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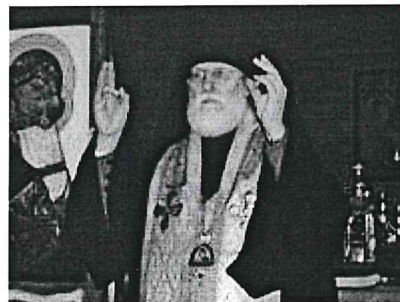


THE TIMES AND  
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Wednesday, 17 May 2006

## Bishop Basil 'retired' by Moscow in Russian church crisis



Church in Britain. More on this latest example of modern **Christianity** below. And see Jonathan Petre's Telegraph story of 30 May **here**. Meanwhile, if you are interested in Russia generally, there are good times to be had as well. Check out the Russian Summer Ball **here**. And see **Michael Binyon's excellent article from 3 June on this issue here**.



This icon shows St Stephen of Sourzh to whom the diocese of Great Britain and Ireland is dedicated. There is a relic of him at the Cathedral of the Dormition and All Saints. I have attended Divine Liturgy there and found it, I am afraid, rather long. Also I found it difficult to remain standing for a couple of hours or more as there are no pews or chairs. But the cathedral, like the whole Orthodox Church in Britain, is bursting at the seams. From up to 3,000 members in the entire country, since 1993 numbers have grown to a potential 250,000. Most of these are economic migrants from the former Soviet Union.

And here is the heart of the problem at Ennismore Gardens. Bishop Basil was more interested in creating an Orthodox Church in a uniquely British mould, continuing the legacy of Metropolitan Anthony, believing migrants to this country should of course retain their identity but also adapt to living here. Moscow wants the diocese to remain uniformly Russian, to be a 'home from home' for the migrants, to be a mirror of the Russian church in Moscow. Things came to a head, and Bishop Basil applied to Moscow to be released. He wanted instead to take his diocese under the broad wing of Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew.



Not surprisingly, given that Sourzh not only has a flock of so many thousands but owns a fabulous cathedral as well as several other multi-million pound properties in central London, Moscow was disturbed by what it saw as a serious threat to unity. Patriarch Alexis II intervened. He has 'retired' Bishop Basil and flown in Archbishop Innokenty of Korsun from France to take over.

It is worth reading the letters that both parties have posted in response to the crisis. Bishop Basil's is **here** and Archbishop Innokenty's is **here**.

Bishop Basil is a great ecumenist. He is loved by Anglicans, Catholics and many others. It is perhaps easy, for Anglicans in particular, to forget how differently structured are the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury has been almost powerless to act as various bishops and parishes have sought alternative oversight, although even he, in the midst of the crisis over gays, has not had to deal with what amounts to an entire province seeking oversight from another patriarchate. Even he might be forced to act if, say, the whole of Ecusa suddenly voted at its convention next month to join the Unitarian Universalists. Patriarch Alexis II has

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BISHOP BASIL

real power and he is not afraid to use it.

But Alexis might face a problem yet. Bishop Basil is a trustee of the charity which actually owns all those lovely properties. He has written to the Charity Commission, who are looking into the takeover of Ennismore Gardens by Moscow to see 'if any regulatory action will need to be taken.'

I will be watching developments with enormous interest.

Meanwhile, here are some facts about the Eastern Orthodox Church, summarised from Wikipedia:

The Eastern Orthodox Church is made up of a family of self-governing or 'autocephalous' churches based mainly in eastern Europe.

With 215 million adherents, it is the second largest Christian communion, after Roman Catholicism. There are 14 autocephalous churches, or 15 if America is included, and a further ten autonomous churches worldwide.

Originally, the Church was ruled by five patriarchs including Rome but disputes over papal authority led to the Great Schism in 1054. There is now no Pope and the highest ranking patriarch is Bartholomew of Constantinople. Next in the honorary rankings come Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem with Russia fifth. The Russian church originally came under Constantinople but separated in the 15th century. After the fall of Constantinople five years later, Russian Tsars and monks promoted the doctrine of Moscow as the Third Rome.

Earlier this month, a breakaway branch of the Russian church, the White Russian church in New York, approved a resolution to reunite with Moscow. You can read Jeremy Page's story from Moscow on that here.

ruth gledhill

Posted by Ruth Gledhill on Wednesday, 17 May 2006 at 05:44 PM in Current Affairs, Religion, Weblogs | Permalink

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### Comments

As an Orthodox priest who has had the privilege of celebrating the Divine Liturgy in several jurisdictions, my heart and my prayers go out for the Diocese of Sourozh and Bishop Basil of Sergievo. We Orthodox need always to remember that we are Orthodox first and that our ethnic background comes very much a poor second. The present dispute can only damage the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is our first task. Let us all pray that His will be done.

Posted by: Fr Columba | Sunday, 04 June 2006 at 05:05 PM

I understand some of Worried's concerns, but I am not so sure that the issues currently facing the Diocese of Sourozh are solely those of the influx of Russians into the parish. I don't doubt that this had profoundly affected the nature of the parish, in London and elsewhere, but I'm not sure that describing this as an invasion is helpful language.

Russians in the UK want to go to church. There aren't enough of those. Is this the fault of either/both the Diocese of Sourozh or the Moscow Patriarchate? I've no idea, but one can hardly blame Russians for wanting to attend services. I suspect that the real (realpolitik even...) issue is that elements of the Moscow Patriarchate seek to establish hegemony over the Diocese and the conflict has been allowed to develop to a point at which control can be most easily wrestled from Bishop Basil. It's effectively a hostile takeover.

As Michael Binyon outlines in today's article in The Times, there is the issue of property and money and, whilst Moscow might potentially be willing to allow parishioners to go with Bishop Basil under a new jurisdiction, Moscow wants control of the assets and it doesn't yet have them. The Diocese of Sourozh seems to have been canny enough to ensure that Moscow never got its name on the deeds or had access to the pursestrings.

There are any number of solutions to these issues, but it would seem best for the Moscow Patriarchate to actively support Bishop Basil's desires to take his flock elsewhere and not to pursue any protracted legal wrangling over property and similar. That would be graceful and least painful for all involved, but regretfully it's not a sufficient expression of Russian dominion for those currently at the controls. It is in this quest for power, I suspect, that one may find something of a 21st century version of the "Russkaya Dusha" (Russian Soul) mentioned earlier in these comments. We're a long way from St Seraphim of Sarov or even the Elder Zosima in Dostoevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov'.

Posted by: Alex Koyama | Saturday, 03 June 2006 at 07:29 PM

This is the simple truth.

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*Fear of Control*



The Russian Orthodox Church in London has been worshipping at the Cathedral of The Dormition and All Saints in Ennismore Gardens since the middle 1950's. For more than 40 years, the members of this London Parish have worshipped in peace and harmony, always welcoming any visitors, Orthodox or non-Orthodox alike, from this country or from abroad. Founders, Friends and Members contributed to the funding of this parish and eventually to the purchase of the Cathedral itself in the 1970's through a registered UK charity trust. At no time whatsoever, did funding come from the Moscow Patriarchate towards the purchase of the Cathedral or any of its' properties.

Following its tradition of 40 years, the London Parish welcomed with open arms the huge influx of the new Russians who want to worship in the Cathedral from the middle 1990's onwards. It not only welcomed them but even trusted them implicitly and welcome some to seek active participation on the governing board as Parish Council Members.

However no one had envisaged that this welcome given to the new Russians has a potentially dark side to it which could turn the London Parish upside down and possibly end the London Parish's heritage altogether.

The new Russians invaded the London Parish by sheer numbers, easily outnumbering the 'older' parishioners by 50 to 1, and possibly double that or even triple that. Suddenly the 'older' parishioners realised they have been pushed aside and even pushed out, and the London parish they knew for more than 40 years is literally being robbed from them in broad daylight!

Do the 'old' minority give up what they have build up over the past 40 years and simply hand over to the 'newly-arrived' majority? What rights does an 'old' minority have over the 'newly-arrived' majority? The answers to these questions are important as it will determine who has the right to use the Cathedral as their place of worship.

There is a call for justice here. I put it to the UK Government, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights under the Equality Bill to take up this matter and to look into it urgently.

Posted by: A worried Orthodox Christian | Saturday, 03 June 2006 at 06:04 AM

I am surprised by the use of "breakaway" and, worse, "White Russian" with capital letters as though it were the title. You really should know better. The title is Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and it has never claimed to be other than part of the one Russian Orthodox Church. Now, the two parts of the Russian Church are coming together. Glory to God!

Posted by: Andrew Bond | Friday, 02 June 2006 at 07:01 PM

This is getting really tiresome..The Orthodox Church is NOT hierarchical, that's political spin, bishops, whether singly or in synod, do not have any claim to primacy over the Church.

Orthodox ecclesiology begins here:

Christ specifically and clearly ruled against a hierarchical Church. Mark 10:41-43, see also Matthew 20:24-26, and Luke 22:24-26.

Compare:

25But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

26But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

with:

from the Statutes of the Moscow Patriarch Russian Church

3. The name of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia shall be mentioned during the divine services in all churches of the Russian Orthodox Church with the following wording: 'For our Great Lord and Father (name), His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia'

And in the above is most likely the origin of the Moscow Patriarch's unhelpful attitude towards the Sourozh Diocese under Metropolitan Anthony and in continuation under Bishop Basil.

"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".  
Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

Bishop's are servants, not masters.

Myrrh

Posted by: Myrrh | Thursday, 01 June 2006 at 09:22 PM

I have been a member of the Diocese of Sourozh for twenty-five years.

The uncanonical position of the Diocese of Sourozh over the past three years (since the death of Metropolitan Anthony) is what has led to the crisis. The failure of the Patriarchate of Moscow to appoint Bishop Basil as Metropolitan or at least as canonical head of the Diocese has meant that he has not been able to act fully as shepherd to his flock in accordance with traditional orthodox ecclesiology. Termed the 'administrator' of the Diocese he has been forced to act as it were with one hand tied behind his back. In reaching the conclusion that the

*Ecclesiology*



only way out of this impasse was to appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate he has in fact acted completely canonically. It is the Patriarchate of Moscow that has not and is not acting according to the canons of the Church.

Posted by: Andrew Morris | Tuesday, 30 May 2006 at 11:17 PM

I have only just seen Mr Ford's contribution, in which he purports to describe a situation in Bristol.

I am a member of the Moscow Patriarchate community in Bristol, although I was not around at the time the Sourozh diocese withdrew its support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate parish. As far as I understand, there were a number of issues that led to the withdrawal of Sourozh clergy (I believe this action was taken by Bishop Basil himself), which Mr Ford has chosen not to mention. Those parishioners who preferred to stay with the diocese of Sourozh formed the eucharistic community of which I am now a member.

We do not worship in any unusually 'formal' way. In fact, I have occasionally attended services at Mr Ford's church and I would have thought that his priest was much more of a stickler for 'correct' practice than ours - I have seen him charge out of the sanctuary to tell the choir director he was doing the wrong thing! And I have heard far more Slavonic at Mr Ford's church than in ours.

Our community has grown and flourished, and we have members from several countries. We have a wonderful priest whose selfless dedication to our community has been one of the major factors in its success. Another very noticeable characteristic of our church, which struck me when I first visited long before I moved to Bristol, is the tangible atmosphere of prayer.

Mr Ford's characterisation of our community would be totally unrecognisable to anyone who actually came to one of our services!

Posted by: Thomas Garland | Tuesday, 30 May 2006 at 01:04 AM

With all respect to people who want to move the whole diocese of Sourozh to Constantinople, I found it a little strange. Sourozh is part of Russian spiritual heritage, department of the Russian Orthodox church with its headquarters in Moscow and even points to particular geographical location in Russia, near town which is now called Sudak. Even though name Sourozh is now include Russian Orthodox church of Britain and Ireland, is it reasonable on that basis to move Sourozh from Russia to Constantinople? Couple of months ago Bishop Basil wrote to patriarch Alexis asking permission to build cathedral in London for the Russian Orthodox Church, next month he says he want to move to Constantinople, moving all Orthodox Christians, Cathedral, properties even priests! In the past, Orthodox communities split at the times of Civil War, foreign invasion, global disasters like

these. Now it is suggested that we should split because our Bishop has bad

relations with his superior. May be he is right in his argument with Archbishop Innokentii or Bishop Kirill etc, may be not. But suggesting to his flock and clergy to change churches! Is it not a bit too much? Loyalty to the Church is Orthodox tradition too, is it?

Posted by: wolfson | Thursday, 25 May 2006 at 10:42 AM

In response to Benjamin Waterhouse I would like to clarify three points.

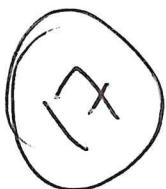
First the mention of a schism is inaccurate. The proposal is for a diocese to move from one Patriarchate to another. Both Patriarchs belong to the same Church, there is no state of schism between them and will not be unless the Patriarch of Moscow insists on one.

Second, it is not a case of what Bishop Basil 'wants', but rather of what he is forced to do. The problem arises from a number of new immigrants who see it as their right to take the diocese away from those who created it and have worshipped in it over the decades. If they were willing to integrate themselves in to the diocese rather than trying to remove it from those who already worship in it, there would be no problem.

Third, if anyone has shown 'papal' behaviour it is the Patriarch of Moscow. The Orthodox Church is indeed hierarchical. According to that hierarchy the Bishop is the head of local Church, and may not be 'retired' by any other Bishop. Only the Holy Synod has that power and the Patriarch acted without consulting them.

Posted by: Ralph Olsson | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 04:11 PM

I am an English person and a novice to Orthodoxy. However, I have been to the Cathedral for about a year, and the Cathedral has had a massively positive effect on my life. One of the greatest things about the Cathedral is its 'soul', and also its ability to bring people together, during the last year I have made some wonderful friends of many nationalities. For me a cultural wall has come down and I've been able to understand and learn about the wonderful Russian 'Dusha', and hopefully my friends have learnt things from me. The past couple of weeks have been a torturous time for many of us. However, what has given me hope is that beyond the rogue dissidents on the extremes, there are many of us who would like to see the 'mending of fences'. This sentiment is best expressed in an open letter/petition that is circulating the Cathedral.



Open/letter/petition

We do not wish to curse the darkness but to light a candle to show us the light'

We do not wish to argue about theology or ritual. We do not wish to post-rationalise our argument; instead we just wish to speak from the heart.

How we feel

Over the past two/three weeks we have gone through a whirlwind of emotions including being: upset, confused, embarrassed, depressed, angry, shocked, tearful and bewildered

What we pray for

- A Church of harmony
- A Church of peace
- A Church of love and thoughtfulness
- A Church which listens
- A Church where we can pray in peace
- A Church not in civil war
- A Church which does not divide loyalties
- A Church which respects opinion
- A Church of unity
- A Church that respects culture and is not embarrassed by it
- A Church which does not condemn
- A Church not divided on ethnic grounds
- A Church not divided on intellectual grounds
- A Church that preaches and believes in the Gospel
- A Church which practices the spirit as well as the letter of the law
- A Church which inspires
- A Church which leads by example
- A Church which follows the example of the Holy Fathers
- A Church that provides spiritual guidance to all
- A Church which breaks down cultural walls
- A Church which does not air its grievances in public
- A Church in which the laity are not briefing the media
- A Church that understands we are a broad Church from different backgrounds
- A Church that recognises that we come to the Church from many different places: be that from our fathers and mothers, from another Church or from another religion
- A Church that understands the difference between 'Tradition and traditions'
- A Church which respects and loves the Russian language
- A Church which respects and loves the English language
- A Church which loves Old Church Slavonic
- A Church which loves the mixed-language service
- A Church which understands that not everyone is a linguist
- A Church which sees a mixed-language service as more than just a compromise
- A Church that loves the culture and Orthodox tradition of Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom
- A Church which embraces and is excited by the idea of communion with our brothers and sisters in ROCOR
- A Church that condemns racism and bigotry towards people from ex-CIS countries or from the UK
- A Church in which we all strive to help each other
- A Church which is proud of its increasing congregation
- A Church which helps new émigrés adjust to the UK
- A Church which helps UK citizens understand the enormous hardship and difficulties some émigrés face in the UK
- A Church which can make people feel less home-sick
- A Church which loves the beauty of the 'Russkaya Dusha'
- A Church that loves the British way of life
- A Church in which we can all say 'we have helped it grow and flower'
- A Church in which we can all share our feelings without feeling threatened
- A Church that recognises that some of us are expressive in our emotions while some of us are private
- A Church not involved in a legal dispute
- A Church that can educate all
- A Church that does not talk about 'New Russians, Old Russians and English' but only 'Orthodox'
- A Church which believes in the authority of the Patriarch Alexis II
- A Church which in believes in the authority of the Archbishops and Bishops
- A Church which respects all the Patriarchs
- A Church where lay people are not involved in micro or macro politics
- A Church of wisdom
- A Church not of backbiting or backstabbing
- A Church where the economics of property are not top of the agenda
- A Church that is not defensive, selective or precious
- A Church that is not suspicious
- A Church which respects all priests regardless of their nationality
- A Church that 'mends fences'
- A Church which does not condemn but forgives
- A Church which is not liberal, modern or conservative in nature, but Orthodox
- A Church which enjoys togetherness and the celebration of a harmonious spiritual community

*Cultural Church*

*name of the soon formalised plan for unity came from an Englishman - Anne Leary*



A Church which builds fellowship and unites souls  
A Church that is thankful for what we have  
A Church that is a beacon of light

A Church that says "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

A Church that is truly the Body of Christ

We hope that our prayers will be answered

If anyone would like information on this open letter/petition they can contact me at [stevielacey@aol.com](mailto:stevielacey@aol.com)

Yours in Christ

Posted by: Steven Lacey | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 02:46 PM

I would like to comment on a point made by Roger Pearse.

The trust deeds both of the Diocese of Sourozh and of the London Parish (which are public documents copies of which can be obtained from the Charity Commissioners) nowhere refer to the Moscow Patriarchate. Property has been given over the years to these independent charitable trusts. The trust deeds also include express provisions as to the procedure to be followed in the event of a doubt as to the succession in the Diocese or Parish and the trustees concerned are seeking appropriate professional advice as to their legal duties and obligations in this situation. These matters can of course only be dealt with under English law.

Posted by: Maurice | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 01:44 PM

Crist Aras!

Forgive me.

As St John Chrysostom said "schism is worse than heresy"

We see other parts of the Martyred Russian Church feeling their way together after the events of the 20th century; and now a Bishop wants to create another schism, with possibly the hidden hand of the Oecumenical Throne with Papal pretensions behind it.

Holy Orthodoxy is hierarchical not congregational, we leave that to the Protestants...

Posted by: Benjamin Waterhouse ROCOR England | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 10:55 AM

In answer to Roger Pearse.

You are begging the question: What is an "organization"? And why should Sourozh be and "arm" of the Russian Church. You seem to think of it in Roman Catholic terms. Sourozh was founded on the same principles as the Archdiocese on the Continent, to care for exiles and ANYBODY ELSE who wished to join, and to be inculturated in our society. If the Russians want a bit of England that is for ever Russian they have the resources to establish one, without hijacking the Orthodox Church already settled here.

Posted by: Jeremy Hummerstone | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 09:55 AM

I'm a member of an Orthodox Parish in Bristol. Our Community was founded in 1946 by a group of (mainly) Polish Orthodox. With their Bishop (of the Polish Orthodox Church in Exile) they were taken under the wing of the Throne of Constantinople, (Oecumenical Patriarch), who, technically, has the care for all Orthodox in the Diaspora (ie, all Orthodox living outside their homelands).

In Britain by far the largest Orthodox grouping is the Archdiocese of Thyateira – a See mentioned in the Book of Revelation and transferred to Britain in the 1920s. We have a number of Bishops and a large number of Parishes, mostly of Cypriot descent. As they are living in the Diaspora, they come under the care of the Oecumenical Throne, rather than being an off-shoot of the Church of Cyprus.

Our community struggled to find a suitable Priest for a number of years, until a young Deacon of Russian descent moved to Bristol from London. He was from the Diocese of Sourozh, and so an arrangement was made whereby Sourozh provided the Priest while the Parish remained in Thyateira.

This arrangement worked very well, and it was understood that all Orthodox were welcome to worship with us, as long as all other affiliations, outside the act of worship, were left at the door.

After the fall of the Soviet Union we began to see many more Russians and other Slavs, and a similar situation began to develop in our Community, as the current one in Sourozh.

There was a grouping who wanted traditional Russian worship, in the very formal style currently used by Moscow. Some people wanted to become wholly part of Sourozh, and the rest of us wished to stay where we were, as we could offer pastoral care to all, in the true spirit of the Diaspora. We had also developed (with our close ties with Sourozh) our own British style of Orthodoxy, and venerated the local Saints who were in communion up until the Great Schism of 1054.

Eventually a split occurred and those who wished to, set up their own Community under Sourozh.

It is a terrible thing to have your Eucharistic Community torn in two, but we have survived and gone on from strength to strength and now have members from the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, etc, in a truly oecumenical spirit.

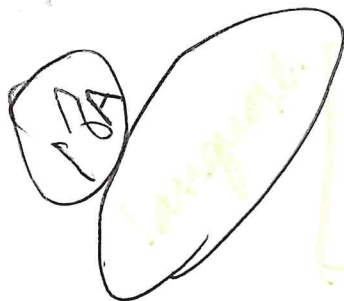
It is interesting to note that we had gradually, over the years, celebrated more and more in

18

The Privileges - British - opposite schism

rather a "clean" version  
as this priest had a very  
serious breakdown. He  
died 2/3 yrs ago.

Confession  
Baptism



English; to the point where there was little Church Slavonic left. When the Parish Council conferred with the Community recently as to restoring more Slavonic in services, we were told that English was preferred, as it was more intelligible than Slavonic! We continue to sing the Lord's Prayer in Slavonic and English, and it is often read in Romanian too. Each group then participating in the language they are used to hearing it in.  
We as a Community can only pray that the oecumenical culture of Surozh is not similarly torn asunder. But if it does, that the true spirit of the Diaspora is re-established, and once again available to all who seek it.

Posted by: Geoff Ford | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 09:37 AM

I would like to respond to the call by Archbishop Innokentii 'We must preserve the unity of the Church, we must remain faithful to the Mother Russian Orthodox Church and to His Holiness, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia'. This is clearly at odds with the actual policy of Moscow Patriarchate vis-a-vis the Diocese of Surozh over the last 4 years: 2 parishes (Manchester and Dublin) were taken under the direct control of Patriarch Alexis thus tearing apart the body of our Church and our Diocese (they are so called 'stavropegic parishes'). As to the second part of the above statement, this does seem the key issue, i.e. call for the loyalty to the national administration and not to the Orthodoxy itself.

Posted by: Olga, a member of Surozh Diocese | Wednesday, 24 May 2006 at 09:16 AM

I am sure Bishop Basil will find a warm welcome if he decides to join the Church of England, which really does have "a uniquely British mould."

Posted by: Alan Marsh | Monday, 22 May 2006 at 12:19 AM

I am not Russian Orthodox, but the principles at issue seem simple enough. Bishop Basil did not found the organisation, nor donate the properties. It was set up as an arm of the Russian church. Therefore he must either submit to the (legitimate) authority of that body, or else leave.

If the central body itself was corrupt and attempting to hijack the organisation for some other purpose than that which it was founded to do, for which money was raised and in which the members believe, that would be a different matter. But that does not seem to be the case here.

Posted by: Roger Pearse | Saturday, 20 May 2006 at 10:18 AM

"Even he might be forced to act if, say, the whole of Ecusa suddenly voted at its convention next month to join the Unitarian Universalists."

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Too late. ECUSA has, in effect, already so joined.

James

Posted by: James | Wednesday, 17 May 2006 at 05:54 PM

### Post a comment

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