



St John's Church News No 37: June 2012

**РУССКАЯ ПРАВОСЛАВНАЯ ЦЕРКОВЬ
СВТ. ИОАННА ШАНХАЙСКОГО, ЧУДОТВОРЦА
ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Military Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 2AN**

**His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias
Most Rev. Metropolitan Hilarion, First Hierarch of ROCOR
Very Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain**

For this newsletter in electronic form: www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm

**Confession and Contact / Исповедь: о. Андрей / Fr Andrew: T: 01394 273820 / E:
frandrew_anglorus@yahoo.co.uk / W: www.orthodoxengland.org.uk.**

Facebook: [Christian Orthodox group in Colchester](#).

**Русская Школа / Russian School: Lyudmila Pavlova: Tel: 07518 842319 /
plyudmyla@googlemail.com**

Сторож / Caretaker: Paul Hopkins, 69, Military Road

Расписание богослужений / Services in June

Saturday 2 June

5.30 pm: Pentecost Vigil / Всенощное бдение накануне праздника Пятидесятницы

Sunday 3 June: Pentecost – Whitsun – The Feast of the Holy Trinity / Пятидесятница – Св. Троица - Сошествие Св. Духа на апостолов

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy. Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers / Часы и Божественная Литургия. Вечерня с коленопреклонными молитвами

Saturday 9 June

5.30 pm: Vigil for All Saints / Всенощное бдение накануне праздника Всех Святых

Sunday 10 June: All Saints / Неделя Всех Святых

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Monday 11 June

Beginning of the Apostles' Fast / Начало Петрова поста

Saturday 16 June

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 17 June: All the Saints who have shone forth in Rus / Неделя всех святых, в земле Российской просиявших

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Saturday 23 June

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 24 June: All the Saints who have Shone Forth in these Isles / Собор всех святых, на Британских островах и в Ирландии просиявших

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Friday 29 June

5.30 pm: Vigil for St John of Shanghai, the Wonderworker / Всенощное бдение накануне праздника свт. Иоанна Шанхайского, чудотворца

Saturday 30 June: Patronal Feast / Престольный праздник: St John of Shanghai / День памяти Свт. Иоанна Шанхайского

10.00 am: Hours, Liturgy and Procession (Blessing of Water at 8.30 am) / Часы, Божественная литургия и крестный ход (в 8.30 – малое освящение воды)

Saturday 30 June

4.00 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

**Patronal Feast: Saturday 30 June. Concelebrating
with his Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of
Volokolamsk**

**Престольный праздник: Суббота 30 июня. В
сослужении с высокопреосвященным
Митрополитом Иларионом Волоколамским**

The Real St. George



Regularly, the secular media report stories about England's current patron-saint. There are those who complain that St George is 'a Turkish saint'; others project the image of a knight in medieval armour; yet others claim him as 'the patron of the English football team'. Where does such nonsense come from and who is the real St George?

George was born in about the year 283 to a rich Greek family in Cappadocia. Cappadocia is in what we now call Turkey - although then, and for hundreds of years afterwards, there was not a single Turkish person in Cappadocia. For the Turkish peoples invaded Asia Minor only much later and the name Turkey did not exist.

The name George means husbandman, a worker of the land. This is why in the Matins to St George, we hear how he earned his name in a spiritual sense, for he became a spiritual husbandman, sowing the seed of God and working in His fields.

When George was young, his father was martyred for Christ and his mother moved away to Palestine. Palestine was so called after the Philistines, whom we remember from the Old Testament as being the enemies of the Jews. Today's Palestinians, still enemies of the modern Jews, are Arabs. They too are cousins of the Jews, both being Semitic people, though Palestine is better known to Christian believers as the Holy Land.

The young George joined the Roman Army, but remained a believer. Nevertheless, George was immensely successful, quickly becoming an officer and then a tribune. A tribune was one of six officers in charge of a legion, a legion at that time being composed of about 6,000 infantry with a strong cavalry detachment. (This is the explanation why St George is shown on icons on horseback).

When George was aged twenty, he was arrested for his faith, which he fearlessly confessed, in the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. This arrest took place at Lydda in Palestine. This is about twenty-three miles to the north-west of Jerusalem, some seven miles to the south of Arimathea (now Ramallah) and some seven miles to the south-east of Joppa, which is on the coast. We understand how close all the places we have spoken of on recent Sundays are. All

these places are near Jerusalem, the site of the Resurrection; St Joseph of Arimathea came from nearby; St Tabitha was raised from the dead in Joppa; and now we speak of Lydda.

Refusing to renounce the faith, the tribune George was imprisoned and then cruelly tortured. First, he was placed in stocks and a large weight was placed on his chest. This must surely have broken some of his ribs, leaving him in great pain. Then he was tied to a wheel which was turned around, but underneath the wheel there were great nails sticking up from a board. These must have torn his skin from him. Then he was buried up to his head and left for three days. Finally, he was given poison. However, despite all these tortures, George not only survived, but was also miraculously healed, his unceasing prayer giving him the strength to defy his torturers. Seeing his courage, two soldiers, Anatolius and Protoleon, a priest, the governor and others, were converted to the faith. Not only they, but also the Emperor's wife, the Empress Alexandra. Thus, it was that they too were all martyred, being commemorated today, and George was beheaded.

The first question that we now ask ourselves is why St George has become such a great saint. There were thousands of martyrs at this time, including our own Protomartyr St Alban, who was possibly martyred in the same persecution in the same year, but at the other end of the Roman Empire. It has to be said that in this respect St George resembles St Nicholas. Their lives are both relatively short and yet both have become universally popular saints. The reason for this must be that they both received great glory from God. Their sacrifices gave them great power. This indeed is why miracles began over St George's relics straightaway, which is why the Church gave him not only the title 'Great-Martyr', a title granted to very few, but also the title 'the Wonderworker'. In addition, St George has a third title, 'the Victorious', for he was victorious over the Emperor of Rome, over the pagans, over the devil.

His victory is why we see St George portrayed as a Roman tribune on a horse defeating a dragon. The dragon of course symbolises the devil. Here we should recall that in the Book of Genesis, the punishment given by God to the serpent who had tempted Adam and Eve, was that he would thenceforth have 'to go on his belly' (Genesis 3, 14). From here it is clear that the serpent originally had legs, which is why one of the names for the devil is 'the old dragon'. For what is a dragon, if not a snake with legs? Indeed, the memory of the devil as a dragon has been kept in the folklore of many countries, as for example in the Far East.

Unfortunately, this was not understood by the Crusaders, more or less barbarians, who in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries went to the Holy Land. There they saw icons of the soldier-saint and, with their primitive, literal mentality, failed to understand that the dragon depicted was symbolic, not literal. And yet it had been understood in the West in earlier times. Thus, one thousand years ago, the Old English preacher Aelfric, wrote a life of St George, in which there is no mention of any dragon. The fact that the Empress Alexandra was martyred together with St George, led to the other very late medieval distortion, that St George had killed a dragon in order to free a princess. Thus, the medieval knight of the George myth - an image very far from the reality of the early Christian soldier-martyr.

It was these Crusaders who brought back new veneration of the soldier-saint George to the West, especially to England. The Patron-Saint of England had since the late ninth century been the martyred King Edmund. However, in the fourteenth century veneration for him started to be replaced by veneration for St George. By the fifteenth century this was complete; St George had become the Patron-Saint of England. There was no official decree, no law, this was just a question of popular glorification. St Edmund has never ceased to be the Patron-Saint of England, he has just become secondary to St George.

Veneration for St George, like that for St Nicholas, has not ceased worldwide, including among Protestants and Muslims. In Protestant England, the expression 'By George' is the only remaining invocation of a saint still in use. In Europe, St George is popular in many countries, perhaps especially in Portugal, England and Russia; the crest of the City of Moscow being the icon of St George. The country of Georgia was named after him and the Georgian flag has five red crosses on it, being a more advanced version of the English flag. With regard to what we think of as the Standard of St George, the English national flag, this is in fact the flag of Jerusalem, flown at the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem today. It is also this flag that appears on certain very late icons of the Resurrection. The white indicates the sinlessness and purity of Christ, the red cross represents the blood sacrifice on the Cross of the Son of God, that became the victory over death, the whole being what we might call 'the flag of the Resurrection'.

The veneration for St George actually increased in some parts of the world, especially in Russia, in 1945. For the end of the Second War in reality came on Sunday 6 May, which was the coincidence of Orthodox Easter and St George's Day. Even though peace negotiations were not concluded until midnight on 7 May and peace publicly declared after midnight on 8 May, that terrible War in fact ended on 6 May. St George remained, and remains, the patron of those that defend right against might.

Holy Great-Martyr and Wonderworker George the Victorious, Pray to God for us!

An Interview with a Russian Website

1. How did your parish greet the news of the reconciliation of the two parts of the Russian Church?

In a parish few people have an overview of the life of the diocese, still less of the whole Russian Orthodox Church. They see only parish life. True, in our parish we had one person who complained that the bishops should have restored canonical unity long before and another person who took the opposite view and said that all been done too quickly. However, everyone else considered that the restoration of unity, though very good, would change little in their lives. Basically, this was because we have always been spiritually united. There has never been any schism between the Church inside Russia and the Church outside Russia, there had only been a division for external political reasons. Once these external reasons stopped existing, there was no longer any division.

From the point of view of our parishioners, all that changed in 2007 was that we began praying for the Patriarch by name. So for most people at that time nothing really was different. It is only

with time that people have begun to understand the importance of unity. Hence the importance of the last five years when this understanding has begun to deepen.

2. How did you learn that unity would be restored?

Everybody knew about this because we had been discussing it since the resolution of the Fourth All-Diaspora Council in San Francisco a year before in 2006. I was a speaker there and it had become clear what was going to happen. I welcomed this since it was the will of the Church, God's Will. The time was ripe.

However, what we regret that is that there was so little discussion before 2006. For example, there had apparently been a meeting of some ROCOR clergy to discuss possible reconciliation in December 2003 in Nyack in the USA. We only learned of this meeting after it had happened! We read the internet and discovered that there, I quote, ‘a meeting of all ROCOR clergy had taken place’. Well, in our diocese we had known nothing of this. This upset people. It appeared to some at that time that something was being prepared behind our backs. I regret that we had not been prepared for the reconciliation before 2006. I must say that this fact played a negative role among those who were opposed to reconciliation. In the age of the internet there should have been much better communications.

3. How do you remember that day?

I was in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow on the day of the reconciliation and the signature of the Act of Canonical Communion. I was one of only two priests there who were confessing before and during the Liturgy. I still remember the confessions. Many people came, thinking I was a priest from the Cathedral. Then they began confessing how in their previous lives they had persecuted the Church. Their repentance was heartfelt. Many cried. I actually remember this more than anything else. It was only afterwards that I saw on television the pictures of the signature of the Act and so on. Though present in the Cathedral and taking communion at the Liturgy, I had missed the great events in front of the TV cameras, but had witnessed great events in human hearts, if I may put it like that

4. What does it mean to you today?

Only today are the consequences of the reconciliation taking effect. Perspectives are opening up before us which were unthinkable five years ago, let alone twenty, thirty or forty years ago, when we only dreamed of them. Only now are we beginning to understand that we have taken part in a historic event, which will have repercussions outside Russia for generations to come. We have witnessed and taken part in history.

I think that it took the repose soon afterwards of the two main participants, His Holiness Patriarch Alexei II and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Laurus, for many to understand the importance of these extraordinary events. It became clear that they, the émigré Patriarch and the exiled Carpatho-Russian Metropolitan, had both played Providential roles, roles of destiny. There are those who have said since then that one day they will both be canonised as models of Orthodox unity, that one day a church dedicated to St Alexei of Moscow and St Laurus of New York will be raised up. As God wills.

5. How would you describe the relations between the two parts of the One Church today?

Relations today are generally very good. The only tensions are caused by ignorance, by the spirit which has no concept of history. That spirit knows nothing of either the history of the Church inside Russia or of the Church outside Russia. The solution here is to write and publish a popular work – not an academic study - to relate the facts of the history of the two parts of the One Church. This is a vital need, yet to be done. The huge ignorance must be overcome.

6. What gives you joy about this?

The normality that we now have.

7. What remains to be worked on in order to solve problems between the Church in the homeland and the Church Outside Russia?

You mention problems between the Church of the Fatherland and ROCOR. Such terminology is to misunderstand the situation. To oppose ‘the Church of the Fatherland and ROCOR’ is to misunderstand everything! Only someone in Moscow would use such terminology and make such a distinction. In the Ukraine or Estonia, we would probably not speak in this way. Still less would we. Let me explain.

First of all, ‘the Church of the Fatherland’ is not the Church of the Russian Federation. It is the multinational Church of Rus. In other words, it exists not only in the Russian Federation, but also in the ‘near abroad’, in the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Latvia, Kazakhstan etc. This is also Rus. However, the Church of Rus also exists in ‘the far abroad’, in Italy, England, Denmark, Portugal, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, Argentina etc, that is on our territory, which is also Rus for us. This is why we speak of American Rus, Australian Rus, English Rus and so on. It is this part of the Church which interests us most because it is the part to which we belong. We in ROCOR, like you, all belong to ‘the Church of the Fatherland’, the Church of Rus, and have never belonged to any other Church.

For example, I remember how babushki (grannies) welcomed the ROCOR delegation when we concelebrated in Trinity-Sergius Lavra in May 2007. They said: ‘It is a pity you weren’t here before’. I answered: ‘In spirit we have always been here’. And so it was and so it is.

However, one problem remains to be resolved between us. This is that it makes no sense that in the ‘far abroad’, there are not only ROCOR parishes, but today parishes of the Patriarchate too. It is clear to me that all Russian Orthodox abroad should be united. For example, in ROCOR there is an ‘Archbishop of Berlin and Germany’ and in the Patriarchate there is also an ‘Archbishop of Berlin and Germany’. This is both illogical and uncanonical.

This general need for co-operation affects all areas. For example, only a few days ago I was talking on the phone to the Archbishop of the local Patriarchal Diocese, who wants to publish a priest's service book in English in October. He did not know that our diocese had already done this a few months ago. There is a huge lack of communication. And when that exists, there is a huge possibility of misunderstanding. ROCOR has existed for over 90 years, most of the Patriarchal parishes abroad are recent. Therefore, we often did one or two generations ago things which the Patriarchate is only just beginning to do. It often has no idea that the work was done long ago. The greatest problem here is undoubtedly that many of the Patriarchal clergy do not speak a Western language. If we can co-ordinate our activities, we can do much more together. We cannot assume that those in the Patriarchate read our websites for news and they cannot assume that we read theirs. We need to create channels of communication. We need some central points, intermediaries, through which communications can pass.

8. Has the mood of protest settled down among those who disagreed with the reconciliation, compared to before?

I think this question in itself shows great misunderstanding. It is a one-sided question, because it overlooks the protest groups which left the Patriarchal Church and so the Russian Orthodox Church, the Church of Rus, both recently and in the past. However, I will first of all answer the question as you have expressed it.

As regards the problem of those who left ROCOR because of the reconciliation between the two parts of the Church and formed, or joined, a number of sects, we should keep it in proportion. Outside South America, very, very few left us, less than 1% of the Church. Let us speak of them first.

Only a few of these have returned and we have always greeted them. They have warmed our hearts. However, the majority of those who left will probably not return – though we shall continue to wait for them and pray for their return. Why will they probably not return? Firstly, some have died – many who left were elderly. Secondly, unfortunately, many of the others are rather fanatically-minded. They seem not to want to belong to the Church or to obey the bishops, but want to belong to sects. Mostly, these were the very people who had already been causing many problems in ROCOR for many years before the reconciliation, disobeying bishops and making our life difficult. It should be added that most who left lived in countries without a resident bishop. This illustrates the theological fact that without a bishop, there is no Church. It is a miracle that our Church has survived at all in countries where there is no resident bishop.

In South America, where ROCOR lost, I think, ten priests in all, the problem was very specific. Our diocese in South America was very isolated, politicised, small and poor. Very importantly, it had not had a resident bishop for many years, so that the personalities of individual priests played a great role. This was a recipe for a sort of 'Orthodox Protestantism'. When most of the priests there left ROCOR (and the problem of isolation and lack of communication played a very important role in their decision), the people were obliged to leave as well, because we did not have any new clergy to send there to replace those who had left. In order to continue some sort of life, the people followed the clergy. If we had ten clergy we could send to South America and we could pay and house them, most of the people would come back to us. However, the fact is that ROCOR is far too poor to be able to do that. And where would we find ten free clergy who speak Russian and Spanish or Portuguese?

However, your question overlooks a far more important question - those who protested and over the decades left the Patriarchate. In Russia, people have little concept of this. Some have heard of the Sourozh schism of 2006, when 300 individuals left the Sourozh Diocese of the Patriarchate in Great Britain because they wanted to keep their renovationist 'heritage', which is what they themselves call it. They rejected the Russian Orthodox norms of the Patriarchate inside Russia, which were then being restored in the West, just as they had already rejected the identical Russian Orthodox norms faithfully conserved by ROCOR. Unfortunately, elements of the same Sourozh-style renovationism still exist in a very few Patriarchal parishes in Western Europe. Here there is still a real danger of sectarianism, even of schism, because renovationism is an ideology that is always based on the personality cult, on personalities who place themselves above the catholicity of the Church.

However, beyond these elements, there are several large groups which in the more distant past left both ROCOR and the Patriarchate and which have still not returned to our common Russian Orthodox Church, the Church of Rus.

The first group is the very small Paris Exarchate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, where the 300 Sourozh schismatics took refuge. It left the Russian Orthodox Church in 1931. At present, with only one bishop, it is sharply divided between those who wish to return to the reunited Russian Orthodox Church and those who do not.

The second group is the OCA, to which the Patriarchate controversially gave autocephaly in 1970, during the Cold War. Today, parts of the OCA want to return to the reunited Russian Orthodox Church, but others do not. That is a complex situation which naturally can only be resolved by members of the OCA themselves.

Finally, there are large Ukrainian groups, a small Carpatho-Russian group and an even smaller Belorussian group, all based in North America, which essentially belong by history to the Russian Orthodox Church, but which still have not returned to unity with us.

In all these cases the main problem is undoubtedly political nationalism or phyletism, whether Ukrainian, American or other, which has crept into the life of those parts of the Diaspora. Again, only members of those groups can decide what they want to do, to reunite with the Church of Rus or to remain outside Her.

9. What questions, claims and misunderstandings still remain today?

The first great question is that of the future of all Russian Orthodox outside Russia, whether within ROCOR or in dioceses and parishes of the Patriarchate outside Russia. We would hope that one day soon there could be a meeting or Council of all the Russian Orthodox bishops who have dioceses outside Russia. For example, they could consider how our Churches outside Russia could be structured and organised so that we could work together much more efficiently. They could issue a joint statement, stating our common values and aims, affirming our Russian Orthodox Tradition and Identity, our common Russian Orthodox 'nationality', which is above worldly nationalities and languages. This declaration would speak not only to our own Russian Orthodox faithful, but also to the outside world. We should express our common Church Tradition and our readiness to co-operate especially with other Orthodox, but also with those of goodwill outside the Orthodox world. We do not live in a ghetto, but with others.

Apart from questions like the above one and also the ecumenical problem, which is very painful for us in ROCOR, as also for many in the Patriarchate, I think there is another area which causes many misunderstandings. This is a question of human psychology and stereotypes. There is no reason to be pessimistic about such human problems. They are of the past. We look to the future. Time will bring healing here, as all learn to know and respect each other. Without doubt the main problem here is one of ignorance, a leftover from the mentalities of the past on both sides.

10. Are there any disappointments or, conversely, unexpected successes?

Personally, I cannot think of any disappointments or unexpected successes. I think this is because I had a good idea of the situation before. I had already lived through the last quarter of the twentieth century as a conscious Russian Orthodox and knew the mentalities in the different parts of the then divided Russian Church. However, I cannot speak for others.

11. Do you feel connected with the Church in the Homeland and how do you support that connection?

Yes, now that the old atheist regime of the past has gone, we who belong to Rus abroad feel this attachment to the Church in 'old Rus' very strongly. We have always felt very strongly that we belong to the Russian Orthodox world, whatever our first language and whatever the country we live in. Russian Orthodoxy for us is a kind of super-nationality. We all have worldly passports, which may say 'German', 'French', 'British', 'Swiss', 'Venezuelan', 'Chilean', 'Australian', 'Canadian', 'American', 'Indonesian', 'Mexican', etc, but our spiritual passports all say 'Russian Orthodox'. Of course, in ROCOR, we always had this sense of identity. We are all Russian Orthodox first, then secondly we belong to the country whose passport we hold. But this feeling of attachment to 'Rus' has been much reinforced by the reconciliation. I know several ROCOR members who have been able to obtain Russian nationality. I know many, many more who would like to obtain Russian nationality, if only it were to be made easier for us.

Today, we have a very good idea of what is going on in Russia and in the other countries which form Rus, the homelands of our Faith. Sadly, since the fall of the Soviet Union we have seen ever more clearly that there are elements in the West which want to create a new Cold War. Before, they said that they were only against the Soviet Union, but in reality some hated Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Soviet Union was only an excuse for this hatred.

Some of these elements are today actively work for the downfall of Russia and of our Russian Orthodox Church, sending out disgraceful propaganda against authentic Orthodoxy and against Russia. Russophobia is a reality among Western Powers which are jealous of Russia. These people are also enemies of our Church because they know that our Church has Christian values, whereas their values are secularist, humanist, atheist.

It is our task to defend the Russian Orthodox Church, Tradition, Identity and Values. There is colossal ignorance about Russian Orthodoxy in the West. It is our task to dispel this. We are unpaid ambassadors for the Russian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, many here reject Orthodox Rus, the Tsar-Martyr Nicholas, and the revival of Orthodox culture in Russia, to which they oppose the Godless West, Secularism, and the Mammon of the dollar and the euro.

This is not a political question, this is a question of defending our common Russian Orthodox values. The heartfelt desire of ROCOR has always been the restoration of Sovereign Orthodox Rus, of Holy Rus. The closer the Russian State identifies with our ideals of Holy Rus, the more our hearts rejoice. What we certainly do not want is the downfall of the Russia which is today being reborn. Of course, some perfectionists are impatient, they want everything restored now, but that is not possible. 'In your patience you will save your souls' (Lk 21, 19). And those who have patience always have humility. We do not have the right to ask for perfection of others, only of ourselves. The restoration of Orthodox Rus takes time and needs a constructive and positive approach, not a fault-finding approach.

12. Separately, we would like you to tell us about the joys and difficulties of life today in the Church Outside Russia.

I would say that our difficulties at present are twofold:

Firstly, we suffer from the problem of Western atheism, as we can see, for example, in the banning of Christian symbols, political correctness, the promotion of gay marriage etc in the West. Unfortunately, many 'semi-Christians' in the West also support these secular values. The problem is that most of the West only knows and understands deformations of Christianity and the Church. When it discovers Orthodoxy, it often does not even recognise it as Christianity. A common question we get here, especially from Protestants, is: 'But are you Christians?' If you tell them that Orthodoxy is the original form of Christianity, they may even comment: 'But then isn't it about time you changed?' Such is the ignorance here.

This Western ignorance can also come in the form of the proud delusion of 'spiritualism'. For example, some people in the West say, 'I am a very spiritual person, therefore I am not a Christian'. What they mean is that they reject the Incarnation, the duty of the Church to influence and Christianise the State, the armed forces etc. This anti-Incarnation West is simply denying the Church as the Body of Christ. Here, most Christianity is reduced to a personal hobby, part of the individualistic and egoistic cult of consumerism. What such people should say is, 'I am not at all a spiritual person, therefore I am not a Christian'. The problem is that their knowledge of Christianity is limited to a deformed and deluded Christianity.

Our second difficulty is the problem of our poverty. ROCOR is poor. I remember in the 1990s many priests from Russia started contacting us, wanting to emigrate and join us. The first question we asked them was: What Western languages do you speak? Usually the answer was 'None'. The second question we asked was: 'What is your secular profession?' The usual answer was 'None'. But how can an Orthodox priest live in the West, if he does not speak the local language and has no secular profession?

Most ROCOR priests do not expect to be paid – rather the priests expect to pay for the Church. Many ROCOR priests speak three or four languages and may work as office-workers, nurses, engineers, teachers, programmers etc. The concept of the Church as a money-making activity or career is alien to us. However, as a result of the lack of money, we also lack infrastructure. What is possible in countries like Russia, Romania and Greece is very difficult for us. And in this context we must mention our lack of bishops, a problem which we have already mentioned above.

However, I would say that our joys are also twofold:

Firstly, there is the current large-scale expansion of ROCOR and our task of Churching Orthodox who have emigrated to us. New parishes are opening all the time as a result. Baptisms and weddings are far more numerous than funerals. This is the opposite of our situation in the 1970s and 1980s.

Secondly, there is our task, or mission, to bring Non-Orthodox into the Church. Our witness to those fragments of Christianity that survive in the Western world is very important. It is always a joy when Non-Orthodox come to us and find a spiritual home in the Church. Here in our Church they can at last find the great picture, into which they can fit their little pictures, the fragments of Christianity which have survived in the West and which they have kept. Our Orthodox Tradition is the key to the door of the Church for them.

Overall, I would say that despite all our difficulties, it is a privilege for us to be alive now. We face huge challenges but also huge opportunities. We must make use of this extra time that God has given us, the time that He has added on to the end of time, for the repentance of many through ‘the preaching of the Gospel among all nations’ (Mark 13, 10).

Archpriest Andrew Phillips
11 May 2012

With the ROCOR Delegation in Russia (Part One)

Wednesday 16 May

After the second meeting of the working group for co-operation between our two parts of the Russian Church, I feel the strength of our personal relations with the Department. These are genuine people. Though, for historical and cultural reasons, we may be on different trains and on different lines, both our direction and destination are identical. We have a clear vision of where we want to go. All is positive, fruitful and frank. I am touched by the dedication of all to the memory of Metr Lavr in both Moscow and Washington.

Again I feel sorry for those few who did not come with us out of political or sectarian prejudice. In Russia, even more quickly than among the Greek old calendarists, those tiny groups immediately split into six or seven sects, all accusing and hating each other – abroad they split into, I think, at least four sects, all out of communion with each other. There is no Love there.

Afterwards I spoke in private to Archbishop Mark (Yegor’evsky), who is in charge of all the parishes in the far abroad, apart from our own. I had a very positive impression.

I ask how many bishops there are now in the Church. I estimate 250. I am told the exact number - 260, however next week it will be more. I ask when the increase will stop. I am told: ‘Only when the world ends’. And actually, why should the number not go up to 1,000 or more? That is what is needed.

Our Delegation of ten goes to the airport. Our passports are Canadian, Australian, German, French, American and British. I see that the Church is a reality in contemporary Russia. It is no longer under cover. We are heading for Diveyevo, in many ways, a spiritual centre of the Reborn Russian Church – Moscow is only the (very necessary) administrative centre. In Diveyevo there are the relics of St Seraphim of Sarov and it is from here that the worldwide preaching of Orthodoxy must go out, according to the prophecies – which are taken very seriously here. I reflect that probably London is nearly midway between Diveyevo and New York.

The flight is about 1 hour 20 minutes to Nizhny Novgorod then there are 2 hours 20 minutes by road. We are met at the airport by Metropolitan George of Nizhny Novgorod and a Church delegation. Then, with police escort to go faster, we are taken to Diveyevo. In the late evening, we are met at the Convent gates by the Abbess and a choir, as well as many clergy and people and we venerate the relics of St Seraphim. This is the largest Convent in Russia, with 400 nuns.

Thursday 17 May

The morning starts with a service of intercession and akathist before the relics. I pray again for many who have asked for prayers. I remember my parents and eldest brother who have departed this life. I never thought that I would be able to do this. This is higher than any dream – this is both grace and reality. Then comes the Liturgy, then another service of thanksgiving. I feel that our unity has been renewed through St Seraphim.

I speak to the Metropolitan, who takes a genuine interest in me, as, of course, in others. He is a large, very kind man, perhaps aged 50, originally from Belarus, a monk from Trinity St Sergius Monastery, with long hair and a huge beard – clearly very dynamic. He exudes faith and the strength that comes from faith. He tells us that although virtually everyone who is born and dies in his vast Metropolia (250,000 square kilometres) is baptised and buried by the Church, only 10% of weddings take place in Church. He sees clearly the awful legacy of the atheist period. He is intent on changing it, intent on the desovietisation of life.

Looking around the Convent, I notice even more sharply than what I notice in Moscow. This is the division of the sexes. Russia has never been through the awful 1960s, when the distinction between the sexes became blurred. Here men are men and women are women. This is healthy; if this continues there will not be that disastrous sexual confusion of the West, and we know how that is ending.

In the afternoon we all visit the Kazan Church and the two Cathedrals in the Convent and venerate all the relics. The Churches are very spacious, about the size of our Church in Colchester, though the Kazan church has thirteen altars. A huge hole in the ground marks the site of the third Cathedral which is to be built here. It too will be magnificent. The Convent is a very large complex and expanding. It includes a school. We walk around the rampart (kanavka), praying to the Mother of God, as pilgrims do.

The abbess, Mother Sergia, was a doctor in the world. She is very talkative, in a good way, and very hospitable. The nuns tell me that there are still bears (as well as wolves) in the forest around, just as in the time of St Seraphim (Sarov is only a few miles away).

We return to Nizhny, again with a police escort, along the birch-lined roads. I see the vast expanse of European Russia. Why was such a huge territory – the vast majority of Europe – and added to that all northern Asia (Siberia) - given to Orthodox Russia? There is a reason for all this wealth. Russia is to use it for the good of the whole Orthodox world.

We stop at Arzamas, a town on the way. We see the churches, there are many – all magnificent. Everywhere they sing ‘Christ is Risen’ in three languages, Greek, Latin and Slavonic. This is the pre-Revolutionary Tradition. The Church has been put at the top of society. The New Martyrs captured the high ground, now the middle and low grounds have to be captured. The Church has a huge task before it. Everywhere I see veneration for and icons of the Royal Martyrs and all the New Martyrs. This is most significant.

I reflect on the remarkable destiny of Metr Hilarion, a Canadian farm boy by background. But then who am I, but an English farm boy?

Friday 18 May

We visit the Monastery of the Ascension in Nizhny. I am impressed by this piece of Old Russia by the River Volga and its prior Fr Tikhon, who is also a researcher and writer. He has written a book about Patriarch Nikon. He thanks us for the books from Jordanville on which they depended for decades during the atheist period.

We next go to the seminary (future matushki and choir directors are trained here too, as before the Revolution). Then we visit the magnificent Cathedral. Once more I see how for Russians the Church is Heaven on earth. There is a beautiful fresco of the Royal Martyrs here. It has recently been painted, together with the other frescoes.

I speak to the priest-secretary of the Diocese. He says that there are over 500 churches now and the rate of opening continues to be over twenty per year. There are eight monasteries and seven convents at present, but they are to open another eight. Twenty years ago virtually all lay in ruins after the atheist nightmare. So much has been restored, but there is still much more to do.

Metr George tells us of the different Church publications in Nizhny, including a bimonthly newspaper with a circulation of 22,000. His budget for the Church radio station alone is \$140,000 per month. He is an ardent evangelist – in the Orthodox sense, of course. In this City of 1,350,000 he still only has 150 priests (from what I could see – the vast majority of them under 40, an age which is related to the fall of atheism in 1991). The Metropolitan is a dynamic man of vision. For him the re-evangelisation of Russia is only just starting. His Metropolia now has two diocesan bishops, soon there will be a third. Forty-seven Metropolias are being established inside the Russian Church, they are already nearly half way to this. The overwhelming impression is one of energy, youth, dynamism, faith.

It is quite clear that there is no opposition from Communism. The opposition is from the new Western atheism with its secularism and political correctness. There is no doubt that the Church will combat this most vigorously. Unlike in the West, where Non-Orthodox seem actually to encourage secularism. This is unlike the situation when I was here five years ago. The Church has made great strides since then, and that is why Western political forces, often financed from the West and supported by the Western media, have launched their vicious attack against the Church in recent months.

Only this week Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and all the Russias said: 'Once again, as 400 years ago, we see hostile acts aimed at undermining our spiritual values, at the weakening of the State. Once again, we see confusion in our society, sowed by those who rebuff our worthy national values, searching for 'saviours' from outside Russia. They warn us not to bring our faith, our culture, and our ethics into the public place. They tell us that if we do not shut up, things will get worse for us; they will desecrate our churches and smash our icons. As it was in times past, we can only oppose such if we have a unified Russian society, which they cannot browbeat or ignore. We must base our unity on loyalty to our spiritual and moral traditions.' Rightly, there will be no compromise here. The Church is spiritual content; the West is spiritual death. We know it, we live in the West.

Metropolitan George explains to us that the period of regeneration of the Church in Russia is over. Now is the period of development, of the Churching of society. The Church must see to education, schools and universities, health, hospitals, orphans, the handicapped, the elderly – everything that the State does so poorly. (In the West it also does it poorly, to such an extent that the State privatises everything. Here it must all go to the Church). The whole of society is to be Churched. In Russia there is no alternative to the Church. The Church is the source of culture and civilisation. Communism was not and the concept that the modern secular West could be is simply laughable.

We have dinner at the railway station. A huge picture of the Tsar–Martyr is on the wall. It commemorates his visit to Nizhny some 100 years ago. We return to Moscow by train. This is the first time I have taken the train in Russia since 1976. It is quite different now. The head of Russian Railways is a well-known Orthodox and we can feel the presence of his faith here. I notice the presence of English. The announcements on the train (which is superior to anything in Britain) are bilingual. The English is faultless British English.

I reflect on the accusations of the pro-Western, anti-Church campaign that Church clergy and officials are money-minded and seek luxury. This is not the case, with rare exceptions. In Russia, after the humiliations of the Soviet period, the idea is that the Church must have a high profile, must gain respect, must have prestige. Before the Revolution bishops had a black carriage with horses, now they mostly have a smart black car. The only problem is that there can develop a personal attachment to such things. They must never be for personal glory, but for the glory of the Church, for God. The spirit of non-acquisition must be maintained.

Saturday 19 May

We return to Butovo outside Moscow, to the Church of the New Martyrs, where we were five years before, at its consecration. There are about 220 priests and 22 bishops concelebrating with the Patriarch. I admire the discipline, infrastructure and order of the service, the almost military organisation. Here we see the Church Militant; in the West the Non-Orthodox are simply full of self-doubt. Here there is the conviction that comes with real faith. The example of those who really believe is great, indeed essential, for those who are new to the faith. The choir, as usual, is superb. We take communion from many very large chalices. In the sermon our unity is mentioned together with the fact that this is the birthday of the martyred Tsar. The Patriarch commemorates him at the dismissal.

In the evening we go for the Vigil to Sts Mary and Martha Convent, where I stayed for a week five years ago. Afterwards we meet Bp Panteleimon. He is very good. I mention how five years ago I had expressed the hope that the Convent would one day become for our Church a kind of 'dependency' for us in Moscow. (Of course, it can never be a real dependency, because we are not a Local Church, but still it can be a home). I say that this evening my hope is being fulfilled.

I reflect on how the Church in Russia has moved on very rapidly from five years ago. We in ROCOR have to do the same. We need to have a sense of urgency, to act before it is too late, to share in the Russian dynamism.

My overwhelming impressions are energy, youth, conviction, example, discipline, finance, order, vision, dynamism, infrastructure, organisation, action inspired by real faith. The Church is going places. I feel sorry, and not for the first time, for those who are not on board with us.

Sunday 20 May

We concelebrate again with the Patriarch at Christ the Saviour Cathedral, just as five years ago. There are twenty-one bishops and about thirty priests. I see that, as elsewhere, they have returned the verse 'O Lord, save the pious' to the Liturgy, which before only we had kept from before the Revolution.

The Patriarch speaks to me afterwards, asking where I am from. I reply 'From England', but he asks from where, and I say 'From Colchester'. He appears to know of it. I am impressed by him again, as yesterday. He is generous and grateful and very energetic, a man of great vigour. A weight is taken from me, as the injustice from the past is forgiven.

After the Liturgy I see bishops on their iPhones everywhere.

At lunch I sit next to a young archimandrite. I ask him how many monks he has, if he has a big monastery. He replies, 'only average', he adds, 'about 140 monks', which is unlike Trinity St Sergius Monastery with 300 monks.

Later in the afternoon we have a round table meeting with His Holiness. There are fifteen of us. It is clear that he will help us in any way that he can. Our Metr Hilarion replies that with regards to dissidents all we can do is pray and be patient. We are all impressed by the understanding and goodwill of His Holiness. He sincerely wants us to prosper. All is positive.

There takes place after this a very impressive concert of singing and music, including Rakhmaninov. The Patriarchate has done its utmost for us. This is no flattery, no attempt to 'buy' us. This is simply love for the Church and unity that is being expressed.