

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR
EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE ON
THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CRISIS
IN THE DIOCESE OF SOUROZH**

Editorial Note: The Report which is being reproduced here from the Nachrichtendienst Ostlichen Kirchen from Muenster, Germany, presents one perspective regarding a crisis created by the request of Bishop Basil of the Diocese of Sourozh in England to change jurisdiction from the Patriarchate of Moscow to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. We would have preferred to present a balanced analysis or at least also to provide the point of view of the other party in the conflict but since we did not have available materials we decided that our readers may wish to at least become aware of the issue even from a one-sided viewpoint.

The present report has been compiled from materials gathered by the Commission investigating the crisis in the Diocese of Sourozh. This is connected with the decision of the Diocesan Administrator, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, to go over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Commission was appointed by decree of His Holiness Alexis, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, on 9 May 2006, and approved in the Minutes of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of 7 June 2006. The temporary Administrator of the Diocese of Sourozh, Archbishop Innokenty of Korsun, was appointed Chairman of the Commission. Other members were Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain (ROCOR), Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, Secretary for Inter-Orthodox Relations in the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (DECR) and Priest Michael Dudko, Secretary for Church-Society Relations of the DECR.

The Commission examined oral and written evidence collected by it at two meetings: on 27 and 28 May in Oxford and 29 and 30 May in London, and also from 17 to 20 June in London. There were press interviews with those who were directly involved in the conflict, as well as those who witnessed it, and likewise documents and official correspondence on matters concerning the Diocese of Sourozh. Also there were documents of the Charity Commission, Trust Deeds and other documents concerning Diocesan and Parish property, as well as minutes of Parish meetings, meetings of the Parish Council of the Cathedral, and meetings of the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of Sourozh. These documents totaled over 2,500 pages.

The Commission's task was to make an objective and unprejudiced study of the crisis which had unfolded in the Diocese, on the basis of documents available to it, as well as oral and written evidence presented to the Commission by those involved in the events linked with the crisis, and by those who witnessed it. The work of the Commission was timed to begin with the Annual Conference of the Diocese of Sourozh in Oxford. All those present were given the opportunity to share with members of the Commission their views as to why the crisis had taken place. The clergy, lay people and members of parish councils at the Conference were all asked for their views. Members of the Sourozh Diocese were invited to meet the Commission on several occasions, through announcements made after services at the Cathedral and during the Diocesan Conference in Oxford. These were also placed on the official website of the Sourozh Diocese and the Cathedral notice-board. In particular cases, witnesses were invited to give their testimonies in person, either orally or else in writing. 52 individuals decided to do this before the Commission. Apart from this, 17 written testimonies were sent to the Commission. Despite being invited three times, Bishop Basil refused to meet the Commission as a whole and he also declined a separate meeting with Archbishop Innokenty and Archbishop Mark.

The Commission noted that materials placed on the website set up with the blessing of Bishop Basil, www.dioceseinfo.org, in effect recommended members of the Sourozh Diocese not to co-operate with members of the Commission and this complicated the Commission's work. At the same time, the Commission had at its disposition publications from the Russian and British press, as well as from the website set up with the blessing of Bishop Basil. In these publications Bishop Basil himself and his supporters set out their views on the crisis and its causes. These publications were also scrutinized by the Commission. All the information presented in this Communication is confirmed by documents and testimonies collected by the Commission and made available to the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

A Note on the Diocese of Sourozh

The basis of the Diocese of Sourozh was the Parish of the Dormition in London, which existed as the Embassy Church since 1716. Since it began it has changed address on several occasions. At the present time it is situated in the building of the former Anglican All Saints Church. After 1917 the Parish was in the jurisdiction of the Supreme Church Council

Outside Russia. In 1926 the Parish split into those who continued to support the Karlovtsy Synod and those who supported the West-European Diocese. Each group took services in turn.

In 1931 the Parish was taken into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1945, together with the Exarchate of Western Europe, the Parish was reunited with the Moscow Patriarchate, but remained within this jurisdiction after the Western European Exarchate had returned to the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1946. At that time the Rector of the Dormition Parish was Archpriest Vladimir Theokritov (+ 1950).

In 1948 Hieromonk Anthony (Bloom) came to London, having been appointed chaplain to the Anglican-Orthodox Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. On 1 September 1950 Hieromonk Anthony became Rector of the Russian Parish of the Dormition in London. By that time the Parish of the Dormition was not the only parish in Great Britain. On the initiative of N. Zernov, a Russian Orthodox center was founded in Oxford. This was 'The House of St Gregory and St Macrina'. Oxford became the center of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. Other parishes appeared, set up by Russian Orthodox communities. In 1957 the Vicariate of Sergievo of the Exarchate of Western Europe (Moscow Patriarchate) was formed in Great Britain. Anthony (Bloom) became Bishop of Sergievo. On 10 October 1962 the independent Diocese of Sourozh was formed, headed by Archbishop Anthony (Bloom) with the title of Sourozh.

On 1 January 2006 the clergy of the Sourozh Diocese consisted of 2 bishops, 24 priests and 13 deacons. There were 9 parishes and 25 'eucharistic communities' (communities consisting of a small number of families, where services are conducted once or twice a month), making a total of 34. 7 church buildings belonged to the parishes, 7 were private properties and the other buildings belonged to various Christian denominations.

On the basis of evidence submitted, the Commission came to the conclusion that the critical events linked to Bishop Basil's decision to go over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople were the result of a long build-up of tension in the Diocese. Nearly all the witnesses questioned by the Commission spoke unanimously of this. This is also confirmed by the documents made available to the Commission. One of the first signs of the build-up of tension were the events surrounding the stay in Britain of Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev). On the basis of the materials at its disposition, the Commission considered it important to point out that the appointment of Bishop Hilarion as an assistant bishop of the Diocese of Sourozh

came about exclusively in connection with the repeated and insistent demands of Metropolitan Anthony, who valued Bishop Hilarion as a bishop who could take pastoral care of the Russian-speaking part of the flock. Witnesses mentioned that Bishop Hilarion was highly educated, had pastoral abilities and was able to mix freely with both the Russian-speaking and the English-speaking flock. During his stay in Great Britain Bishop Hilarion was initially well accepted by both parts of the flock. The lack of acceptance of Bishop Hilarion can be explained by actions which were interpreted by one part of the community as attempts to change established customs in the Diocese.

Bishop Basil stated that his conversations with Metropolitan Anthony about the possibility of going over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople date back to that time. This contradicts the repeated public assurances of Metropolitan Anthony of his unconditional loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate. Bishop Basil also stated that the preparation of 'letters of dismissal' for clergy of the Diocese dates back to that time and that these were written with the knowledge and approval of Metropolitan Anthony. If this was the case, then their preparation was kept secret, since some of the closest and most trusted assistants of Metropolitan Anthony did not know of them. According to several testimonies, Bishop Basil himself stated even then that 'he had no future in the Patriarchate'. The Commission noted that on 13 May 2002 an attempt was made to change the way in which property connected with the Cathedral was managed. On that day there was a Parish Council meeting, at which changes to the 1944 Trust Deed were put forward. According to the 1944 Trust Deed, the management of parish property and decisions regarding issues about 'the continuity of parish life and the identity of the community' remained within the competence of the Parish Council. The members of the Parish Council were elected by the Parish. The proposed changes would have allowed property to be removed from the control of the Parish Council and handed over to the exclusive competence of unelected members of the committee of Trustees of the Parish. The attempted change was unsuccessful. Some witnesses considered that this attempt to change the way that property connected to the Cathedral was managed was designed to ease the transfer of property, in the case of a change of jurisdiction from the Moscow Patriarchate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. During a talk given in the Cathedral on 28 November 2002, Metropolitan Anthony himself said: 'It is not a question of taking this building or any other church property away from our native Church, but of defending it, as is mentioned in the statutes of the Moscow Patriarchate, where it says that everything must be

done in accordance with local laws...It is not a matter of appropriating this building or any other church property of our Diocese, but of our Diocese keeping this property intact for the Russian Church. In saying this, I hope that I have reassured those who think that we want to have the ability to separate ourselves from our native Church and take its property with us'. Such declarations were also made by Metropolitan Anthony at the Parish Council meeting on 6 November 2002.

Finally, in order to refute any suggestion that there was any intention to remove the Cathedral or the Diocese from the Moscow Patriarchate, a joint statement of Metropolitan Anthony, Archbishop Anatoly and Bishop Basil was made on 5 January 2003 and made public at the General Meeting of the London Parish on 12 January 2003. However the suggestion by several parishioners that this statement be published was not carried out, inasmuch as Bishop Basil stated that it had to be edited. Neither was this statement sent to His Holiness the Patriarch. However, documents confirm that at the Diocesan Assemblies and at Parish Council meetings the question of changing the management of property was clearly discussed in the context of 'a possible conflict with Moscow about property'. Witnesses call the period between July 2002 and December 2005 relatively calm. All the witnesses noted that Metropolitan Anthony's funeral was an extremely significant event for the Diocese, which spiritually united all its members.

Many documents testify to the fact that Bishop Basil and diocesan clergy openly supported the initiatives of the Moscow Patriarchate connected with the organization of the Church in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the Commission considered it necessary to point out that critical events were taking place at this time. It is clear from evidence submitted that even in 2002 Bishop Basil was trying to persuade Metropolitan Anthony to go over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This met with strong objections from the Metropolitan. Later on, Bishop Basil often used to talk of the possibility of going over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The situation developed further under the influence of Metropolitan Anthony's decision that Bishop Basil should take care of the English-speaking part of the flock and Archbishop Anatoly the Russian-speaking part, 'not under Bishop Basil, but working together', in other words virtually independently of one another. This was stated by Metropolitan Anthony at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Cathedral Parish on 12 January 2003. At the same time as repeatedly publicly confirming his loyalty to the Moscow

Patriarchate, Metropolitan Anthony also carefully wished to preserve the original features of the Diocese, which was later interpreted by supporters of the separatist current in their favor. Witnesses say that relations between Archbishop Anatoly and Bishop Basil were tense and this was expressed particularly clearly immediately before Bishop Basil's decision to change jurisdictions. Letters of Bishop Basil and Archbishop Anatoly at that time also witness to this. On the basis of evidence submitted, the Commission considers it necessary to point out that Archbishop Anatoly lived in a damp basement flat and for a long time his monthly salary was at a level several times inferior to that of other members of the Cathedral clergy. Archbishop Anatoly was distanced from decisions regarding the running of the Cathedral, including liturgical decisions. Witnesses spoke of instances when some of the parishioners and choir members behaved in a rude and tactless manner and did not carry out Archbishop Anatoly's instructions when he was celebrating.

In his open letter of 9 May 2006, Bishop Basil speaks of insufficient help given to him by Archbishop Anatoly in caring for the Russian-speaking flock, and his support of 'dissident' attitudes. The Commission considers it important to note that witnesses unanimously testified that the critical events concerned only the Cathedral in London. There was no tension in the other parishes of the Diocese. The fact that they belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church did not hinder English-speaking priests from working with their flocks. Letters of Russian-speaking parishioners from 2002-2003 mention that there were not enough Russian-speaking priests in the parish to celebrate services and, in particular, to confess, that English was gradually used more and more as a liturgical language, and that this was disproportionate to the actual number of English people at the Cathedral, that Bishop Basil was not trusted and that he spoke about the possibility of going over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Those who wrote these letters called attention to the neglect of Russian Orthodox traditions in the way that both regular and occasional services were celebrated.

The reply of Metropolitan Kirill, the Chairman of the External Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, according to the appraisal of Bishop Basil himself, tried to support the unity and to preserve the integrity of the Diocese. The problems mentioned came up between 2002 and 2005, and also later, at Parish Council meetings and at General Meetings of the Cathedral, but were not dealt with effectively. Bishop Basil's decision to go over to another jurisdiction was preceded by the very recent conflict linked to Archpriest Andrei Teterin. The Commission noted that Archpriest Andrei was found in Russia by

Archpriest Michael Fortounatto and was sent to serve in London at the personal and insistent request of Bishop Basil. Witnesses mentioned the pastoral qualities of Archpriest Andrei Teterin and his high authority among all parishioners at the beginning of his stay in London. Towards the end of his service, Archpriest Andrei Teterin began to express the interests and needs of that part of the parishioners who wanted to see practices in the parishes brought into line with those to which they were accustomed before coming to England. From December 2005 onwards, Archpriest Andrei Teterin harshly criticized not only established liturgical practices, but also the leadership of the Diocese and clergy of the Cathedral. The bans imposed on Father Andrei by the leadership of the Diocese because of his outspokenness at the Conference of the Russian Christian Movement seem excessively strict. The Commission noted that his suspension was accompanied by a prohibition not only to be in the altar, but also to be in the church itself, which seems unthinkable from a canonical viewpoint.

The conflict between the Diocesan leadership and Archpriest Andrei Teterin developed in a written form. There was no personal contact and Archpriest Andrei was not summoned for a discussion and this only made the situation worse. In his correspondence with Bishop Basil, Archpriest Andrei Teterin used disrespectful and improper expressions, which are inadmissible for one ordained to the priesthood. The dismissal of Archpriest Andrei Teterin aroused indignation among a significant part of the Russian-speaking parishioners and this was reflected in internet polemics and letters sent to Moscow requesting support. Bishop Basil's accusations that the DECR supported the protestors in the parish are not founded on solid facts and are not supported by documentary evidence. Contrary to the assertions of Bishop Basil, support for his efforts, aimed at normalizing church life and especially at reconciling the various groups of the faithful in the Sourozh Diocese, was repeatedly expressed in letters sent to him by His Holiness Patriarch Alexis and the leadership of the DECR.

On 20 March 2006 Bishop Basil sent out a decree dismissing six members of the Cathedral Parish Council who had openly advocated closer links between the Diocese of Sourozh and the life and practices of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Commission noted that the members of the Parish Council who had been dismissed had been elected by the Parish Meeting, in accordance with established parish procedures. The dismissal of members of the Parish Council by decree of the Diocesan Administrator contradicted established procedures for the replacement of members of the Council. Since, according to the Trust

Deed, members of the Parish Council are responsible for managing parish property, the dismissed supporters of the Moscow Patriarchate might well have thought that this was a preparation for going over to another jurisdiction.

The letter addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Alexis of Moscow and All Russia stating his intention to transfer to the Patriarchate of Constantinople was sent by Bishop Basil just when the Secretary for Relations between Church and Society of the DECR, Fr Michael Dudko, was in London. He had gone to London to help with services at the Cathedral during Lent and Easter. This need had arisen in connection with the removal of Archpriest Andrei Teterin. Bishop Basil was positive about the fact that Fr Michael had been sent to London. Subsequent assertions by Bishop Basil that Fr Michael Dudko had refused to meet his supporters do not correspond to reality.

On 24 April 2006, Bright Monday, Bishop Basil sent a letter to His Holiness Patriarch Alexis of Moscow and All Russia, stating his intention to go over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. On 4 May this letter arrived at the DECR for translation into Russian. On 5 May His Holiness Patriarch Alexis sent a reply to Bishop Basil, exhorting him to continue his work in caring for the flock of the Sourozh Diocese within the Russian Orthodox Church. On 2 May, without waiting for His Holiness' reply, Bishop Basil sent a letter to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople with a request to be received into his jurisdiction. A day before this, on 1 May, Bishop Basil had sent out a letter to the clergy of the Sourozh Diocese with an appeal to follow him into the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Commission noted that the letters had been sent off without consulting the clergy and laity of the Diocese. The fact that a letter had been sent to His Holiness Patriarch Alexis was not revealed for some days.

Without waiting for a reply from the Moscow Patriarchate, Bishop Basil sent a letter to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which he then refused to withdraw. Despite a request not to reveal his decision to leave for another jurisdiction until he had learned of the contents of the reply of His Holiness Patriarch Alexis, handed to him before the liturgy in London on 7 May, Bishop Basil made an announcement to the Parish that day about the step that he had taken, without acquainting himself with the reply. Bishop Basil did not avail himself of the offer to meet His Holiness Patriarch Alexis in order to discuss the situation and did not reply in writing to the appeal of the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church to him.

His reasons for going over to the Constantinople jurisdiction and the timing of it were set out by Bishop Basil in his Open Letter to members of the Diocese of Sourozh on 16 May 2006. Bishop Basil wrote that he had decided to go over to another jurisdiction, 'because it had become obvious that the Moscow Patriarchate was planning to make the Diocese of Sourozh correspond to its idea of a "normal diocese" outside Russia', and that, in his opinion, their first concern would be the recent arrivals from the former Soviet Union. Bishop Basil also explained his departure by his lengthy temporary status as Diocesan Administrator, the lack of help from Archbishop Anatoly, the confrontation with Archpriest Andrei Teterin and part of the Parish Council, the internet campaign against him as Diocesan Administrator and, in the words of Bishop Basil, the fact that, 'I saw that I was gradually being worn down under pressure from the opposition'. The personal nature of the decision, that is, the lack of any preliminary consultations with the clergy and the Diocesan Assembly, are explained by Bishop Basil as his fear of dismissal, before such time as he could take steps, 'so that the clergy would be released from obedience to the Patriarchate'.

In this connection, the Commission noted that there is no evidence that anyone wished to make 'the first concern' of the Sourozh Diocese the care for new arrivals from the former Soviet Union, to the detriment of continuing care for English people and representatives of the old emigration. For some years after the death of Metropolitan Anthony, church life there has kept its original features in full, in accordance with his vision of the future of the Sourozh Diocese. Neither is there any evidence that the Moscow Patriarchate put in doubt the traditional diocesan mission to English speakers. Despite the naming of His Grace Bishop Basil as Bishop of Sergievo, and not of Sourozh, this fact did not have any influence on his full authority as the Diocesan Administrator officially appointed by the Holy Synod.

At the same time there were many protests from members of the Diocese, which mentioned his inability to put forward a program of diocesan life suitable for all its members, both English and Russian-speaking. The adoption by him of the episcopal title of Sourozh, corresponding to that of the Diocese, but without changing anything in the scope of his powers, could have led to even sharper controversy. The confrontation with one member of the diocesan clergy, Archpriest Andrei Teterin, had already been overcome by his ejection from England when the decision to go over to another jurisdiction was taken.

A confrontation with part of the Parish Council did indeed take place, but on issues which really troubled the parishioners at the Cathedral and members of the Diocese. The calming of this confrontation was a management problem, which should have been implemented gradually with the participation of all members of the Parish and the Diocese, taking into account their interests. What Bishop Basil called in his Open Letter 'an internet campaign' was not an action organized by anyone and aimed at discrediting Bishop Basil. In the Forum of Deacon Andrei Kuraev, among a great many others, a free discussion arose spontaneously, in which supporters and critics of Bishop Basil took part. The tiredness of Bishop Basil, connected with solving problems in running the complex Sourozh Diocese, of which he speaks in his Open Letter, was his personal problem, which should not have been dealt with by changing jurisdictions. The personal nature of the decision he took to go over to another jurisdiction does not correspond to the spirit and the letter of the statutes of the Diocese of Sourozh, to which Bishop Basil professes loyalty. The secrecy which surrounded the decision to change jurisdictions cannot be explained, as Bishop Basil tries in his Open Letter, by a possible move to counter the handing out of letters of dismissal. As Bishop Basil himself testifies, these 'letters of dismissal' had already been prepared beforehand in February.

Some witnesses explained the timing of the move to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople by the imminent re-elections to the Parish Council. In connection with the increasing numbers of new Russian-speaking parishioners with the right to vote, the supporters of unity with the Moscow Patriarchate could have obtained a majority on the Council. This would have complicated the transfer of property to another jurisdiction. In this connection, witnesses pointed out infringements of electoral procedures to the Parish Council in recent years. The so-called 'letters of dismissal' were not sent out by Bishop Basil to all clergy of the Diocese. These letters were not sent to those members of the clergy whose loyalty to the Russian Orthodox Church was beyond doubt. Some member of clergy who received the so-called 'letters of dismissal' had not requested them from Bishop Basil. The so-called 'letters of dismissal' were sent out by Bishop Basil on 11 May 2006, that is, at a time when he had already been released from running the Diocese and had been retired until the affair had been examined. The so-called 'letters of dismissal' were signed and dated 2 February 2006. This must mean that Bishop Basil had already 'dismissed' his Diocese then, which does not correspond to reality. In fact, diocesan life had been going on as before.

Witnesses remark that, until they were sent out on 11 May, they had not known of their existence. The so-called 'letters of dismissal' were not addressed to a particular bishop, but written out to clerics with the words, 'To whom it may concern'. This contradicts the canonical sense of this document and is unprecedented in the practice of the Church.

The Commission particularly noted that even after the Holy Synod of the Church of Constantinople had decided to receive Bishop Basil into its jurisdiction and given him the title 'of Amphipolis', Bishop Basil sent out letters with this title on them to clerics of the Sourozh Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate with an appeal to follow him. Regardless of any assessment of the canonicity of the decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Constantinople, such conduct by a bishop towards the clergy of another jurisdiction is unprecedented and inadmissible.

Members of the Commission emphasized that the accusation of nationalism among Russian-speaking supporters of the Russian Orthodox Church were refuted by numerous testimonies of witnesses. English people questioned by the Commission had not noticed any prejudiced attitudes towards them on the part of other members of the Parish and Diocese. There is no evidence of any significant national conflict in the Parish or in the Diocese. Many witnesses named 'the lack of financial transparency' in the life of the Cathedral in London and the Diocese as a whole as one of the reasons for the crisis, as this left open the possibility of misuse of moneys. Bishop Basil's poor execution of his administrative duties in running the Diocese and his lack of real pastoral contact with the Russian-speaking flock served to deepen the crisis. Having reported on the course of the investigation and the evidence collected on the critical events in the Diocese of Sourozh, the Commission asked the members of the Holy Synod to bear in mind that the facts presented may be incomplete, but that this is connected to the resolute refusal of His Grace Bishop Basil and his close entourage to co-operate. The Commission expressed the hope that this gap could yet be filled by the personal explanations of Bishop Basil.

(Bulletin of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions - www.orthodoxeurope.org/ - 09.09.2006).