

HOME	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	MEDIA COVERAGE	COMMENTS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION
ГЛАВНАЯ	ИСТОРИЯ ВОПРОСА	ДОКУМЕНТЫ	СМИ	КОММЕНТАРИИ

06/06

Translation from the French of an account in SOP of the Sourozh Conference (<http://www.orthodoxpress.com>)

LONDON: Annual Conference of the Diocese of Sourozh

DIOCESAN CONFERENCE

The Diocesan Conference organised each year by the diocese of Sourozh, the name given to the diocese of the Patriarchate of Moscow in Great Britain, took place from 26 to 29 May 2006, at Rye St Anthony School in Oxford, on the theme, 'The Human Person: Fallen and Reborn'. The Conference took place under the presidency of Archbishop Innokenty, who, since 14th May 2006, has become responsible for the administration of both the diocese of Sourozh and that of Korsun, the name given to the diocese of the Patriarchate of Moscow in France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The members of the Commission of Enquiry were present too, having also been designated on 14th May by Alexis II, Patriarch of Moscow, to shed light on the crisis which has been shaking the diocese of Sourozh for several months, and which led Bishop Basil (Osborn), who until 14th May was the temporary administrator of the diocese, to announce his intention to leave the Patriarchate of Moscow (SOP 309.4). The Commission is composed of Archbishop Innokenty himself, Archbishop Mark (Arndt), who leads the diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in Germany and Great Britain, and which remains for the moment out of canonical communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow, and priests Nicholas Balachov and Michael Dudko, both members of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Relations.

The Commission of Enquiry began its investigations during the three days of the Conference. According to a dispatch from the Russian Press Agency Interfax-Religiia, which is very close to the Patriarchate, 'All the participants had the opportunity to express their views to the members of the Commission regarding the causes of the crisis' which is presently shaking the diocese of Sourozh. According to the same source, several speakers expressed 'their immense joy' to see the Commission at work, which would be a 'sign of the unity of the Church'. In the closing allocution of the Conference, Archbishop Innokenty said that Bishop Basil found himself 'in a very difficult position' and called the participants at the Conference to redouble their prayers for him.

According to another source cited by Interfax-Religiia, the Commission might have gathered testimony accusing Bishop Basil of 'transgression of the statutes of the London parish and lack of financial transparency'

Bishop Basil, for his part, did not participate in the Conference, contrary to his initial intention. He explained his decision in a communique, indicating that he could not support the presence of the Commission of Enquiry, which, he explained, was both judge and litigant, since, in his opinion, the crisis in the diocese of Sourozh was due essentially to the support given by the Patriarchate's Department of External Relations to a small group of parishioners of the London Cathedral, who systematically opposed the authority of the diocesan bishop and the ways of functioning proper to the diocese. According to the communique, Bishop Basil did accept to meet with Archbishop Innokenty privately in London the day after the Conference, a face to face meeting at which he explained his motivations. Several of those who had previously long since agreed to give talks at the Conference, declined all participation in the weekend as a sign of protest and had to be replaced at the last moment.

The testimonies received by SOP from certain members of the diocese of Sourozh who were personally present at the Conference give a rather different version of events from that given by Interfax-Religiia. All agree in saying that the weekend took place in a very different atmosphere to that which prevailed in the past. One parishioner from the London cathedral, a member of the first Russian emigration, said that she returned 'disgusted' from what she had seen and heard in Oxford. Many participants had spoken 'frankly, politely and intelligently, but also strongly and with conviction, and some with great emotion' to make known their incomprehension regarding the measures taken in regard to Bishop Basil. 'The response [of the members of the Commission] each time was always the same, like a worn-out record, 'Love and unity!' - but without any concrete explanation being given about the decisions taken by the Patriarch of Moscow.

'Archbishop Innokenty also spoke a lot about the obedience due to Patriarch, bishops and priests', the parishioner continued, 'some people retorted with the question, "Why do you listen to those of the group which has precisely chosen to go over the head of their bishop and their priests, to write directly to the Patriarch and to others holding responsibility in the Patriarchate? Why do you support them in their lack of proper discipline, their violence and their lies?" The response was identical, 'Peace and unity!' Another participant said that the members of the Commission had been disappointed by the resistance they encountered. One of the Conference speakers at the end of her communication which was about 'Freedom, Power and Authority', expressed her regret that Archbishop Innokenty had been placed in 'an impossible position'.

The first difficulties between the diocese of Sourozh and the Moscow Patriarchate appeared in 2002, when the London parish was troubled by the actions of Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev), sent by Moscow to assist Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), the founder of the diocese, who died in August 2003 (SOP 281.5) Bishop Hilarion allowed himself to openly criticise the diocesan statutes, the ways the diocese functioned and pastoral and liturgical practices (SOP 270.7, and 271.12). New problems manifested themselves last December, after a colloquium on conciliarity, during which Father Andre Tererine,

sent to the London parish by the Patriarchate's Department of External Relations, gave himself up to a systematic denigration of the work of Metropolitan Anthony and of his designated successor, Bishop Basil, whose election as diocesan bishop by the clerico-lay Assembly of the diocese in February 2003, while Metropolitan Anthony was still alive * (SOP 276.1), has never been confirmed by the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Judging that the permanent state of trouble provoked in the life of the diocese by the actions of those recently arrived from Russia enjoying the active support of the Patriarchate's Department of External Relations, could no longer continue, Bishop Basil, in a letter to Alexis II, Patriarch of Moscow and primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, dated 24 April 2006, asked to be allowed to join the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch, along with those clerical and lay members of the diocese of Sourozh who might wish to do so.

* there was no election & @ the time M. Anthony said clearly the decision was in the hands of the Holy Synod of M.P.