



Communiqué N° 18-06 of the Council of the Archdiocese Meeting of 18 October 2006

The Council of the Archdiocese met on 18 October 2006, with His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel in the chair. Among the questions addressed were:

1. *Relations with the Patriarchate of Moscow.*
 - a) The Council of the Archdiocese studied the minutes of the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow on 6 October 2006. It took note of the proposition put forward by the Moscow Patriarchate to try to tackle the problems that have arisen over several years between the Exarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate, within the framework of discussions between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Constantinople (Minute 104:3). The Council was pleased about this initiative, since a distressing situation has been created here for all who experience here these divisions with pain and bitterness. The Council also hopes that a discussion between those responsible in the two Patriarchates – taking account of different aspects presented by the situation – would allow for a reduction in tension and the re-establishment of peace, with respect for the ecclesiological and canonical norms of the Orthodox Tradition.
 - b) Concerning the canonical situation of His Grace Bishop Basil of Amphipolis and the various other clergy mentioned in Minute 104 of the meeting of the Holy Synod of Russia on 6 October 2006, where it is said that ‘some clergy were received into the Exarchate without their having been asked for letters of release from their hierarchical and canonical authority’, i.e. by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Council of the Archdiocese, likewise heard a series of detailed comments whose content can be found as an appendix on the website of the Exarchate (www.exarchat.org).
 - c) The Council of the Archdiocese also judged it was necessary to observe that, contrary to what is said in the note contained in Minute 104:
 - His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel was not ‘appointed head of the Exarchate’ (as one can read in the note) but, like all his predecessors at the head of the Exarchate, was elected by a free and conciliar choice of the Archdiocesan General Assembly at its meeting of 1 May 2003, in conformity with the regulations of the 1917 – 18 Council of Moscow and with the statutes of the Archdiocese. His election was subsequently confirmed by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Throne.
 - The ‘direction of the Exarchate’ has on no occasion and in no way abandoned – nor is it abandoning – the spiritual heritage of Metropolitan Evlogii and of those who succeeded him in the work of building up the Church in Western Europe. It is precisely in fidelity to their teaching, and in conformity with Orthodox ecclesiology, which is based on the territorial aspect of the Church as manifest in one place, that the Archdiocese calls earnestly for the creation of a Church that is locally and geographically one, like that which was proposed in 1949 in particular by Metropolitan Vladimir and the members of the General Assembly of the Archdiocese, and has been confirmed on numerous subsequent occasions,

notably by the late Archbishop Serge: 'Our existence under the *omophor* of the Ecumenical Patriarch for seventy years and our taking root in Western Europe in the course of these long decades has created a situation which is altogether new [by comparison with the time of Metropolitan Evlogii]. It can no longer be a question simply of a return by our Archdiocese [...] beneath the *omophor* of the Patriarch of Moscow. We have to seek together, in a spirit of mutual understanding and love, the ways towards a global solution of the problem of the Orthodox diaspora in the West.'

2. Episcopal Vicariate of the British Isles:

His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel will chair the annual conference of the Vicariate which will take place on Saturday 18 November in London, on the theme, 'Finding our Freedom in Christ', with two talks on the programme: 'Our Future – the Local Church' by Archbishop Gabriel, and 'Continuity and Change – the Vicariate in the Context of Orthodoxy in Western Europe' by Bishop Basil.

3. Parishes

- The community of Stavanger (Norway) was recognised as a parish. They now have a resident priest, and liturgical celebrations in Slavonic take place regularly each week (Vigil and Liturgy at weekends and also Great Feasts).
- At Antwerp (Belgium), on 5 November, Archbishop Gabriel will preside at the celebration for the dedication of the new church of the Dutch-speaking parish of the Holy and Great Martyr George.
- An enquiry in process by a working group led by Archpriest Alexis Struve will soon publish its findings on the rectors of parishes in order to allow a better framework for the structure and life of the parishes of the Archdiocese.

4. Commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the death of Metropolitan Evlogii

The commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the death of Metropolitan Evlogii took place on Saturday 7 October alongside the diocesan conference chaired by Archbishop Gabriel at the St Sergius Institute. A detailed account has been written and published[?]. Other meetings will take place, notably Sunday 12 November at the House of ACER in Paris, with a talk by Madame Tatiana Victoroff on 'Metropolitan Evlogii and ACER'

5. Catechism for new immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe:

The formation course put in place by the diocese in Paris will resume in the second week of November. The catechetical team, which has been given into the care of Archpriest Wladimir Yagello, is organised into three separate groups, which meet in premises belonging to the parish of Our Lady of the Sign, the parish of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, and the St Sergius Institute (see posters for the days, times and ways of enrolling). A catechetical course of the same type, led by Archpriest George Ashkov, has also been set up by the parish of St Nicholas (Nice), meeting once a month.

6. Meeting of rectors and parish wardens from Paris and the surrounding area:

A meeting for the exchange of views and information concerning problems of administration, law and property, as well as the general situation of the Archdiocese, will take place with the rectors and parish wardens of Paris and the surrounding area on 2 December at rue Daru. A meeting of the same kind already took place in February 2005.

Appendices

- Regarding the canonical situation of the clergy mentioned in the Minute 104 of the meeting of the Holy Synod of Russia on 6 October 2006, the Council of the Archdiocese wishes to make known the following facts.
- In the first place, the Council cannot but affirm, as it has regrettably already had occasion to do, that it is actually the Patriarchate of Moscow, at the session of its Holy Synod on 24 December 2004, that took upon itself the heavy responsibility of deciding that it would not take into account disciplinary measures taken or which would be taken against one or another clergyman by the diocesan Archbishop in charge of the Exarchate (Minute 92:3), and would receive into their jurisdiction any priest, subordinate up to that point to the Archdiocese, who wanted to be received, without demanding from him a canonical letter of release (Minute 93). On the basis of these decisions, which gravely contravened every ecclesial norm, the Patriarchate of Moscow then received into its jurisdiction and allowed to celebrate a clergyman of the Archdiocese who had been forbidden *a divinis* by His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel for serious lapses in ecclesial discipline, and who was then reduced to lay status by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. There is no doubt but that 'to trample on the canons on which Church life has been founded over the centuries is an extremely dangerous thing' (Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, interview with the agency RIA-Novosti, 15 October 2006).
- Concerning His Grace Bishop Basil of Amphipolis, the Council can only remind Moscow Patriarchate that since 8 June this year he has been under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to whom he appealed on 14 May, in conformity with Canons 9 and 17 of the Holy and Great Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, which grant the Archbishop of Constantinople the right to 'administer justice' to 'any bishop or clergyman' who was having a dispute with the authority of his Local Church. It was by a Patriarchal and Synodal decision that His Grace Bishop Basil was received under the *omphor* of the Ecumenical Patriarch. This decision, moreover, was strengthened by the unanimous opinion of several Primates of other territorial Orthodox Churches: the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, as well as the heads of the Churches of Cyprus and Albania, who recognised the decision as well-founded. The Council of the Archdiocese has neither any reason - nor any right - to question this decision, which comes from the highest canonical authority, the Holy Ecumenical Throne, and protects His Grace Bishop Basil from any measures taken by the hierarchy of another Church to which he no longer belongs. Thus, in particular, the suspension put into place against him by the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow at their meeting of 19 July 2006 (Minute 75:6) can have no effect.
- As for those worthy clergymen, sixteen priests and deacons who are currently under the authority of his Grace Bishop Basil of Amphipolis within the Vicariate of the British Isles, they too can no longer be affected by any decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, in that they have already been released from their obligations and ties to the Diocese of Sourozh by valid and canonical letters of release signed in proper and due manner by His Grace Bishop Basil while he was still administrator of the said Diocese of Sourozh. On the basis of these letters, these clergy were for the most part first received into the Archdiocese of Thyateira (Ecumenical Patriarchate) last June – a move that has in

no way been contested by Moscow – and then subsequently, on presentation of letters of release given by His Eminence the Archbishop of Thyateira, transferred to our Exarchate.

- As regards Archpriest George Ashkov, the Council of the Archdiocese declared that the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (Minute 112: ‘To bless the passing of Archpriest G. Ashkov into the Archdiocese of Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe (Patriarchate of Constantinople), and in light of this to send a letter of release for the said clergyman to Archbishop Gabriel of Comana’) renders null and void the claims expressed in this regard in Minute 104, according to which this priest had been received into the Archdiocese ‘without having asked for a letter of release.’ Archpriest George Ashkov was received into the clergy of the Archdiocese by a decree of 10 January 2006, on presentation of a first canonical letter signed by His Eminence Metropolitan Iuvenalii of Krutits and Kolomna, dated 19 December 2005 (a copy of this Decree No. 3549 can be seen by anyone at the office of the Diocesan Administration). This decree conforms in every way to those which other priests of the Moscow Patriarchate have received in the past and were brought within the Archdiocese, both in the time of the late Archbishop Serge and during the two first years that Archbishop Gabriel was head of the Archdiocese. It would appear that the Patriarchate of Moscow has now decided, on its own authority, to change the way this kind of document is issued, thereby requiring in the present case a second letter, which was also issued by His Eminence Metropolitan Iuvenalii in response to a request to this effect by His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel,
- Finally, as regards the complaints of the Moscow Patriarchate about the manner of reception into the clergy of the Exarchate of Priest Miron Bogutskii (placed under ban in 1993 by His Eminence Archbishop Iuvenalii of Kursk and Belgorod), the members of the Council of the Archdiocese and the Ecclesiastical Court, who met in joint session on 23 March 2006, have already had the opportunity to study the explanations of Father Miron Bogutskii (cf. Council Communiqué 07-06). Today the Council wishes to place on record that neither any witness nor any valid argument has been presented as to tangible and indisputable acts transgressing ecclesiastical discipline that could be imputed to Father Miron Bogutskii and would justify the sanctions taken against him in the Diocese of Kursk and Belgorod thirteen years ago when he was secretary of the bishop of that diocese. Indeed, on the contrary, it emerges from the testimony of Father Bogutskii that it was because of his protests against various transgressions of good ecclesiastical order and Christian morality in the life of the diocese, that he found himself mercilessly persecuted, being sent to a distant parish and then suspended. The apparent injustice and severity of the sanctions in question led this priest to turn to the so-called ‘Patriarchate of Kiev’, thus putting himself outside communion with the fullness of the Orthodox Church. One cannot but thank God, who allowed this priest, now definitively settled in Norway, to rejoin communion with universal Church through an act of repentance and by approaching the Exarchate so as to continue there in a worthy manner his pastoral service, to the very great satisfaction of the faithful of the community of Stavanger, for which he is now responsible. The holy and venerable Church of Russia, in the course of its long history, has always known how to show mercy and forgiveness, as taught by our only Master and Shepherd. Thus it is impossible to doubt that the highest authority of the Russian Orthodox Church will know how to show proof of its leniency and compassion, and that she will overlook in her forbearance the possible weaknesses – if so they prove to be – of a clergyman who is today restored to the true ecclesial path.