

faith in Europe

Current Developments in the Relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Diocese in the UK

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Peter Scorer is Protodeacon in the Russian Orthodox parish in Devon, serving under Bishop Basil of Amphipolis, of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

I dedicate my remarks today to the memory of Fr Sergei Hackel. He would have been suffering very much if he had lived to see the recent developments in the UK diocese.

Irina Levinskaya has spoken of the conservatism and insularity which have prevailed within the Moscow Patriarchate over the past decade. The Holy Synod in Moscow has just had a two-day meeting at which it approved the report of the commission looking into the conduct of Bishop Basil Osborne. Members of the UK diocese refused to take part in the commission because it could not satisfy them that they would have a fair hearing. The text of the commission's findings has not been made available to the UK diocese.

In 1927 Metropolitan Yevlogi, head of the Russian Orthodox diocese in Paris, appointed a priest to London. In 1930 Yevlogi was ordered to take a pro-Soviet line; in response he moved his parishes from the jurisdiction of Moscow to that of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. After the Second World War there was a movement to return to Moscow. Metropolitan Yevlogi was persuaded to do so, but died a year later.

In 1962 the Diocese of Sourozh was set up in Great Britain under Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. He was firm in his loyalty to Moscow but saw himself as able to speak the truth in the name of the Russian Orthodox diaspora. He also saw it as his mission to bring Orthodoxy to the West. He produced guidelines on how a 'local' Christian church was to be run, based on the decisions of the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church held in Moscow in 1917-18. After the end of

the Soviet Union in 1991 it soon became clear to Metropolitan Anthony that the Moscow Patriarchate was no longer interested in having a liberal voice abroad. Nevertheless, feeling his age, in 2002 he invited Fr Ilarion Alfeyev of the Moscow Patriarchate to come and help him. Moscow insisted that he come as a bishop. His activity soon proved problematic and Metropolitan Anthony dismissed him.

When Metropolitan Anthony died in August 2003 the leadership of the diocese fell to Bishop Basil Osborne. However, Moscow never recognised him as Bishop of Sourozh - merely as the diocesan administrator.

Bishop Basil was finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the huge influx of Orthodox from Russia into the UK. Their expectations were that they should be able to continue to practise their religion in the UK in the way that they were used to in Russia; these expectations were incompatible with the traditions built up in the Diocese of Sourozh under Metropolitan Anthony. Bishop Basil's appeals to the Moscow Patriarchate for help in resolving the problem went unanswered. Eventually Bishop Basil saw no alternative to placing himself under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. So far six or seven parishes in the Diocese of Sourozh and two thirds of the clergy have gone with him.

One of the current allegations by the Moscow Patriarchate is that the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople is paid by Turkey and the USA to pursue US policy in the Orthodox world.

Discussion

The Moscow Patriarchate is in flight from the contemporary world - in two directions: into the primitive church and Russia's past; and into the future in the context of expectations of the Apocalypse. Meanwhile it is neglecting to engage the church properly with contemporary social and political issues.

It was noted that some monasteries in Russia house individual priests of a surprisingly liberal persuasion. The activity of a range of Orthodox brotherhoods and sisterhoods in social work in Russia was also mentioned; they were described as 'beacons of light'. Irina Levinskaya was, however, inclined to view the activity of such brotherhoods as marginal within a basically conservatively orientated church.

President Putin may or may not be personally religious, but is interested in using the Orthodox Church to further Russian diplomatic interests abroad. He took the initiative in promoting

the current moves towards reunification between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

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