

*Criticism of the Commission  
Make up*

06/06

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

Readers may have seen the report on Interfax News Agency that Bishop Basil had refused to meet the Commission of Enquiry three times. The evening that the Sourozh Conference began in Oxford Bishop Basil was invited to speak to the Commission of Enquiry who were present at the Conference. He declined on the grounds that while he would be happy to speak to an objective and independent Commission, the present one could not be said to have these qualities.

The following day he was invited to speak to Archbishop Innokentii and Archbishop Mark without the two priests. He declined on the same grounds.

On Wednesday 31 May 2006, Bishop Basil met briefly with Archbishop Innokentii at a neutral location in London, and reiterated his concerns.

The following analysis of the Commission has been received from Russia:

Looking at the composition of the Commission sent by the Department of External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate to examine the situation in the Diocese of Sourozh, I am struck by the very high level of competence of the Commission's members, the very rich and diverse fund of personal, social, political, religious and national experience at their disposal.

Unfortunately, I know nothing of the four members of the Commission outside the officially published data, apart from one piece of knowledge freely imparted by Archbishop Innokenti at a Sourozh Diocesan Conference informing us that he had been married before becoming a monk. Not knowing how this marriage ended and refusing to speculate on it, I do simply note that this is a man who is familiar with personal loss and therefore will be able to understand the many widowed and divorced members of the flock who bring their distress to the church.

Otherwise, we have only the published data on the members of the Commission, as follows.

To start with, three of them are long-term and highly (or relatively highly) placed employees of the Department of External Church Relations (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate - the very body to whom the late Metropolitan Anthony and after him Bishop Basil of Sergievo as well as many others have been appealing strongly but in vain for formal support against a small and exceptionally active minority who have been fomenting trouble in the Diocese and undermining the authority of our Bishops by communicating directly with the Patriarchate authorities in Moscow. It is very understandable that there are people who do not believe that these three members of the Commission might be impartial in examining complaints against their own employer.

**Archbishop Mark of Berlin**, the fourth member of the Commission, is more puzzling: an Archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) who has been the most active participant of the rapprochement between his own branch of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate. A major conference has just come to a partially successful conclusion to these negotiations, but the press in Russia, the USA (where most of Archbishop Mark's colleagues live), and in Western Europe indicate that the terms of this rapprochement are unclear. The Western-based side seems to insist that the rapprochement concerns only a possible religious re-establishment of Communion, whereas the Russian side seems to envisage an additional administrative element, with the Moscow Patriarchate gaining at least a measure of administrative control over ROCOR and its 500,000 or so members all over the world. I for one am worried that unresolved items on the ROCOR agenda will influence the commission's work, particularly since the two dignitaries who have been heading the Moscow Patriarchate-ROCOR negotiations are actually Archbishop Innokenti of Korsun and Archbishop Mark of Berlin, the two highest-ranking members of the 4-man commission sent to investigate the affairs of Sourozh.

*Personal background of the members of the Commission*

#### **Archbishop Innokenti of Korsun**

His full Curriculum vitae is on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate and it makes very impressive reading. The Moscow Patriarchate is fortunate in having such a highly qualified person to conduct its affairs in Western Europe, where he is based in Paris. A career diplomat in Soviet times, a trained communicator presenting his country's message to its expatriate and former citizens living abroad through the Soviet equivalent of the BBC World Service, he also acquired



experience in international business (gas) and academia. In other words, in the first 33 years of his life he has been brilliantly prepared for worldly success. In 1980, however, he moved from this success in the world to serve the Church. Ordained in 1981, he rose to a bishopric in 1992 and occupied a series of most important positions, including a period in Japan at a time of trouble in the Orthodox Church there.

We have therefore at the head of Moscow's Commission investigating the affairs of the Diocese of Sourozh a man with extraordinarily high qualifications.

The official CV does not give any private details, of course, or any comment on personality, but one may see indications even in the bare bones of dates, locations and jobs.

Valeri Vassiliev, the future Archbishop Innokenti, was born in 1947 in Staraia Russa, Novgorod region. This is a very significant date and location: he was born 2 years after the end of the dreadful war and in an area that suffered immense damage under German occupation. The very fact of having been under German occupation was a major crime in those times. We do not know, of course, whether his parents themselves had suffered this fate, but a heavy stigma is still attached to all the occupied territories and people connected with them even now.

He served in the Soviet Army 1966-1969, which means that he was not a student at age 19 (if he had been, he would have been eligible for deferment of service or some other privilege). He did receive a higher education, though, and in an exceptionally prestigious establishment: MGIMO, the Institute run by the Soviet Foreign Office which trained diplomats and foreign relations specialists. To be admitted into this institute a candidate from the provinces had to be truly exceptional; a boy from Staraia Russa even more so. In any case, the candidate had to be fully approved and recommended by his local and professional Communist authority: at the very least, by those of school army. We cannot know, of course, whether the future Archbishop was a Communist in his heart or not, but there was no possibility of his avoiding membership and all outward proofs of faith and enthusiastic support for Communism throughout his young life. Nothing in his career indicates any change of behaviour until 1980.

It is interesting to note that this particular year, 1980, was the year designated by the Communist leadership as the one in which the Church would be entirely and irremediably eradicated from the Soviet Union. We, Orthodox Christians in the West who accepted the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate, used to say as fervently as we could the prayer composed especially by the leaders of our West European Exarchate, asking Our Lord to open the minds and hearts of Soviet leaders who were persecuting the Church. We prayed again and again for "Sauls, the persecutors of Christians, to be turned into Pauls, Apostles of the Christian faith". 1980 was a time of great lassitude, almost paralysis, in the Soviet Union, and it passed without the Soviet leaders proclaiming the end of religion or indeed anything at all on the subject of religion.

The great qualifications of the young deacon (May 1980) and then priest (August 1980) were recognised and used without his being required to undertake any formal theological study, as far as we can tell - if he had undertaken such a course, it would surely have appeared on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate. We do see that he was a librarian and teacher at the Odessa seminary 1990-92, but not a student. (It is a matter of interest what he could have taught there). It is not for a lay person to comment on his ecclesiastical career, but one notes multiple moves from one area of the huge country to another. To me, this is an indication of his being groomed for another diplomatic or administrative career rather than trained to be a Diocesan Bishop: we have always been taught that an Orthodox Bishop is "married" to his Diocese to the end of his days, unless he is moved to be invested of higher authority.

The CV does not mention any foreign languages, and certainly in his negotiations in the UK Archbishop Innokenti always speaks through interpreters. I understand this is also the case in France.

This too indicates that Archbishop Innokentii understands the value of protocol and also possesses an immense amount of self-control. It is unthinkable that a Soviet diplomat was not taught foreign languages - and enquiries of graduates have confirmed this. Indeed, observing Archbishop Innokenti in action, it is difficult to avoid hearing him speak English in informal situations. In formal ones, however, he patiently waits for translations to be performed, however slow and possibly inaccurate they may be. There are great advantages to this practice, the most obvious one being that he can take time to consider his statement.

If we consider the activities of Archbishop Innokentii in France, Germany and Italy since he settled in Paris, we see that he has been very active indeed in using his skills to extend the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate in local Church circles, and that his activities have included moves to take over property of local Orthodox believers. Some of these moves have been successful; some have been fought off in courts of law. The situation in Germany is suspended while negotiations (headed by Archbishops Innokentii and Mark) are proceeding. Archbishop Mark may be considered to be in charge of administering Orthodox Church property in Germany. He lacks the skills and the diplomatic backing with which Archbishop Innokentii is so richly endowed. It is very difficult indeed to comprehend why he is included in a commission of enquiry in the affairs of a Diocese located exclusively in the United Kingdom.

#### Father Nikolai Balyshev

A senior member of the Department of External Relations, Father Nikolai is very experienced in dealing with communities outside the Patriarchate. His personal experience may well give him a greater understanding of the people in the Diocese

of Sourozh: he used to be a Baptist and converted to Orthodoxy as an adult. He may therefore be able to empathise with our members who came to the Orthodox faith from other strands of Christianity. He may also be more familiar than most with the attitudes which converts meet when faced with those who have no experience of conversion, also with those who never felt they had a choice, only certitude.

### **Father Mikhail Dudko**

A fairly senior member of the Department of External Relations, Father Mikhail is the son of a very famous dissident priest of post- Stalinist times. He must have suffered greatly in his early years, both during his father's great popularity with those, both in Russia and abroad, who opposed the official line of the Moscow Patriarchate, and possibly even more after his father could no longer sustain the dreadfully unequal fight. We do not know how his personal experiences affect his thoughts and behaviour, but we have witnessed his support for the very vociferous "Initiative group" in the London parish during his "visit of inspection" to London in Lent 2006, we witnessed his lack of support for our Bishop, we know that he refused to speak to several people suggested to him by our Bishop (these include the Dean of the Cathedral, Father John Lee). Therefore we, those who have seen Father Mikhail Dudko in action, are quite certain that he is not an objective member of the Commission of Enquiry.

### *Conclusion*

It is a great pity that the Moscow Patriarchate misses a unique opportunity to listen to the voice of people who have supported it through nearly 60 years of very great difficulty. We could, in love, trust and faith, remain friends and we could have helped the Moscow Patriarchate to acquire much needed knowledge, also to regain contact with the roots of Russian Orthodoxy which were almost eradicated in the Soviet Union but which survived in the West. These roots produced an immense flourishing of theological thought, rooted in the Russian pre-Revolutionary school and in the Council of 1917-18 and carefully nurtured in Paris, New York in London, to name but three. We wanted - and still want - to give these riches to Russia, because this is the real, the true treasure which we possess and which the Moscow Patriarchate needs.

We will now retreat one pace and hope to continue our life of worship, thought, social service, ecumenical friendship and publishing abroad, under the protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We do most sincerely hope and pray that our Mother Church will recover from the heavy, almost deadly wounds inflicted on her since 1917 and that She will find peace.