person – and in the Diocese – two of the three tendencies. He remained loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate AND introduced into the Diocese the changes called for by the 1917-18 Council. This he was able to do because he was able to maintain the independence - or rather, the local autonomy - of the Diocese *vis-à-vis* the Patriarchate and encourage the Diocese to develop along the lines indicated by the Moscow Council of 1917-18. An indication of the merit of this path is the fact that only in Britain is the Patriarchal jurisdiction the largest of the local Russian *diaspora* jurisdictions. Everywhere else the Patriarchal jurisdiction is the smallest.

It seems absolutely clear to me that the only way forward is to follow the path shown us by Metropolitan Anthony, and to combine loyalty to the Patriarchate with internal autonomy. If we do not do this, the 'fault lines' that exist elsewhere in the Russian *diaspora* will appear here as well and the Diocese will split up. (*Editorial emphasis of OCC*) This does not have to take place. The past 40 years have shown that it is quite possible to maintain local autonomy within the Patriarchate. We have demonstrated this very clearly here in Britain. If we become truly aware of what we must do if we are to stay together, we can achieve this, in spite of the fact that even today, nearly twelve years after the fall of communism, it has not yet been possible to implement the decisions of the 1917-18 Council in Russia.

There is another very important reason, I believe, for following the course set out by Metropolitan Anthony. There is a very real desire on the part of the Patriarchal Church to see all elements of the Russian *diaspora* united under its *omofor*, particularly in Western Europe. We have to accept, however, that the two splinter groups will never willingly re-join the Patriarchal Church unless they can preserve the internal autonomy they now have, in other words, unless the local autonomy called for by the 1917-18 Council is implemented in the *diaspora*. Neither the Church in Exile nor the Paris jurisdiction is going to re-establish links with the Patriarchate of Moscow on any other basis.

We should therefore be taking a lead in this area, showing the other jurisdictions what can be done within the Moscow Patriarchate, how it is possible to live with the local autonomy that enables a *diaspora* community to react appropriately to the very real challenges it faces. By doing so we will be giving a lead to the other Orthodox Churches in the *diaspora*, since only by *their* achieving local autonomy will it be possible to bring them all together to form a truly all-embracing local Orthodox Church in Britain and in Western Europe.

AT LAST THE BISHOP OF SERGIEVO FEELS VERY HAPPY !!!

21 April 2003

Statement by Bishop Basil of Sergievo concerning the open letter
of Patriarch Alexis of Moscow and All Russia

Dear Clergy of the Diocese,

The importance of the Open Letter of the Patriarch, which you will all by now have seen, can hardly be overemphasised. His