

Helena Fisher, From a former London Parishioner, now living in the United States:

In 1991, when I first visited England and met with Metropolitan Anthony for an interview, I asked him directly what would it take for him and the diocese to end the relations with the Moscow Patriarchate and he replied: 'When they try to push us to abandon our way of being the Church.'

It isn't that Bishop Basil rejected or betrayed the Mother Church. It's that the Mother Church rejected and betrayed HIM (and, of course, us). It's that way round. This is what needs, very simply, to be understood.

Helena Fisher

Karin Greenhead, Letter from a provincial parishioner

I am writing to express my concern about the events which are taking place in the

Diocese and to express my support for Bishop Basil in these extremely difficult times. I am not a member of the London parish and I have not been involved with any of the events which have unfolded there over the recent past. I am writing from the point of view of a member of a provincial parish, an assembly member and an occasional visitor to the Cathedral.

When I received Bishop Basil's letter and a copy of his letter to the Patriarch my first instinct was one of relief. That instinct is the result of feelings which have grown over the recent past to a point where, as a convert to Orthodoxy I have seriously wondered if my decision to convert was correct as I began to experience things which made me increasingly feel as though I did not belong in the Church which I have chosen.

My experiences have included attending a Liturgy in the Cathedral at which the first half hour was entirely in Slavonic (how much more was Slavonic I don't know as I left); attending a meeting in a room where the walls were pasted with many posters and notices which I did not understand; a service where words to communally sung prayers were handed out to Russians with no similar papers for the English; a Liturgy which was entirely in English having Slavonic parts added to it when nobody in the parish was Russian; a conference in the Diocese held entirely in Russian; a report on the work of the Diocese which appeared to consist wholly of events and meetings with dignitaries from Russia and previous Russian states and almost nothing about establishing links within the UK; learning that a priest is likely to include Slavonic prayers in a Liturgy on the basis of there being one or two Russians in the congregation when there are a dozen English who will not understand; the realisation that after over 40 years of Surozh in the UK our Cathedral still does not have one service in English, amongst various other events.

My feelings crystallised a few months ago when I tried to understand how I felt and I came to the conclusion that when I first met the Russian Orthodox Church in the UK I assumed that it was in a period of transition towards establishing links within the UK, increasing the use of English, making itself known to its neighbours amongst the British people and embedding Orthodoxy into British cultural life. It began to dawn on me that I had been mistaken in all those things. In fact the opposite appears to be happening within the Diocese.

I have four fears:

First, that on the present course the Russian Orthodox Church in the UK will become an ethnic enclave which serves the Russian émigré population but which has few points of contact for non-

Russians and little in common with the population as a whole. This kind of Church will have little to contribute to the religious life of the UK; increasingly inward looking and self concerned, only looking out to look to the East, to Russia, to strengthen links to other Russian tradition Orthodox Churches. The Cathedral is already becoming less welcoming to the British people who are its neighbours; it is not welcoming to come into a church and be unable to understand the notices or the prayers. As more Russians move to the provinces this may begin to be the case in provincial parishes. Sourouz would find itself in a similar situation to that of the Serbian Orthodox or the Polish Catholic Church.

Second, that converts like myself will feel increasingly alienated and the feeling of 'not belonging' which I hear expressed in the provinces will increase. I first heard this expressed during a Diocesan conference when there was so much Slavonic in the services that at least one person was driven out and I found her sobbing in the garden. I hope she will not mind me quoting her "I have been in this Church for twenty years and for the first time I feel as though I don't belong"

Third that there will be small opportunity to develop anything in the UK which can itself contribute to Orthodoxy. The English Orthodox Russian tradition singing I have heard in English country churches seems to me to be the first flowering of a wonderful English based Orthodox style which is likely to be nipped in the bud in the current climate.

Fourth, that the current cultural and ethnic separation between the Cathedral and the provinces will widen. There is, in this respect, already a profound division in the Diocese. This has been noted at the conference where people like myself find ourselves frequently hearing the problems of London and Oxford rehearsed when our own parish life and problems seldom get a hearing and bear little resemblance to that in these two cities. Bishop Basil's call a couple of years ago at a conference for more priests and deacons from the Cathedral to visit provincial parishes does not appear to have borne any obvious fruit. I have also heard Russian Orthodox people from provincial parishes say when I ask them why they don't visit their Cathedral when they visit London "why should I, it has nothing to do with me".

It seems to me that Bishop Basil has been trying hard to solve some of these problems but against great opposition and with very little time. His determination not to base himself in London, his assiduous attention to the problems of those of us in the provincial parishes, his support and unceasing patience listening to our concerns, his development of the Deanery system; his many visits to us to celebrate on our feasts and to chair our meetings even though this meant long hours of travel; his willingness to get personally involved with us in trying to solve our small parish problems when he has had far bigger issues amongst the London parishioners, are witness to this. Added to this his concern that we should not worry about what is happening in London and his determination that we should not have to be burdened with hearing of London's problems make him, to me and I am sure to many others, an excellent pastor.

It is for these reasons and because of the feelings and thoughts expressed above that I found myself relieved that Bishop Basil had taken the step he had taken, even though it might mean division and hardship. I long to see a real future for Orthodoxy in the UK, but I believe that this is likely to only be achieved when the Church is prepared to sacrifice some of its ethnic Russian character and rules and allow itself to embed in our British life, culture and language. I believe that the plan Bishop Basil has put forward gives Orthodoxy the best chance of actually growing and developing creatively in the UK and I look forward to worshiping in an Orthodox Church which explores a way to combine the best of Russian Orthodoxy with the ancient Christian tradition which already exists here, to create a new vision which looks forward and not back, which looks to Britain as well as to Russia.

Concerning the current situation: I am puzzled, particularly in the statement of Archbishop Innokenti concerning the unity of the Mother Church.

The eternal universal and undivided church IS united by and in Christ. It seems to me that people confuse the Church with jurisdictions on earth.

The Church has 4 jurisdictions and they are all in communion with one another: all are brothers.

In 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul teaches us that Christ loves diversity. The Body is made up of diverse members: eye, ear, foot, hand - some of which we may consider inferior to others: these members we take particular care of. Each member of the body is essential to its wholeness "without the ear, where would be the hearing?" The body is sustained and holds together not through rules or compulsion but by the bond of love freely given.

In the course of life in this fallen world people have often fallen out between themselves. Usually this is due to one of the following:

- 1) they do not understand one another for reasons of differences in language and culture
- 2) they do not understand one another or have a sufficient overview of the situation owing to lack of information, lack of education or the darkness of their minds owing to sin
- 3) they are not pure, having an agenda consisting of wanting something from the other - usually property or money or wanting to use them or have power over them.

We are all shaped by our background, language and culture. These colour our perception, understanding and attitude far more than we usually realise. Unless we have acquired the mind of Christ we may not have overcome our prejudices and we may not even be aware of this.

It may happen that the needs of one community of people may be better met by one jurisdiction than another. Moving to another jurisdiction does not mean leaving the Mother Church or causing a split since the Church is one. It just means moving under the supervision of a different limb of the body.

I have had the privilege of working all over the world and speaking 4 languages. Working with the local people, staying in their houses and talking with them has given me a deeper insight into what God means by being human as I witness that human nature articulated in so many diverse ways, throwing light on different aspects of what it means to be human.

The differences between us are not a matter of who is right or best. Our differences should be causes of celebration. We should respect the distinctiveness of each culture and person. The only time it may be appropriate to advise change would be if for example the culture embraces something clearly alien to the Gospel and this "correction" offered to our brother should be done with caution and care as we remember that we are answerable to Christ for all our actions and attitudes at the judgement. This need for self examination also applies to authorities. Historically there is much precedent for this. I offer 3 examples

- 1) the Case of Caiaphas the High Priest and also Christ's warning that a time will come that people will kill you thinking they are doing a service to God
- 2) The case of St Mark of Ephesus - at one time the only "Orthodox" person in the Church

3) St Maximus the Confessor, tortured by the Church for teaching that Christ had both a human and a divine will. He died of his wounds. Ten years after his death the Church accepted his teaching and he was recognised as a Saint. I have often wondered what those who tortured him thought about it later. Lets hope they repented.

It seems to me that with the best will in the world it would be extremely difficult for the Moscow Patriarchate to understand the West and the diverse cultures included in the term "Western" because of lack of sustained contact and a totally different background and experience. Here in England we have often had priests from other jurisdictions celebrating in our churches: Greek, Serbian, Antiochean - at Pan-Orthodox vespers we all celebrate together. Where there is a shortage of priests we could accept help from other jurisdictions. These Quarrels between jurisdictions should not happen and are a disgrace to the Church. It seems to me that the Patriarchate should proceed with caution in this situation. It is so easy for large and powerful organisations to assume that right is on their side and to forget to listen with love and understanding.

the gospels tell us to correct

Karin Greenhead

(Member of the Diocesan Council, Diocese of Sourouz)

From Alexandra Milton, parishioner of the diocese:

I write as an Orthodox immigrant to Britain. My parents converted to Orthodoxy before I was born and I was brought up in an Orthodox parish in Paris. The founders of this church were Russian émigrés, yet they decided to translate and celebrate all the services in French, even though some of them did not speak a word of the language.

They believed that they had managed to retain the one thing that was most precious from their home country - their Orthodox faith - and that they should plant it in their new homeland in order that it could flourish there.

I found that the same spirit prevailed when I arrived in London 20 years ago and first went to the cathedral. In many ways, I felt as if I had gone from home to home. But I struggled with the fact that half the services were in Church Slavonic, even though English was clearly the common language for all the parishioners at the time.

Metropolitan Anthony took the time to listen to my difficulties and, thanks to his unique manner, I understood the value of transcending language, while at the same time remaining close to the spiritual roots of Russian Orthodoxy. He foresaw the day when England would face a new influx of Russian immigrants and wished them to be able to worship in an environment that was familiar to them.

But when these immigrants did indeed arrive, I saw that there was a flip side to this. He expected them to accept that they were worshipping in very different circumstances to those from which they had come.

Years later, my husband converted to Orthodoxy and, in time, served two terms on the parish council. Together with other parents (Russian, Serb, French) we started a Sunday school for the

children in the cathedral. Newly arrived Russians were initially surprised that the stories were not in Russian, but they very quickly became reconciled to the fact that the contents of the catechism - Truth - should be taught in the only common language shared by all.

In time, my husband and I had the privilege to be involved in the establishment of the Orthodox Eucharistic Community in Clapham and other people took over the Sunday school in the cathedral. I was saddened to hear recently that this is now conducted almost exclusively in Russian. What sort of message is this giving to non-Russian speaking children? Being a foreigner, I can relate completely to the need for parishioners to meet with like-minded people from the same country, as well as with their desire to worship in a church that closely resembles those at home.

In London there are Greek, Serbian and Romanian churches, but there has never been a specifically 'Russian' church in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate. It is most unfortunate - indeed it is tragic - that the group of individuals who have in recent years decided to express their feelings so vociferously did not use their enormous energy in a positive way and create just such a church.

I believe strongly that the cathedral, the mother church of the diocese, should be one place where all Orthodox believers can worship together in peace, irrespective of ethnicity, culture, nationality and sentiment. It is most unfortunate that the Department for External Church Relations has singularly failed to recognise this - indeed they have proved utterly indifferent to the spirit of English pan-Orthodoxy within the Russian tradition. They have failed to support Bishop Basil in his endeavours to encourage this.

They should now direct all their efforts, energy and financial resources into establishing a Russian Orthodox Church in England, and allow everyone else to build upon the enlightened vision of Metropolitan Anthony of blessed memory.

Alexandra Milton.

John Carras: To whom it may concern,

I was baptized by Bishop Anthony and in all the years since then while living in London and then in Oxford have continued to be a worshipping member of the Parish. Indeed the experience of living as part of such a wonderful parish has changed my life in more ways than one as I have since - and as a direct result of my experience in the Parish - learnt Russian and become an historian specializing in 18th century Russia. For the last few years I have been living in Russia, invited by the Russian Academy of Sciences, and so have witnessed events in the country first hand.

It is therefore with tremendous sorrow that I have read of recent events in the Diocese of Sourozh. Not only is this Diocese the most profound experience of Orthodox worship that I have experienced, it also represented a beacon of hope for the many, many Russians I know who are searching for depth and real worship in their Church and do not desire a Church that is just an extension of Russian state power or the propagator of an aggrandizing national myth. So many young people in Moscow that I know have cut off all relations with their Church disgusted at Church abuses of power there that it is hard not to cry. Others such as a group of students at the Lomonossov Moscow State University I spoke to recently have held on to the example of Bishop Basil as an exception but also as a beacon of hope. As one girl at the University put it to me: "if only the Church here [in Russia] could be more like that". The lack of spirituality and the worship of power in the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia has reached such a point of crisis that in a number of Russian regions, for

example Iaroslav, there are now more Roman Catholic churchgoers than Orthodox.

I write all this with great sadness, for I am an Orthodox believer and I love Russia. The issues involved in the Diocese of Sourozh at the moment are not about Bishop Basil himself, though he is an outstanding person and one of the very few truly deep Christian Bishops today. The issue is whether the Orthodox Church will turn itself into a club for a few immigrants in England, an extension of state power in Russia, a place where there is no love and no freedom and therefore no truth, or whether it can indeed spread its message of joy, love and redemption throughout the world, for every human being. In the end it is a question of whether the Orthodox Church can, will and indeed deserves to survive, both inside Russia and outside it. Having lived this situation first hand, having seen the despair of young Orthodox in Russia, it seems clear to me that the path of power being followed by the hierarchy of the Church inside Russia will lead to the end of Orthodoxy in that country, or perhaps its transformation into a quaint but meaningless museum piece.

In one of the many writings of Bishop Anthony's that I have read he states (and I am quoting from the book *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World*):

"There is a hierarchy in the Church, but it is a hierarchy of service, not of power. [...] A hierarchy of submission, obedience and subjection on all levels is a heresy against the Church". The hierarchy of the Orthodox Church today would do well to take note if Orthodoxy is to survive not only in Britain, but in Russia also.

Yours faithfully,
John Carras

Protodeacon Peter Scorer is curious to have some questions answered:

- 1 Who was responsible for the invitations to the cathedral last Sunday and why did not *all* the clergy not receive an invitation to go? Why was I not invited?
- 2 Under which article of ROC MP statutes or of the Sourozh statutes did Patriarch Alexis 'retire' Bishop Basil? I have tried to find the appropriate article which allows him to do so. Can you please help?
- 3 By what authority does Archbishop Innokentii now require the clergy of this diocese to commemorate him as bishop of Korsun AND Sourozh? Surely such a decision can only come from the Holy Synod. Even bishop Basil did not have the title of Sourozh. The only hierarch to have this title was Metropolitan Anthony.

Please help me in my confusion.

Voici mes réponses :

1. Why did all the clergy not receive an invitation to go to the cathedral last Sunday?
C'est effectivement une bonne question. Face au PM et à son rouleau compresseur et sa propagande, il faut être très uni et très discipliné. Il faut aussi et surtout agir, par des déclarations officielles, des interviews, des opinions. Ensuite il faut les publier sur Internet et dans un petit dossier sur papier

pour l'envoyer par la poste et le distribuer au plus de paroissiens possibles, à Londres et ailleurs, pour informer les gens. C'est un gros travail. Nous avons fait cela après la mort de Mgr Serge et la lettre du p. Alexis II, quand tout le groupe pour Moscou voulait empêcher l'élection de Mgr Gabriel. cela a payé... Mais il faut le faire, sans attendre que le voisin le fasse...

2. Under which article of ROC MP statutes or of the Sourozh statutes did Patriarch Alexis 'retire' bishop Basil? I have tried to find the appropriate article which allows him to do so. Can you please help?

J'ai déjà écrit que ces actes du patriarche Alexis sont en contradiction avec les statuts actuels de l'Eglise russe de 2000 : "IV. n) le patriarche signe les décret de nomination des évêques diocésains désignés par le saint-synode. [...] V. 26. Le saint-synode élit, nomme et dans les cas exceptionnel transfère les évêques et les met à la retraite. [...] XIV. 6. Les responsables des institutions à l'étranger sont nommés par le saint-synode sur proposition du département des relations extérieures du patriarcat". Ici, le saint-synode ne s'est pas réuni, c'est une chose établie.

Ces actes sont en contradiction avec les [statuts du diocèse de Souroge](#) (jamais approuvés par le patriarcat, au demeurant, mais tacitement appliqués avec son accord, on nous l'a suffisamment répété) (Section 4 Vacancy a. In accordance with the Tradition of the Church the Bishop assumes his office for life and a vacancy will therefore normally occur only at his death. b. A vacancy may occur, however, if the Bishop: i. resigns, in which case the resignation must first be accepted by the Assembly and then the Holy Synod in order to be valid; iii. is retired by the Holy Synod without having offered his retirement, on the grounds of medically certified incapacity, which must have been accepted by the Assembly under the Presidency of the most senior substitute of the Bishop for this task as set down in Article IV Section 3b; iv. is transferred by the Holy Synod, who shall do so only after prior consultation with the Assembly; v. is deposed by an ecclesiastical court in accordance with the accepted canonical norms for judicial procedure). La nomination de Mgr Innocent par décret est aussi en contradiction avec ces statuts qui prévoient une élection.

3. By what authority does archbishop Innokentii now require the clergy of this diocese to commemorate him as bishop of Korsun AND Sourozh? Surely such a decision can only come from the Holy Synod. Even bishop Basil did not have the title of Sourozh. The only hierarch to have this title was Metropolitan Anthony.

Tout à fait exact. Mgr Innocent se fait appeler maintenant archevêque de Chersonèse et Souroge, sans qu'aucune décision du saint-synode n'est été promulguée à ce sujet. Une fois de plus le patriarcat de M. montre qu'il n'applique pas ses propres règlements et il veut que l'on lui fasse confiance et qu'on lui obéisse! On retrouve la mentalité soviétique, l'absence de droit et de respect de la loi. A la place de la sobornost', on nous demande l'obéissance.
