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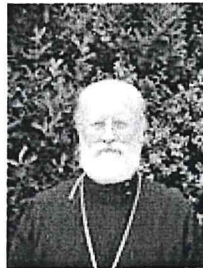
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Friday, 09 June 2006

Bishop Basil granted asylum by Bartholomew



In a provocative step that can only be regarded as a slap in the face to Moscow, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has granted asylum to Bishop Basil of Sergievo, until recently the head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Britain. Read my original blog on this complicated story with lots of useful links here. Below is the statement from this week's meeting of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Holy and Sacred Synod. This eirenic picture shows Patriarch Bartholomew, and below is Bishop Basil.



The Synod statement reads: "The Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate during its meeting on June 8 2006 under the presidency of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, examined the appeal of His Grace Basil, Bishop of Sergievo, to the Ecumenical Patriarch and, taking under consideration canons 9, 17 and 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council unanimously decided to accept under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate the above named Bishop, placing him in the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe.

"Thereafter the Holy and Sacred Synod proceeded, at the request of Archbishop Gabriel of Komana, head of the above mentioned Exarchate, to elect Bishop Basil with the title of Bishop of Amphipolis, as his auxiliary Bishop, to serve the pastoral needs of Orthodox living in Great Britain who desire to place themselves under the jurisdiction of the Exarchate."

A long time was taken at the meeting to ensure this was phrased in the most diplomatic way possible. But it still represents a resounding victory for Bishop Basil and is one that has caused some surprise even among supporters.

At present the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Number One patriarch in the Orthodox church, has a number of Greek Orthodox parishes in the UK under the Archdiocese of Thyateira. Thyateira also has one Russian-tradition parish, in Bath. (Update: see correction to this statement sent into comments below by Archimandrite Kyrill.) The Russian Orthodox diocese of Sourozh, growing fast because of immigration, has about 30 parishes across the country including the beautiful cathedral in Ennismore Gardens, owned by a trust which makes no reference to Moscow but does name Bishop Basil as a trustee. The Charity Commission is looking into the whole affair, but if no accommodation is reached by Moscow with Bartholomew and Basil, we can expect a protracted and costly court case over the vastly valuable property at stake here. Meanwhile, about 15 and possibly as many as two-thirds of the Russian parishes are expected to defect to Constantinople with Bishop Basil, where they will be known as Orthodox Parishes of the Russian Tradition in the Amphipolis diocese, the titular name given to the UK. Amphipolis is a city in northern Greece without its own bishop.

I managed to speak briefly to Bishop Basil this afternoon. At present, Bishop Basil cannot celebrate or preach in Ennismore Gardens since he was involuntarily "retired" by Moscow. He hopes matters will not proceed to a court case. "With a bit of good will I think we can make some kind of arrangement," he said. "It is early days. I do not know how many people there will be. There will be a core who are really quite excited by this idea, and then those who at some point later might wish to join." He will be visiting and preaching soon at parishes such as St Peter's, Clapham, a Church of England building where the Russians meet twice monthly.

Posted by Ruth Gledhill on Friday, 09 June 2006 at 05:05 PM in Current Affairs, Religion, Weblogs | Permalink

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Comments

How strange that Ruth Gledhill can write "the beautiful cathedral in Ennismore Gardens, owned by a trust which makes no reference to Moscow but does name Bishop Basil as a trustee."

A search on the website of the Charity Commissioners clearly contradicts this statement. Of the three registered charities related to Sourozh there is the "Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sourozh" (Reg.No. 277508) and "Trust Property in Connection with the Patriarchal Russian Orthodox Parish in London" (Reg.No. 254025, the third relates to a drug user rehabilitation project.

It is bizzare that the Basilites should claim that 'Russian' or 'Patriachal' are not mentioned. Even stranger that the Diocesan Secretary has sent a letter to Diocesan Assembly members saying that the long scheduled meeting this coming Saturday is invalid (a view which Archbishop Innokenty clearly does not share) and has called for a separate meeting in an hotel for July. Interestingly on the agenda there is an item for 'renaming' of the charitable trust - one guesses the words 'Russian' and 'Patriarchal' are targetted for omission!

Posted by: Seb Richards | Tuesday, 13 June 2006 at 10:16 AM

Thanks to the timing of his letter at least we all know now how Alex Koyama spend last Sunday while we all have been in the Church celebrating Pentecost...

It is bizarre how some people hijacked the memory of our Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Antony for their own political needs, quoting him out of context and even criticising his life work. What these people cannot do though - is to change his life work achievements, the fact that he remained dedicated to Russian Church and Moscow Patriarchate throughout his life to the end of his days.

As for the negative role of Constantinople in the matter of unity of Orthodox Churches, nobody may write more clearly than Metropolitan Antony himself in Tserkovny Vestnik, issue 23, 2002 "... it is necessary for the various national churches to recognise their unity and want their unity to be manifested by being members of the same organisation. So far this has been impossible. It has been impossible because Constantinople claims to be almost a papacy and that it must have authority over everyone else..."

I personally seriously doubt any true Russian Orthodox Christian will suddenly betray his Mother Church and convert to the "papacy of Constantinople" as our late Vladyko Antony used to call it. We will remain true to Vladyko Antony and always remember his life's work and in particular his loyalty to our Mother Church to the end of his days. His loyalty should be (and I am sure will be) example to us all.

Posted by: wolfson | Monday, 12 June 2006 at 01:27 PM

Attack on Vladyka Anthony and his style of work as the head of Russian Orthodox diocese of Sourozh continues. I was surprised to hear Basil of Amphipolis (formerly known as Bishop Basil of Sergievo) says "VERA I VEK", BBC Russian, THE ONLY REASON VLADYKA ANTHONY DID NOT DEFECT TO CONSTANTINOPLE is that he was tired and lost the energy to carry it out (!!!!), (full text of the interview is available on the net):

BBC: Now, don't you think, vладыko Vasilii, that by postponing this decision, you, both of you, I mean vладыka Antonii and yourself actually brought this disaster on the diocese?

BASIL: I am afraid I have to agree with you. The decision which has been taken now should have been taken much earlier. It should have been taken by Metropolitan Anthony, but in his last years he simply lost the energy to carry it out. He was ill, he was tired, and he let things just drag on, and we found ourselves then in a very weak position with his death .

Even more, we are hearing on BBC even DOUBTS ABOUT THE CHARACTER of a great man along the lines that HE USED SAY PUBLICLY ONE THING AND PRIVATELY ANOTHER !!!!

BBC: And when Vladyka Anthony understood there was a danger that this tradition and this life would be undermined, did he ever have thoughts of leaving the Moscow Patriarchate?

BASIL: Well, I can tell you personally, that he certainly thought of it and was very worried about what the future would hold for the diocese. He did think of leaving. It is hard to believe, because in his public statements, of course, he was always very positive about staying, but in his private statements he was really quite nervous.

I wonder what Vladyko Anthony would say to those who want to turn around his life work, saying that his life time loyalty to Moscow Patriarchate was due to his "tiredness" and that really lived double life saying in public writing things he really did not believe in. Was it really necessary to wheel out all these unsightly arguments to justify defection to Constantinople?

Posted by: Sourozh parishioner | Monday, 12 June 2006 at 12:57 PM



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Phonoi/Moscow

IT'S ENOUGH...

I'm of russian descent living since 12 years in Western-Europe and integrated in the orthodox church here. Those who have studied some theoloy and more special ecclesiology have understood and know well that the orthodox diaspora belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and only to it. It's enough! When shall the Moscow Patriarchate, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Serbians and Antiochians leave the orthodox diaspora. It's really time! We need more than ever an integrated orthodox church in Western Europe. Me too I had to learn german, english and french to be able to communicate in a proper way in this area of the world. We don't need priests and bishops who were dropped here and speak only romanian, russian, greek. We need people who are able to take care in their pastoral duties of the the orthodox faithful of their region.

Please, let us all ask metropolitan Kyril of Smolensk to make only trouble in his homecountry!! He has nothing to do with Western Europe.

I know I'm hard. But we must, in order to find a solution.

We must all help bishop Basil and the Ecumenical Patriarchate to go in this way...

Evgenij Syrov,
Mannheim

Posted by: Evgenij Syrov | Monday, 12 June 2006 at 11:56 AM

"Slap in the face indeed". But why it has been described as the "slap in the face to Moscow"? Moscow Patriarchy, being the centre of the Orthodox Christian World, enjoys unprecedented growth in Parishioners worldwide.

Yet in London and UK, Russian Tradition Christians both or Russian and non-Russian descent while outnumbering other parishioners 50 to 1, will loose most of their parishes: "possibly as many as two-thirds of the Russian parishes are expected to defect to Constantinople" as Ruth wrote in her article.

So I would agree, the whole Basil's saga is disgraceful, but it is slap in the face to LONDON, not Moscow.

Posted by: L. D. Ignatieff | Monday, 12 June 2006 at 07:00 AM

It is indeed a wonderful sign of the Holy Spirit, whose day this is, that the Ecumenical Patriarch has blessed Bishop Basil's wise decision to leave behind the new imperialists of Moscow. Orthodoxy in Western Europe is not about bolstering the old regimes who live in the old pre-modernist world; it is about inculturation into the new post-modernist world, a world of beauty and fragility where we all live and share responsibility together for God's creation. A true Orthodoxy for the twenty-first century will look outwards, not inwards. It will look to the presence of the Holy Spirit in all things. It will engage with other faiths with discernment. It will inspire a spiritually starved world with the joy of the Risen Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It will engage with the tremendous spiritual energy which exists beneath the surface of the modern world, which cries out to be heard, which groans with travail like the whole of Creation. Orthodoxy is not about preserving hierarchies, old calendars and rituals, about preserving - or rather returning to - a pre-Modernist outlook. It is not about putting our heads in the sand and saying we know everything already. Orthodoxy is the radical message of Christ interpreted through the Holy Spirit blowing wheresoever she wills. In other words, Orthodoxy is a dynamic faith moving forward into the new millenium, into new encounters, new meetings, new directions.

This is the hope that I feel from the Ecumenical Patriarch's decision to bless Bishop Basil's brave, wise and necessary decision.

Posted by: Andrew Morris | Monday, 12 June 2006 at 12:33 AM

I'm glad to hear that Bishop Basil's appeal has accepted. I don't imagine that this signals the end of conflict and squabbling, but it does offer an exit route for those within the current Diocese of Sourozh unhappy about the direction and management style of the Moscow Patriarchate. I suggest they be allowed to leave as swiftly as possible. Let them take the property with them. Is Moscow really not able to make up the shortfall? If this break is achieved with the minimum of animosity or recrimination, it's all the easier for cordial relations and possible rapprochement to occur within the future.

Defender of Third Rome: I think you make some valid points amidst your comments, yet I feel some some corrections should be offered.

No Orthodox church has been built in Clapham. Rather, an Orthodox community has been founded that celebrates in an Anglican church. It's the only other Orthodox community under Sourozh in London to my knowledge and therefore your extrapolation from this sole example that Sourozh "only builds churches in the nice areas of London" is somewhat faulted. I very much wish that similar communities are established elsewhere in London. I imagine Greek, Syrian and other Orthodox churches to be more than welcoming if the trip to Knightsbridge or Clapham proves inconvenient on a given day.

As to your use of such terms as "totalitarian", "authoritarian" and against "free speech". Well, I've no idea whether the now Bishop of Amphipolis has behaved in such a manner or not, but I must say that my historical confidence in Russian institutions to practise the opposite is rather low. If the behaviour of Moscow during this period has been to indicate its openness and transparency (never mind its Christian spirit), it has been a significant PR failure.

*Orthodox world-view
liberal extreme*

And remember:

"A rabbi whose congregation is not trying to get rid of him is not a rabbi. A rabbi who lets them is not a man.

Geyt gezunterheyt!

Posted by: Alex Koyama | Sunday, 11 June 2006 at 12:27 PM

All this talk of jurisdictions and canonical release is so much nonsense really, where a bishop is there let the people be. We are not a hierarchical Church but it seems few priests are willing to stick their necks out to continue teaching this. I am horribly disappointed that in this day of mass communications all we present is a worldly scrabble for power that intrinsically denies Christ's ecclesiology. The "Orthodox" church is a getting to be a bad joke, pretending that nothing has changed in it, that it is the true continuation of the Apostolic church when nothing could be further from the truth. It has changed, and for the worst. The Council of Moscow, under the last true Patriarch of Moscow, was also the last genuine Russian Orthodox council. The Church is not hierarchical, a synod of bishops is not the highest authority in the Church, the EP is not the principle of unity proving canonicity, the MP is not the Great Lord and Father of the Russian Orthodox, which is the current teaching from those bishops who would control the Church's destiny.

All in all the article below is a good read, but especially note the one problem that is at the heart of this dispute, and which both the Stalin organised MP and the EP have no interest in promoting intent as they are in furthering their own authority over the churches.

"In the UK the distinct and dynamic witness of Orthodoxy was not a matter of numbers, but a matter of spiritual integrity, integrity manifested both in the voice of Orthodoxy to the society at large and in the internal life of the diocese led by Metropolitan Anthony. There was a period during which his views and words were sought out in the same way as the views and words of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Church of England) and the Archbishop of Westminster (Roman Catholic), although Metropolitan Anthony's flock, by comparison, was numerically a tiny one. In ordering the life of his diocese, Metropolitan Anthony was guided by the Church of Russia's Moscow Council of 1917-1918. In accordance with the vision and norms of this Council, clergy and laity were seen as collaborators of the bishop, and not as the bishop's "subjects."

UK diocesan crisis tests Church's mission to all, by Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky

<http://www.oca.org/News.asp?ID=1013&SID=19>

Posted by: Myrrh | Sunday, 11 June 2006 at 12:16 PM

I am a third generation Russian, my family has always had a very close link with the Russian Church. My great uncle Nicolas Zernoff was a theologian of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The current conflict within the Russian Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom has little to do with jurisdictions: the main problem is Bishop Basil's very poor leadership. Since Bishop Basil has been in charge of our parish there has been one conflict after another.

It is extremely odd that both in religious and cultural matters an American Bishop and a British Professor Simon Franklin of Cambridge University are representing the interests of the Russian community in the United Kingdom. In both areas their leadership, has in my view, been, controversial and they have taken actions many members of the Russian community consider to be mistaken. For instance more than 500 people signed a petition against the sale of Pushkin House and they still went ahead with it. No attempt was made to see whether a fund raising campaign or a application to the Heritage fund would be successful. New directors were appointed to the board of Forum Houses the Charitable company which owned Pushkin House only on condition that they supported the sale. I would recommend that you do some research into why Bishop Basil and Professor Franklin decided to proceed with the sale of Pushkin House on the 50th anniversary of the club which my grandmother founded.

I feel that their actions have been high handed to say the least.

I feel that Russians are capable of, and should be representing themselves in cultural and religious matters.

It is extraordinary that Bishop Basil has chosen a moment when parishioners of the Russian Orthodox Church should be celebrating the reunification of the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile with the Moscow Patriarchate to announce his decision to move to another jurisdiction.

It is my submission that should there be a referendum or a petition, there would be massive support for Bishop Basil's and Professor Franklin's resignation.

Yours sincerely,

Nicolas Kullmann

Posted by: Nicolas Kullmann | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 09:41 PM

Membership of this diocese is a way to be an English Orthodox without sacrificing liberty of conscience or behaviour. We hope it won't be a chic little club but open to all as the most beautiful and ancient of all liturgies conveying the fullness of the faith . I don't believe most people would think the disciplines we try to keep are contemptible or the services so very short, though not of Athonite severity.

Posted by: vaila Cochrane | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 07:00 PM

It is regrettable that the Patriarch of Constantinople has taken this action of legitimizing the claims of Bishop Basil. The Patriarch does not know the history behind this disagreement which has been going on for many years. Bishop Basil and his supporters have always wanted their own 'British Church', free from things Russian and 'foreign'. Unfortunately this group has always had the support of the Russians who came here escaping the Russian Revolution and who have always looked down on their 'uneducated and peasant' compatriots who have come here during the past ten years. Bishop Basil is supposed to represent the unity of the Church, instead he had become a symbol of disunity, and he has put his personal ambitions above that of the unity of Christ's church. The Russian Orthodox faithful who have come to the country now are faced with a dilemma: should they continue their allegiance to the Patriarch of Moscow and find themselves eventually without a church to worship in, or should they follow a bishop who has severed his links with their own patriarch and country? This is a great tragedy for Orthodoxy.

shobbery claims

Posted by: has caused nicholas gavrillov | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 05:47 PM

It is a great shame that this split, instigated by a minority who follow a liberal protestant orthodox tradition, has happened. We now have three forms of Russian Orthodoxy Two which practice the traditions of Third Rome and one which is now part of a church lead by an 'Eastern Pope'

The false one
Lead by a totalitarian renegade bishop who used to be a Bishop in the Moscow Patriarchate. This so called 'parish' displays the following characteristics:
It is dominated by ex Protestants who still wish to carry on their old traditions
It is controlling and authoritarian
It is de-facto
It bans free speech
It attacks 'Holy men' with rude comments and has no respect
It has no understanding of the 'Saints of Russia'
It is anti new émigrés
It is unchristian towards new émigrés
It is like a sweet shop – believing that you can pick and mix orthodox traditions
It believes that Orthodoxy is like DIY – you can do it yourself
It is a 'middle class social club'
It only builds churches in the nice areas of London: where there are rich Guardian reading supporters e.g. Clapham
It is old – the average age of supporters must be in the mid 50's and it is not welcoming to the young
It is a cultural 'Ghetto' full of English and Old Russians
It is not welcoming to those who are not of the same nationality or class
It has a Bishop who only looks after a fraction of its flock
It is best friends with the protestant churches

of antique of outflow Moscow

One has to ask will this Church soon have women and gay priests? Will there be funny handshakes in church? Will this church soon become part of the Church of England? (when Bishop Basil gets bored of Constantinople)

Just remember
'Bishop Basil can get rid of the head of the body but cannot get rid of the body you are the body.'
Do not give in to these so called 'Christians' who do not care for any but their own kin.

Posted by: A Defender of Third Rome | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 05:06 PM

Two corrections:

(1) The Archdiocese of Thyateira has at least six parishes of Russian tradition. As well as Bath there are parishes in Bristol (where the Russian tradition has been transmitted through the Polish Orthodox Church), Sheffield, and three Belarusian parishes in London, Wolverhampton and Stoke-on-Trent.

(2) The Ecumenical Patriarchate also has a number of Ukrainian parishes in Britain, with their own Bishop (based in London)and about seven priests.

Posted by: Archimandrite Kyril | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 03:51 PM

The Ecumenical Patriarchate's move opens an avenue of virtue. There will now be more freedom and greater mutual respect among the orthodox in the EU.

The late Bishop Anthony's vision will be fulfilled: European Orthodox now have the blessing to

live and grow on their own, as they deserve, in respectful connection with all orthodox diasporas (not to mention other christians, other faithful, other non-faithful; the world!).

Bishop Basil showed courage and wisdom; Faith, in short. Many are grateful, and there will be more to come.

Posted by: smk | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 03:43 PM

God is great and He is looking after this flock of Orthodox worshippers in Great Britain and Ireland.

Now it is time for the Moscow Patriarchate to act graciously, fairly and truthfully under the Will of God.

Posted by: An Orthodox Christian | Saturday, 10 June 2006 at 10:49 AM

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