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On the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism

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The International Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue

THE NINTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES TOOK PLACE IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, FROM JANUARY 17 TO 21, 2012. The meeting was hosted by His Holiness Abuna Paulos I, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. It was chaired jointly by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Joining delegates from the Catholic Church were representatives of the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. No representative of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church was able to attend.

The two delegations met separately on the morning of January 17. In the afternoon, the Catholic members attended a prayer service with the local Catholic hierarchy, clergy, religious and faithful, at the Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady.

They were greeted with an address by Abune Berhaneyesus D. Souraphiel, CM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Addis Ababa and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia. Cardinal Koch was also invited to speak to the assembly.

That same evening, all the members of the commission accepted a gracious invitation from His Excellency Archbishop George Panikulam, Apostolic Nuncio in Ethiopia, to attend a friendship dinner at the Apostolic Nunciature in honor of His Holiness Patriarch Paulos, who also

attended the meal.

The Joint Commission held plenary sessions on January 18, 19, and 21. Each day began with Morning Prayer. At the beginning of the meeting Metropolitan Bishop congratulated one of the Catholic members, Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, on his recent election as General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches.

The meeting was formally opened on the morning of January 18 by His Holiness Patriarch Paulos. In his address to the members, the Patriarch said, "It is with great pleasure and gratitude we welcome you, the Co-chairs, co-secretaries and members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. And let our spiritual greetings reach to our most venerable brothers, the Heads of our churches, through you. The history of the church tells us that division between the ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church can be traced back to the years after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, whose Christological teaching was not accepted by the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Henceforth, no dialogue or even trial was made to bring these churches into their original unified status before 451 AD and no attempt and activity resulted in settling an irreversible solution to the division. Obviously the 20th century has brought about new horizons in which relations began to be developed through the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna.

This process of relations led to the establishment of an official dialogue between the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches in 2003, under the title "International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches." In accordance with the formally prescribed setups of the commission in Rome, we could say the Joint Commission has developed a few articles related to fundamental aspects of ecclesiology. The issue of communion and communication among our ancient churches in the first five cen-

turies, currently undertaken by the commission since January 2010, is perhaps expected to establish good historical understanding of our churches. We think such technical and scholarly selection of items for discussion will bring many more outstanding results beyond the initially expected purpose of the Joint Commission. Therefore, this theological and spiritual contemplation will not only unveil the historical and theological facts that exist in common but also will show us the direction for the future. The ninth meeting of the Joint Commission in Addis Ababa is expected to bring much more progress in your theological examinations of enormous ecclesiastical issues. And we hope that the agendas chosen to be discussed here will be exhausted with utmost attention. To this end we would like to encourage your skillful monitoring of agendas in the Joint Commission. As we all know, this is the season of Epiphany, the celebration of the baptism of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church celebrates this liturgical, highly spiritual, and unifying feast colorfully and with magnificent numbers of believers. The theological meaning of this feast is highly significant which reflects the mystery of baptism, making all of us children of God, which is on the other hand inspiring. As I officially open the Ninth meeting of the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue, I wish all success and the grace of God to be with you. May it be a blessed and fruitful meeting to the Glory our Lord, Our God and Savior Jesus Christ. I pray to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that His Divine guidance be in your midst during this meeting. May Almighty God Bless us all, bless our world and give us His everlasting Peace! Amen."

The papers presented at this meeting included "Martyrdom as an Element of Communion and Communication" by Metropolitan Bishop, "Martyrdom: An Element of Christian Communio," by Bishop Paul-Werner Scheele, "Exercise of

Ecclesial Communion in the New Testament” by Rev. Fr. Matthew Vellanickal, “The Exercise of Communion as Reflected in the New Testament Writings” by Dr. Kuriakose Theophilose Metropolitan, “Prayer and Liturgy in Religious Life as a Means of Communion and Communication” by Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, and “Prayer and Liturgy in the Religious Life: Their Significance for Communion and Communication,” by Rev. Fr. Daniel Seife Michael Feleke.

In these studies, the members noted that, even in the New Testament, there were various expressions of the *koinonia* of the apostolic churches in their diversity. The understanding of martyrdom was essential to the early Christian experience both in terms of witness to the faith and sacrificial self-offering. The veneration of martyrs emerged early as a point of unity among the churches. Both personal and liturgical prayer of early Christians was rooted in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Eucharistic liturgy particularly manifested a common structure and also a variety of traditions that were mutually enriching.

With these studies, the members continued their examination of the ways in which the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches expressed their communion with one another in the period before their division in the middle of the fifth century. Over the course of the next year, a drafting committee will meet to examine the papers presented in the present phase of the dialogue with the intention of producing a draft text to be examined at the 2013 meeting of the Commission. At that meeting, the members will also examine the themes, “The Saints as an Element in the Communion and Communication in the Early Church,” and “The Process of Recognition/Canonization of Saints in History and Today.”

His Holiness the Ethiopian Patriarch invited the members to attend the celebration of Timkat, the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgical commemoration of Epiphany, on January 20. This joyful festival took place outdoors at Jan Meda at the side of a large pool of water and was attended by hundreds of thousands of faithful. Both Metropolitan Bishoy and Cardinal Koch were invited to address the gathering. On that same evening, the Patriarch invited the members to dinner in his residence. On January 21 the Joint Commission met with students and staff from Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary in Addis Ababa.

The tenth meeting of the International

Joint Commission will take place in Rome in January 2013. The members will arrive on Tuesday January 22, have separate meetings on the morning of January 23, plenaries on the afternoon of January 23, as well as the full days of January 24, 25, and 26, and plan to depart on Monday, January 28.

The members concluded with joyful thanks to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for what has been accomplished at this meeting.

The members of the Commission are: Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (in alphabetical order):

Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church: H.E. Mor Theophilus George Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Beirut, Lebanon; H.E. Kuriakose Theophilose, Metropolitan of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary and President of the Ecumenical Secretariat of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India, Ernakulam, India;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Catholicosate of all Armenians: H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA, New York (unable to attend, represented by H.G. Bishop Ardashir Nalbandian of the Armenian Diocese of Damascus); H.E. Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of Bible Society of Armenia, Etchmiadzin, Armenia (unable to attend);

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy in the USA, New York; H.G. Archbishop Nareg Amezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church; Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (observer); Priest Monk Cedrack Amba Bishoy, Representative of the Coptic Orthodox Church to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (observer);

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend);

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Rev. Fr. Daniel Seife Michael Feleke of Holy Trinity Theological University College in Addis Ababa; Mr.

Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie (unable to attend); Abba Dr. Hailemariam Melese, Vice Dean of the Holy Trinity Theological College, Addis Ababa (observer);

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios, President of the Department of Ecumenical Relations, Diocese of Trivandrum, India; H. E. Metropolitan Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios, Bishop of Delhi (co-secretary), Delhi, India; Rev. Dr. Jossi Jacob, Director of the Post Graduate Department and member of the faculty of the Holy Trinity Theological College of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (observer).

Representatives of the Catholic Church

His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

Most Reverend Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop Emeritus of Würzburg, Germany;

Most Reverend Youhanna Golta, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, Cairo, Egypt (unable to attend);

Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe, Rome (unable to attend);

Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria;

Most Reverend Woldetsaie Ghebregiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar, Ethiopia, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen M.Afr., Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Jerusalem;

Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, St. John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA;

Rev. Fr. Ronald G. Roberson, CSP, Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, USA;

Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, OLM, Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh, Lebanon, and General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches;

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Mathew Vellanickal, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, India;

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekian, Pon-

tifical Oriental Institute, Rome;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Salzburg, Austria.

Rev. Fr. Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary).

Abune Musié Ghebregiorghis, Eparch of Emdibir (observer)

Abba Petros Berga Sorballa, Executive Secretary of the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Ethiopia (observer) -- Addis Ababa, January 21, 2012

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

THE HOLY AND SACRED SYNOD OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE CONVENED today, January 10, 2012, under the chairmanship of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, for its regular session during which, among other matters, it discussed the issue that has arisen regarding the remand in custody of Fr. Ephraim, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi. Accordingly, the following is hereby announced:

1. His All-Holiness and the Holy and Sacred Synod express their sorrow for the situation that has developed with regard to this matter.

2. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, in accordance with its established policy and out of respect for the independent investigation of the justice system, always avoids any kind of interference in outstanding judicial matters, especially inasmuch as it is not privy to the content of the relevant legal briefs.

3. In regard to statements made by a sister Orthodox Church on this matter, the Ecumenical Patriarchate underlines that, as its canonical territory, the Holy Mountain indeed comprises Orthodox monks of different ethnicities but this does not lend a Panorthodox character that would permit any kind of intervention therein by other Autocephalous Churches. -- At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, January 10th, 2012. From the Office of the Chief Secretary.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW ON JANUARY 19 PRAISED A RECENT DECISION BY THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES TO ALLOW THE REOPENING OF A GREEK MINORITY SCHOOL on the northeastern Aegean island of Imvros (Gokceada in Turkish).

The Patriarch was addressing a group of worshippers at the island's main Orthodox church.

"Gradually, we are being vindicated

and injustices are being undone," Bartholomew, a native of the island, told the congregation.

He made the comment in response to news that the ethnic Greek minority school on the island finally received permission to reopen, 47 years after it was closed by Turkish authorities.

Bartholomew called on parents to enroll their children at the minority school. "It does not matter if it will be only one child or a few, the school's reopening is important," he stressed.

Finally, he thanked the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Turkish ministry of education for allowing the school to reopen, underlining the major role played by the Turkish ministry of European affairs and by the representative of minority foundations in Turkey's General Directorate of Foundations, Lakis Vigas. (AMNA) – Athens News, Jan. 19.

ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA HAS DELIVERED THE INVOCATION AT THE 2012 OPENING LEGISLATIVE SESSION OF THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND THE CEREMONY for the 2012 State of the State Address by New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo.

Early in the afternoon of January 4, in the Senate Chamber, His Eminence was introduced to the Members of the Senate by the Lieutenant Governor Robert J. Duffy, offered the invocation and attended the first legislative session of the new year.

Archbishop Demetrios, in the prayer said in part: "we ask You to grant our Senators an extraordinary measure of virtue so that with foresight, sensitivity, and creativity they may perform their duties in these times of tremendous challenges and opportunities. Grant them hearts of compassion for the needy; enlighten their minds with the virtues of tolerance, respect and passion for justice. Throughout their deliberations in this 2012 Session, grant unto them and to those who work with them health, peace and safety in all their ways."

In the short session that followed, Senate Majority Leader Senator Dean G. Skelos offered warm welcoming remarks to the Archbishop and said: "I would like to start off by welcoming His Eminence here. Not only is he the spiritual leader of my Church in this Great Country, he is also a spiritual leader for all faiths. So we welcome you Your Eminence to our Chamber." Minority Leader Senator John

L. Sampson started his remarks by saying: "I want to give a special welcome to His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Church. Thank you very much for that prayer, and I am glad that with the help of Governor Cuomo we were able to ensure that St. Nicholas Church will be rebuilt on Ground Zero."

Following the conclusion of the Senate session Senator Skelos accompanied the Archbishop to the nearby Empire State Plaza Convention Center for the 2012 State of the State Address by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo. The ceremony was attended by all members of the Senate and the Assembly, legislative leaders, State officials, Mayors from around the State including New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and thousands of people.

In his invocation, at the start of the program, the Archbishop said as part of his invocation:

"Grant us to live in harmony with one another, and with all of Your glorious Creation, in mutual respect and love. Grant to our Governor, Andrew Cuomo, the spirit of courage, justice, prudence, and discernment. Keep him in safety and health for many years, always leading the people to victories over injustice, poverty, and everything that is harmful to the dignity and sanctity of human life.

We thank You, Almighty God, for this occasion to gather as a free people and to contemplate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for our State. Through the blessing of our diversity, give us the gift of unity. Make us worthy of the sacred mission to which You called us, as citizens of a Nation that is a beacon of democracy for all people, so that in all we consider and speak and do, we may honor You, the Author of Freedom, Truth and Justice." – Press Release, Greek Archdiocese, Jan. 5.

ON 31ST JANUARY 2012 HIS GRACE PETROS BISHOP OF NIKOPOLIS, RETIRED HIERARCH OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA, FELL ASLEEP IN THE LORD.

The Late Bishop Petros of Nikopolis (Karatroupkos) was born in Naousa, Macedonia. He held a degree from the Theological Faculty of the University of Thessaloniki, was ordained Deacon in 1953 and Priest in 1960. He served as Archdeacon of the late Metropolitan Seraphim of Ioannina, who was later Archbishop of Athens, and as Priest he served at the Holy Metropolis of Verroea and Naousa, the Holy Archdiocese of North and South

America, the Holy Metropolis of Toronto and in the Holy Metropolis of Carthage, serving as its Vicar.

On 22nd February 2001, by proposal of the late Petros VII, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, he was unanimously elected as Bishop of the newly-established Diocese of Zambia. He resigned on 14th March 2003. On the same day he received the title of Bishop of Nikopolis. – Press Release, Patriarchate of Alexandria, Jan. 31.

THIS IS A MESSAGE FROM THE HEADS OF CHURCHES THEIR HOLINESSES AND BEATITUDES THE PATRIARCHS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES AND CITIZENS IN SYRIA. THEY ARE Their Holinesses and Beatitudes Ignatios IV Hazim Patriarch of Antioch and All the East of the Greek Orthodox, Mor Ignatios Zakka I was Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Syrian Orthodox, and Gregorios III Laham Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Alexandria and Jerusalem of the Greek Melkite Catholics.

The Patriarchs met at St Ephrem the Syriac Monastery in Ma'arat Saydnaya on the morning of Thursday 15th December 2011. They examined the situation which our beloved country Syria has been passing through for the last nine months.

The Patriarchs explored the events and their outcomes which have caused pain and suffering to the country and to the people in all aspects of life.

The Patriarchs expressed:

- their deep pain about what is occurring, and their sorrow for the loss of life.
- their fear about the decline of the economic situation.

- their acute wish to see Syria recover from its wounds

The Patriarchs hoped that:

- citizens of Syria may come back to each other in love, tolerance, cooperation and wisdom.

- the nation's interest will take precedence over every other interest

- the people may return to their authenticity and heritage, and to their consciences and faith in dealing with each other; and in solving their problems on their own.

The Patriarchs rejected all forms of intervention by any foreign party.

They called for lifting up the sanctions which were imposed on Syria under any excuse.

The Patriarchs rejected resorting to the use of any type of violence.

The Patriarchs called for:

- peace and reconciliation between all the people under the name of God and the nation.

- respect the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, social justice and citizenship rights.

The Patriarchs encouraged the steps of reforms and positive actions which the government has lately recognized.

The Patriarchs are lifting up their warm prayers, with one voice and one heart, to God Almighty so that He may:

- bless the souls of those who died
- console the hearts of those who lost people

- protect Syria and guide it to the shore of safety, peace, sovereignty, and prosperity

The Patriarchs are calling on everybody to join them in their prayers. They ask people not to let fear enter their hearts because not one single hair will fall from their heads without God's permission, as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us.

During this Advent time, their Holinesses and Beatitudes are approaching all their spiritual sons and daughters, as well as the citizens of Syria with wholehearted wishes. They are asking the Lord Jesus, the God before all ages, who took the flesh of humans for our salvation, to place in our hearts the joy and peace which the angels proclaimed on the night of Jesus' birth; together with the intercession of the Mother of God Mary, everlasting Virgin and all the Saints.

St Ephrem Monastery – Ma'arat Saydnaya, Syria, 15 December 2011. – Website of the Eastern Diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church, December 2011.

THE SECRETARIAT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA HELD ITS ANNUAL "FACE-TO-FACE" MEETING, January 24th and 25th, 2012. The hosts for this year's "face-to-face" meeting were Father Josiah Trenham and the congregation of St Andrew Church in Riverside, CA. An overview of the work accomplished at the Riverside meeting will be included in a soon-to-be issued media release which will report to the Church-at-large on the work of the Assembly during the past year.

The Secretariat, which also meets monthly via teleconference, consists of Bishop Basil (Secretary of the Assembly of Bishops), Archbishop Antony, Bishop Andonios, Bishop Maxim, Father Mark Arey, Father Nicholas Ceko, Father Josiah Trenham, Hierodeacon Benedict (Armi-

tage), Protodeacon Peter Danilchick, and Messrs. Alexei Krindatch, Alex Machaskee, Eric Namee and Constantin Ursache. – Press Release, Antiochian Archdiocese, no date.

CHRISTIANS HAVE THE LOWEST GROWTH RATE AMONG THE ISRAELI POPULATION, ACCORDING TO AN ISRAELI CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS REPORT RELEASED ON 6 JANUARY.

According to the report, the Christian growth rate of 0.9 percent compares to the Jewish rate of 1.7 percent and the 2.7 percent growth rate among Muslims. Christian Arabs have a growth rate of one percent while the rate among non-Arab Christians is 0.7 percent.

About 154,000 Christians live in Israel, constituting 2 percent of the population, according to the bureau.

The percentage of Christians in Israel has remained relatively stable since the mid-1980's, noted Wadie Abunassar, director of the International Center for Consultations and a consultant for the Jerusalem Center for Christian-Jewish relations.

About 80 percent of Christians living in Israel are Arabs, with the remainder mainly Christians who immigrated to Israel with Jewish members of their families under the Law of Return, which allows any proven Jewish person to immigrate to Israel.

The estimated birth rate for Christian women is also the lowest among the religious groups. The average number of children expected to be born to a Christian woman is 2.1, compared to a Muslim woman (3.8), a Jewish woman (3.0) and a Druze woman (2.5).

But though their relative numbers in Israeli society are low, Christian Arab students consistently have the highest success rates on matriculation examinations for certificates that meet the admission requirements for universities compared to other sectors of Israeli society, including Muslim, Druze and Jewish students.

According to the report, in the 2010 school year, 63 percent of Christian 12th grade students earned a matriculation certificate compared with 46 percent of Muslims, 55 percent of Druze, and 58 percent of Jewish students. – Judith Sudilovsky for *ENI*, Jan. 9.

PATRIARCH FILARET, THE HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH-KYIVAN PATRIARCHATE (UOC-KP) SAID IN AN INTERVIEW TO RISU THAT IN 2008, THE ECUMENICAL PATRIAR-

CHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE PROPOSED THE UOC-KP TO JOIN IT, and later receive autonomy. The conditions of Constantinople, however, were unacceptable for the clergy of the UOC-KP and the union was not concluded.

"Some say that we did not join the Patriarchate of Constantinople as Filaret did not want to give up leadership. But it is not true. No one set a condition of my resignation either in Fanari or Kyiv. No one!" he said.

"The situation was as follows. They conducted negotiations with me and proposed that we join the Constantinople Patriarchate. Viktor Andriiovych [editor: Yushchenko] agreed and said: 'We will be canonical! Moreover, we will be first! For the Patriarchate of Constantinople is the first and the Moscow Patriarchate is the fifth,'" said the Patriarch.

According to Patriarch Filaret, at the time of the negotiations in 2008, the Ukrainians wanted to obtain recognition and the Greeks wanted to subordinate Ukraine. "Instead, it proposed conditions that were worse than the conditions of the Kyivan Metropolitanate before the 17th century or the present conditions of the UOC-MP," said the Patriarch.

The hierarch said that the delegation of the UOC-KP demanded from Constantinople guarantees that the UOC-KP would be granted autocephaly in a specified period of time but Constantinople refused to give such guarantees.

Patriarch Filaret noted that it is not necessary to join anyone in order to obtain recognition and cited the examples of the Bulgarian and Romanian Churches.

To obtain the recognition of their autocephaly, neither the Hellenic nor Bulgarian nor Romanian Orthodox Churches joined Constantinople but were simply recognized as autocephalous, that was all. And if anyone says that it is impossible to recognize the Kyivan Patriarchate because its head was anathematized by Moscow, there is an answer to it as well: how then was the Bulgarian Church, where all the bishops were anathematized by Constantinople, recognized?" he said. – *RISU*, Jan. 3.

THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE DOES NOT INTEND TO APPOINT AT ITS NEXT SYNOD AN ACTING HEAD OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PERIOD UNTIL THE RECOVERY OF METROPOLITAN VOLODYMYR, Heorhii Kovalenko, the primate's press secretary, said in a commentary to tyzhden.ua in

order to refute information spread by mass media.

"I hear it for the first time now. It is senseless both from the point of view of the canons and Statutes. Therefore, I do not understand what can be the source of that information. It appears that there are many smart people in the media who have no close relation to real life. The session is planned to be held on January 26, but it might be postponed."

"On the contrary, it seems to me that the illness of the primate unites the church. All the churches pray for His Beatitude. He is improving and celebrates services himself. Therefore I do not understand the source or purpose of that information. In addition, the last Synod confirmed that all the institutions in the church are functioning during the illness of the primate," the protopriest said.

According to the protopriest, the church's Statutes stipulate the election of an acting head as a temporary measure in two cases; namely, the death of the head of the church or his abdication. – *RISU*, Jan. 12.

ON 21 JANUARY 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY (PNA), MAHMOUD ABBAS.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church congratulated Mahmoud Abbas for winning the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations (IFUOCN) prize and called the awarding a symbolic event. He said: "Though you are not an Orthodox, we wanted to show our respect for your actions directed at preserving the holy sites and keeping up religious life in the Holy Land, including that of Orthodox Christians, as well as for your special contribution to the development of relations between the people of Palestine and Russia."

While talking about the situation in the countries of the Middle East, His Holiness said that interreligious balance is being upset and interreligious peace is being violated there, mentioned egregious cases of persecution against Christians in certain countries, and supported religious peace in the land of Palestine promoted through the efforts of the President of the Palestinian National Authority.

"By this prize, we wanted to emphasize your personal contribution to interreligious peace in Palestine," the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said to

Mahmoud Abbas, and congratulated him and the people of Palestine on the important steps taken towards recognition of the State of Palestine by world community. "Palestinian membership in UNESCO is an impressive sign of further improvement in the situation. I am deeply convinced that the State of Palestine can bring its reconciling and constructive contribution to the establishment of interreligious peace in those Middle East countries, in which it is frustrated at present," His Holiness said.

He noted with satisfaction the development of pilgrimages from countries with a Russian Orthodox presence to the Holy Land, and mentioned the relations between the State of Palestine and the Russian Orthodox Church and between Palestine and Russia as a principal factor in this development.

Brotherly relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to which jurisdiction Orthodox Christians of the Holy Land belong, were noted. "We believe that the development of pilgrimage serves the development of relations between the two sister Churches. The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission was established in the Holy Land in 1847. Some metochia are now in the territory of the State of Palestine. Restoration and decoration of these places so important to us is under way, and I wholeheartedly thank you for support you are rendering to the Russian Orthodox Church," the Primate of the Russian Church said.

Mahmoud Abbas underscored the importance of his meeting with His Holiness, saying that all people of Palestine, who belong to different religious groups including Orthodox Christians, respect Patriarch Kirill. As to the prize, Mahmoud Abbas said that it was a privilege to him and all people of Palestine. He expressed his hope for increasing the number of pilgrims to Palestine, especially from the Russian Orthodox Church. "By now the number of pilgrims has reached 250 thousand a year, and we want it to grow to one million next year. The Holy Land is dear to all people who profess the three major religions that are called heavenly: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Peace is necessary to this country so that all could come to this land and venerate holy sites."

The head of the State of Palestine certified the fact of good relations of Palestine with the Russian state and Russian people and with the Russian Orthodox Church. He said that the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society would celebrate its

130th anniversary this year and added that its establishment and activity speak of the foresight of those who founded it.

Mahmoud Abbas said that he had handed a letter to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church written by the Palestinians twenty-four years ago about the Russian property in the territory of Palestine. "Even before the beginning of our negotiations with Israel, we tried to find out and verify what had belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church in the territory of Palestine, as we consider it very important to return everything. Our courts are trying one or two cases. I am confident that they will rule in favor of the Russian Orthodox Church," he added.

Mahmoud Abbas spoke about interreligious peace in the Middle East. "The acts against Churches in Egypt and Iraq have pained our hearts and we strongly condemned them," he said and added that it was necessary to maintain national unity so that religious groups that have lived in the territory for a thousand years could coexist in peace and harmony.

"Relations with all Christian Churches are very important to us," the Palestinian leader said. He mentioned friendly relations with Patriarch Shenouda III of the Coptic Church, the Pope's visit to Bethlehem two years ago, and recent meetings with the representatives of religious communities in London.

The head of the Palestinian National Authority is confident that Palestine should be a land of peace and harmony, as it is the Holy Land for the three world religions, the followers of which should come to Palestine and feel this peace and harmony. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 21.

ON 24 JANUARY 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEODOROS II OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE IN ST. DANIEL'S MONASTERY. The Primate of the Church of Alexandria arrived in Moscow at the invitation of His Holiness to receive the prize "For Outstanding Activity in Strengthening Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations and for Consolidation and Promotion of Christian Values in the Life of Society" named after His Holiness Patriarch Aleksey II.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church warmly greeted His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros, noting that the awarding is a momentous event. "You are

caring as no one else for Orthodox Christians in fifty-four countries of Africa, thus consolidating unity of the Orthodox Church on the large African continent. You are making an important contribution to the unity of Orthodoxy as Primate of the Church of Alexandria, which has come from St Mark and is playing an important part in Orthodox affairs as it did in olden times," His Holiness said.

He called relations between the two Churches "traditionally good and fraternal" and added that the Patriarchs of Alexandria had been involved in momentous events in the life of the Russian Church. For instance, Patriarch Meletios Pegas, a deeply spiritual man of action and mighty intellect, played an important part in the establishment of the Patriarchate in Russia and extended substantive support to the first Patriarch of Moscow and to the Russian state. "It mattered a good deal to Russia as it was necessary to rely on the generally recognized Orthodox spiritual authorities; the Patriarchs of the Eastern Churches enjoyed prestige with Russian people," His Holiness underscored.

Patriarch Kirill mentioned many bright events in relations between the two Churches which have always supported each other. "This is a part of our common Tradition," he said and added: "The Russian Church will extend support to the Patriarchate of Alexandria by all available means defending the rights and freedoms of Christian minorities" at this hard time of oppression against Christians in Northern Africa.

Patriarch Kirill believes that the Representations of the Moscow Patriarchate in Cairo and of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Moscow play an important part in the development of bilateral relations: "They symbolize the living linkage between our Churches." His Holiness assured Patriarch Theodoros that he was always happy to meet him. Having noted that after his visit to Moscow His Beatitude will visit fourteen African countries, he wished him God's help in his missionary endeavors.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for brotherly talk and added: "It is my fourth visit to Moscow in the eight years of my being Patriarch. This displays my respect for the Russian Church." He said that he had warm recollections of his time spent in Russia, and the years of 1985-90 in particular, which he served in Odessa as Exarch of the Patriarch of Alexandria.

Patriarch Theodoros shared recollec-

tions of his meeting with Patriarch Kirill in Mozambique during his missionary visit to the country and said: "When I leave this world, I want people to remember me as a missionary Patriarch."

He remarked that he would visit the King of Morocco on March 25 and then go to other African countries. "I will bring love there and remember that the Patriarch of All Russia is always with me."

Also discussed were bilateral relations, pan-Orthodox cooperation, pastoral care for Russian Orthodox Christians living in African countries, and missionary work of the Church of Alexandria.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill described recent events in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church, including the establishment of new dioceses. His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros spoke of the three new dioceses of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and of missionary achievements in tropical Africa. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 24.

ON 26 JANUARY 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH ANTONIS SAMARAS, LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY OF GREECE, AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE IN ST. DANIEL'S MONASTERY.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill warmly greeted them, saying: "We are always happy to welcome guests from fraternal Greece." He said further that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of Greece have maintained traditionally good relations that are important to the ties among Greece, Russia, Ukraine and other countries in which the Moscow Patriarchate is present. "Political circumstances are changing, whereas our relations that date back centuries remain unchanged. Orthodoxy is a very important factor of national identity of both the Greeks and the Russians."

His Holiness mentioned Orthodox relics that have been brought from Greece recently; the Sash of the Theotokos and the relics of St. Demetrios the Great Martyr. "Millions of people stood in queue for hours to venerate the relics. So many people never came to a political meeting of a sports event. As long as they come to venerate relics, there is hope for the future," Patriarch Kirill said and added that veneration of the new martyrs of Russia and Greece was very important, too.

The Primate of the Russian Church stated that the Russians sympathize with the Greek people who are experiencing

difficulties. "We highly appreciate the Orthodox Church of Greece's charitable work. I know, for instance, about soup-kitchens. This shows that the Church takes the suffering of common people to heart," he said and noted that relations between the Russian church charities and the Church of Greece are being established to help those in need. Patriarch Kirill has given his blessing to raise funds in all churches of the Russian Orthodox Church.

His Holiness mentioned the forthcoming official visit of His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece to the Russian Orthodox Church and expressed his hope for the visit "to give a new impetus to the development of relations between the two Churches."

Antonis Samaras thanked His Holiness for the meeting and agreed with His Holiness in that the Greek relics brought to Russia and the decision to lend a helping hand to the needy show the level of bilateral relations. "It happened that politics divide people, whereas faith always unites them," he said.

The leader of the New Democracy party hopes that Greece will cope with the crisis in the near future. He believes that along with economic analysis of the crisis the Greek people should carry out its "spiritual study." Antonis Samaras is confident that Orthodoxy is a fundament that gives spiritual strength which people need for struggle and for finding a way out of the crisis situation. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 26.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES ARE SOMETIMES AT ODDS ON ISSUES RANGING FROM CHURCH LEADERSHIP TO THEOLOGY, BUT AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN MOSCOW AND FLORENCE SHOWS THAT THEY HAVE COMMON GROUND IN ART.

The exhibits, called "In Christ," are on display at Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery and at Florence's Baptistery, the historic octagonal building next to the Duomo cathedral, constructed to host baptisms.

Two masterpieces by the early Renaissance artist Giotto, the Madonna and Child and ten-panel St. Reparata Polypych, which have never been to Russia before, came to Moscow. In turn, three icons from the Tretyakov, including one connected to Andrei Rublev, Russia's most famous iconographer, went to Italy.

"The idea was also to exhibit those names that could show the source of our common Byzantine culture and its further

development, which was unique to each country," said Irina Lebedeva, the Tretyakov's general director, at the Moscow opening.

The exhibitions, which run until 19 March, culminate a year-long Russian-Italian cultural exchange and are dedicated to the 1225th anniversary of the Second Council of Nicea. That gathering of church leaders in 787 presaged the division of the churches into East and West.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, called "In Christ" a joint Orthodox-Catholic witness "before the face of the modern secular world."

"Byzantine icons reveal not only the human person of Jesus Christ, but God incarnate," he said. "In these icons differ from the paintings of the Renaissance, which present a humanized Christ. Although Giotto is usually attributed to the early Renaissance, in his works one can see with full clarity that early iconographic tradition that is shared by East and West."

In Florence, Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic clergy prayed before the icons. "After decades during which these icons were torn from the context for which they were created, for the church and for prayer, they have been returned, even if for a while, from the museum to a sacred place," Giuseppe Betori, Archbishop of Florence, told Russia's TASS-TV. Icons were confiscated and destroyed, sold or placed in museums after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. – Sophia Kishkovsky for ENI, Jan. 27.

ON 26 JANUARY 2012, THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HELD ITS SESSION IN THE LAURA OF THE CAVES IN KIEV UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF METROPOLITAN AGAFANGEL OF ODESSA AND IZMAIL. His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine could not chair the session because of his illness.

Members of the Synod expressed gratitude to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia for visiting the Lugansk diocese last September and the Chernovtsy diocese last October and for spiritual support thus rendered to Orthodox Christians of Ukraine.

The Holy Synod gave blessing to mark the 20th anniversary of the Kharkov Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the 20th anniversary of His Beatitude Vladimir's ministry as Met-

ropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine. An ad hoc commission was set up.

The Synod approved composition of the commission for amendments to the Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The commission was set up by the decision of the UOC Council on July 8, 2011.

Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl, abbot of the Laura of the Caves, was charged with temporary administration of the Kiev diocese.

Concern was expressed over a draft legislation "On Pilgrimage" that is under consideration by the Verhovna Rada without agreeing with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and other religious association in Ukraine. It was resolved to send an appeal to the chairman, Vladimir Litvin, and to people's deputies, and to set up an ad hoc commission to consider the matter in essence.

The Holy Synod has taken decisions on the Orders of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and on the life of monasteries and convents. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 27.

AN AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE IN THE KYIVAN METROPOLITANATE OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH-MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE (UOC-MP) REPORTED TO RELIGION IN UKRAINE THAT THE SITUATION REGARDING THE SIGNING OF THE LATEST DECISIONS OF THE SYNOD OF UOC-MP OF JANUARY 26 BY ITS HEAD, METROPOLITAN VOLODYMYR, REMAINS UNSETTLED.

Metropolitan Volodymyr was surprised to hear about certain rotation decisions of the Synod. The primate cannot sign the decisions which were not coordinated with him, in order not to provoke further conflict in the UOC-MP. If he refuses to sign them, the decisions of the Synod will hardly be considered valid.

In addition, according to Religion in Ukraine, the head of UOC-MP was prepared to participate in the session of the Holy Synod. One of the options considered was for the members of the Synod to come to the hospital where the metropolitan stays. However, the session was held without the primate's participation.

At the same time, according to Paragraph 17 of Chapter 4 of the effective Statutes on Government of the UOC, the permanent member of the Synod with the longest record of bishop's ministry can act as the chairman of the Holy Synod only if the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine cannot do that for some reason. If the in-

formation about the ability and readiness of Metropolitan Volodymyr to participate in the session of the Synod of January 26 is confirmed and if the ruling head of UOC-MP does not approve the journals of the Synod, the legitimacy of its decisions will remain disputable. – *RISU*, Jan. 27.

ON JANUARY 29, 2012, THE SERBIAN NEWSPAPER 'EVENING NEWS' PUBLISHED AN INTERVIEW OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA.

Q. Your Holiness, as you know, Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija have recently appealed to President Medvedev to grant them Russian citizenship, and his answer is already known. The Serbs appealed to you as well, and their desire was dictated by despair and helplessness in the situation in which they have been caught. The recent initiatives of Serbs in Kosovo for Russian citizenship have given a powerful signal that should be heard not only in Russia but throughout Europe.

Your words have always been a great moral support for our people and country. What message would you convey to all Serbian citizens, especially the Orthodox faithful, to encourage them in this grave period of history?

A. The Serbs who live in Kosovo and Metohija have become hostages in a major political game. Given the indifferent attitude of many states, they are forced to stay in closed enclaves, experiencing everyday anxiety because of the hostile people around who are aware of their impunity. Our brothers in faith have great courage not to abandon their much-suffering land and holy places, and have to live like concentration camp inmates who are denied even the basic right to life. Here we see a glaring injustice, double standards and lies of the policy declaring commitment to the ideal of humanism and human rights protection while shutting its eyes to the hell created by extremists with support from their foreign sponsors.

The Lord says to St. Paul, 'My power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9). When all the human resources are exhausted, when there seems to be no hope, then we seek the help of God about which the Lord told to his apostle. In Russian history we see many examples when the country was on the verge of enslavement and destruction – in the Time of Trouble in 1612, and during the Polish intervention, in 1812 when Napoleon's army invaded the country, and in 1941 when Hitler's armadas advanced with

lightning speed in the territory of the Soviet Union. Not once the enemy was close to his aim but contrary to the logical development, Russia hurled back those invasions and rose from ruins and ashes. In this the believer sees God's providence and His help.

I have no right to give any political advice to the Kosovo Serbs but will offer a counsel relevant in all times: turn to the Lord God with sincere prayer for help. And your brothers and sisters in faith in Russia will lift up their prayers together with you, and I believe the whole Universal Church will do the same. In the Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ repeats these words: 'Do not be afraid!' The fear of dangers and threats is a natural human feeling. But the Lord is always with us and He says to the Serbs in Kosovo today: 'Do not be afraid!'

I am deeply thankful to the Kosovo Serbs for their letter to me and to the Russian state leaders, to 'the Russian people and brothers'. Scores of thousands of people put their signatures to this letter. It has left no one of those who read it indifferent. Our hearts are deeply moved by the trust and love for Russia manifested in this letter. In response I would like to say: the Russian Church, the Orthodox Russian people will never turn away from you. No earthly gains, no changes in the current political situation will make us forget about our ages-old spiritual kinship.

Q. Russia, with her diplomatic and political resources, has given support to the Kosovo Serbs who have been caught in a difficult situation in all respects, socio-economic, legal, psychological. What support can the Serbs from Kosovo expect from the Russian Orthodox Church?

A. The Russian Federation has really given a considerable support to the Kosovo Serbs. For instance, by the decision of the Russian authorities, funds have been allocated through UNESCO for the restoration of ruined churches in Kosovo. This initiative deserves every encouragement. Other actions are taken as well to relieve the situation of our Serbian brothers who live in Kosovo, including the supply of humanitarian aid.

The Moscow Patriarchate has invariably supported the position taken by the Serbian Church with regard of the status of Kosovo. On the international arena, much was done for the protection of the Serbian population of the region by my predecessor, His Holiness Patriarch Aleksy II. In particular, he devoted to this problem a considerable part of his address

to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 2007. I, too, will never stop making efforts for defending the Serbian brothers in their struggle to live in the land of their fathers.

It is very important that the holy places in Kosovo should not be abandoned. It would be a real spiritual catastrophe and would do a serious damage to Europe's Orthodox heritage. Priceless are the monuments created by the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, and they are alive as long as prayers are lifted up in churches and the feat of monasticism is performed in monastery cells. I have approved the action program which will be implemented in 2012.

I have been to Kosovo several times and talked with local people and could see their difficult situation with my own eyes. What I saw made a strong impression on me. The Russian Orthodox Church was and will be in solidarity with the Kosovo Serbs. Our compatriots empathize with them and lift up ardent prayers for a speedy regulation of life in the Kosovo region. There is my voice too among these numerous voices of prayer.

Q. How do you assess the new calls of some Montenegro politicians to divide the Serbian Orthodox Church? The former prime minister of Montenegro, Milo Jukanovic, has recently stated the history will show the validity of his call to divide the Serbian Church.

A. History shows that attempts of particular political forces to put pressure on the Church in order to change her canonical order lead to nothing good.

Fortunately, in Montenegro there are many reasonable political leaders who share this point of view. In February 2009, I met with Montenegrin President Philip Vujanovic. I remember that during that meeting Mr. Vujanovic said that for him the Metropolia of Montenegro and Primorje was the only Orthodox canonical institution in Montenegro and pointed to the importance of the Metropolia's taking pastoral care of the Serbs and Montenegrins.

All the Local Orthodox Churches consider Montenegro to be part of the canonical territory of the Serbian Patriarchate and this generally-shared Orthodox conviction should be respected.

Q. We know that representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in their talks with representatives of the Vatican paid attention to the fact that it would be good for the Pope to voice and openly demand the protection of monuments and

Christians themselves in Kosovo. The then Pope did not listen to the wise advice from Moscow. Is the situation changing in this respect with the coming of a new Pope?

A. When the discussion on the Kosovo problem began, Pope Benedict XVI of Rome, as is known, took a well-considered stand on this problem. The Holy See still refrains from an official recognition of this part of Serbia as an independent state. Moreover, on the eve of the declaration of the independence of Kosovo, the Pope called the international community not to hurry to make the final decision on the status of that territory, emphasizing that the Orthodox monasteries there have a special historical and spiritual significance for the Serbs.

Exactly four days after the declaration of Kosovo's independence in February 2008, Benedict XVI received in audience the Serbian ambassador to the Holy See. In the course of the meeting, the Pope underscored that the Serbs suffered much in the conflicts of the last decades and expressed concern for their situation in Kosovo. Since then he has repeatedly spoken for the protection of the rights of the Serbian minority.

Q. How will you explain the fact that Western Christians, that is, Catholics, did not show a desire to defend old Orthodox, that is Christian, churches in Kosovo? These churches were burnt down and destroyed exactly at the time when Western peace-makers came to Kosovo.

A. Regrettably, the Western world, during the intervention of the NATO troops in the territory of former Yugoslavia, was subjected to a massive information attack and, to a considerable extent, was misled. For long months, the Western mass media played up deliberately distorted information about 'the atrocity of Milosevic's regime' committed in Kosovo, grossly exaggerating the number of victims of 'ethnic cleansings' carried out by the Serbian police in the region.

However, the hostilities themselves in Kosovo provoked in the Western Christian world a reaction far from unequivocal. Many Christians in the West were outraged by the inscription 'Happy Easter!' on bombs made by the American military.

Nevertheless, a number of Catholic bishops did come out in support of Kosovo's autonomy, motivated by hopes for an improvement in the life of the Catholic community in the region, which did not come true.

Other representatives of Western Christian churches and communities have repeatedly expressed concern for the vandalism of NATO's military and for Albanian militants with their extremist attitude to the old shrines in Kosovo. Therefore, I believe, the Western Christians as a whole should not be blamed for the actions of the military. These actions were not dictated by religious beliefs.

Q. Many newspapers have recently reported on your possible meeting with Pope Benedict XVI. Do you still insist that all the disputed questions should be resolved first, because otherwise this meeting is meaningless?

A. Yes, I still believe that for this meeting to be a success it is necessary, if not to settle the problems in full, at least to try to settle them more energetically.

The mass media have stressed only the sensational aspect of a possible meeting, but I do not like it at all to be reduced to sensational. To make it really beneficial for the further development of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church it is necessary to radically improve the atmosphere of these relations through joint efforts for settling the problems existing in our relations.

Q. Under the former Pope, representatives of the Vatican often said they could not influence the Greek Catholics in Ukraine who captured Orthodox churches. Has the situation changed now or things have remained the same?

A. While stressing their loyalty to the see of Rome, the Ukrainian Greek Catholics have insisted on their own autonomy. When in 1990 a quadruple commission was set up including the Vatican, Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, in order to settle the situation in western Ukraine, the Greek Catholics actually wrecked its work. We have recently suggested that this commission be resumed but the Catholic side has been perfectly indifferent to our proposal.

In the course of regular contacts with leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, we have continually raised the question concerning the need to resolve the situation with regard to Orthodox churches in western Ukraine. Both the Pope of Rome and heads of respective Vatican congregations have expressed appreciation of our concern but the problem remains unresolved.

Q. The Russian Patriarch and the Pope were supposed to meet in 1997 in Graz, Austria. Ten days before the meet-

ing, they in the Vatican deleted the part of the document to be signed concerning the harm of proselytism and conflict between the Orthodox and the Uniates in Ukraine. Since the 90s, Catholic churches have been opened in more than 200 Russian cities. Have the positions of Moscow and the Vatican become closer when proselytism is discussed now, or everything has remained the same?

A. It should be noted that the situation in the Orthodox-Catholic relations in Russia have noticeably improved in the last 10 years. The problem of proselytism is not as acute now as it was in the 90s when Catholic missionaries came to Russia to carry out their active work here. A positive role has been played by the Joint Group for Considering Problems in Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Russia, which was set up in 2004. It has become a good platform for an open and honest discussion between representatives of the two Churches on concrete complicated problems and for a joint effort to make recommendations for their solution.

It is necessary to develop cooperation between the Orthodox and the Catholics who have been guardians of the Christian tradition and who have similar views of personal and social ethics, scientific and technological progress, bioethics and other issues of today. Among the problems which have become increasingly relevant is Christianophobia, the persecution of Christians for their faith. In the area of the protection of the rights of Christians, I believe close Orthodox-Catholic cooperation to be promising, important and timely. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 29.

ON 30 JANUARY 2012, HEGUMEN FILARET, VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), MET WITH HOWARD SOLOMON, DEPUTY MINISTER COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF THE US EMBASSY IN RUSSIA.

Discussed were problems of the freedom of conscience regularly presented in the annual reports of the US State Department on religious freedom in the world. Hegumen Filaret gave particular attention to the cases of discrimination and persecution against Christians in the world which have provoked concern of the authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 30.

THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH-MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE (UOC-MP), ARCHBISHOP MYTROFAN (YURCHUK) OF BILA TSEKVA AND BOHUSLAV COMMENTED ON THE WEB SITE OF THE KYIV CAVE MONASTERY ON THE RESPONSE OF THE MASS MEDIA TO THE DECISIONS OF THE SYNOD OF UOC-MP OF 26 JANUARY. He explained why it was decided to appoint Metropolitan Pavlo of Vyshhorod and Chornobyl temporary head of the Kyivan Eparchy of UOC-MP and to replace the administrators of the construction of the Cathedral of the Resurrection. The head of UOC-MP stressed that the Head of UOC-MP, Metropolitan Volodymyr is aware of all the decisions of the Synod and that there is no schism within UOC-MP.

“His Beatitude has been and continues to be our Primate... The Synod considered the current questions of the Church life, particularly, the appointment of Metropolitan Pavlo of Vyshhorod and Chornobyl temporary head of the Kyivan Eparchy and cancellation of the decisions of the previous Synod, which set up the committee of three vicar bishops of the Kyivan Metropolitanate to head the Kyivan eparchy. That mechanism of leadership during the period of sickness of his Beatitude has proved ineffective. It is necessary to make decisions, sign documents, therefore, the question arose who should do that. It undoubtedly should be carried out by one person... Metropolitan Pavlo was entrusted with the task to lead the Kyivan Eparchy as he always stays in the capital, in the monastery and knows the situation in Kyiv and Kyiv Region. He was the most suitable candidate. Also changes were made with regard to the construction of the Cathedral of the Resurrection. Bishop Oleksandr was dismissed from the position of the senior priest of the Church of All Saints because the process of construction has proved extremely complicated and to manage that process and financing thereof one should be good at it. One representative of our Church who is good at it is Metropolitan Sofronii of Cherkasy and Kaniv who built more than one Church. He has experience of construction of large churches. Therefore, it was decided to entrust him with the task of supervising the construction of the Cathedral of the Holy Resurrection,” Archbishop Mytrofan commented on the decision of the Synod.

As for the changes and addenda to the Statutes of UOC-MP, the Archbishop

stressed that the Committee on Alterations and Addenda to the Statutes of UOC-MP will prepare the alterations, and that the final decision to pass or reject the alterations is to be made by the Council of Bishops of UOC.

The archbishop refuted the information that Metropolitan Volodymyr did not know about the decisions of the Synod: “On the eve of the Holy Synod, Archbishop Oleksandr of Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi and Vyshneve and I visited His Beatitude and discussed all the questions to be raised at the synod and His Beatitude was informed of all the developments. On the day of the Synod, Bishop Oleksandr and Metropolitan Lazar of Simferopol and Crimea also visited His Beatitude and reported to him on the decisions made by the Synod. They say that his Beatitude may not sign the decisions passed by the Synod. This is also not true. The decisions at the Synod are taken collectively, that is with the consent of all the members of the Synod, and his Beatitude signs them only if all the members of the Synod agree with them. Therefore, if decisions were taken, actually all the questions raised at the Synod were passed unanimously. If his Beatitude does not agree with any decisions of the Synod, when he fully returns to the fulfillment of his responsibilities of the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, he has a right to submit the decisions to a repeated consideration and only then, they will be changed if it is necessary. As of now, all the decisions of the Holy synod of 26 January are valid and must be fulfilled by everyone whom they concern.” -- *RISU*, Jan. 30.

HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID AND METROPOLITAN OF SKOPIJE JOVAN, ON JANUARY 16TH, IN THE AFTERNOON HOURS, WAS TRANSFERRED FROM THE PRISON RECEPTION SECTION TO THE CLOSED SECTION OF THE “IDRIZOVO” PRISON.

Although the procedure of deciding whether he should be allowed a retrial and be released pending trial is still not finished, the prison authorities decided to put Archbishop Jovan in the section where the sanctions with strictest treatment are executed.

The sentence that Archbishop Jovan received in the court process in which he was sentenced in his absence is two years and 6 months imprisonment, which is not at all a sentence deserving the strictest closed treatment, since other prisoners,

sentenced to much longer prison terms, are receiving the open, or the semi-open treatment.

According to the information reaching the public, the decision is the result of the demands of the schismatic “Macedonian Orthodox Church” (MOC), which insisted that Archbishop Jovan be confined under the most strict prison conditions, and all communications outside the prison be made more difficult for him. -- From the Office of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and Metropolitanate of Skopje, Jan. 18.

WITH THE BLESSING OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA AND HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP KYRILL OF SAN FRANCISCO AND WESTERN AMERICA, THE SAINTS CYRIL & ATHANASIOS INSTITUTE FOR ORTHODOX STUDIES IS BEING ESTABLISHED IN THE BAY AREA. It aims to become a new center for the higher-level study of Orthodox theology, history, thought and practice throughout western North America. The Institute will concentrate its activities around provision of a Licentiate Certificate in Orthodox Christian Studies, offered as a blend of in-class and distance learning instruction, the latter provided through a professionally-designed web site that provides access to video lectures, live chat with lecturers and fellow students, audio interaction, on-line assignment submission and marking, and more.

Next month (February 17-18) the Institute's first regional symposium will take place in San Francisco: "Living Symbol: Exploring the Inner Meaning of the Divine Liturgy" and will feature principal speakers Archimandrite Meletios (Webber), Archimandrite Irenei (Steenberg) and Archpriest Josiah Trenham. For more information on the Institute and to register for the symposium, please visit the Institute's web page at this address: <http://www.sforthodoxinstitute.org/>

AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH FAMED FOR ITS VALUABLE ICONS WAS ALMOST SET ALIGHT IN SOUTHERN MACEDONIA MONDAY OVERNIGHT, AMID RELIGIOUS TENSION BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY. Hours before the fire, Muslim leaders had appealed for calm among community members.

The Jan. 13 Vevcani festival prompted angry, sometimes violent demonstra-

tions by Muslims, who are nearly all ethnic Albanian and make up 33 percent of the country's 2.1 million population and accuse the majority of stoking hatred.

Ethnic tension has been simmering in this small Balkan country since the end of an armed rebellion in 2001, when ethnic Albanian rebels fought government forces for about eight months, seeking greater rights for their community. The conflict left 80 people dead, and ended with the intervention of NATO peacekeepers.

The Vevcani carnival, a traditional festival said to have been held for some 1,400 years, attracts thousands of visitors. Local residents traditionally wear elaborate, frequently sarcastic masks, with some of the most common costumes including devils and demons.

The perceived mockery of the Quran and the burqa costumes caused outrage. On Saturday, protesters attacked an intercity bus heading from Struga to Vevcani, throwing rocks at the vehicle. They also defaced a Macedonian flag outside Struga's municipal building, replacing it with a green flag representing Islam. On the same day, perpetrators attacked a church in the nearby village of Labunista, destroying a 4-meter (13-foot) cross.

Macedonian president Gjorge Ivanov and the leaders of the Orthodox Christian and Muslim communities condemned the incidents and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

The three "expressed confidence that the tradition of living together for centuries in Macedonia remains a value ... for all people of Macedonia," Ivanov's office said in a statement.

The European Union's mission in Macedonia also called for cooperation among the religious communities.

Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and elsewhere in the Balkans have traditionally been secular. But conservative Islamic schools, especially an ultra-conservative form of the religion known as Wahhabism, have taken a foothold in the years following the brief 2001 uprising. — Boris Grdanoski and Konstantin Testorides for *The Associated Press*, Jan. 31.

A ROMANIAN ORTHODOX BISHOP MINISTERING IN ITALY SAYS THAT ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IS TAKING GREAT STEPS FORWARD, PARTICULARLY AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL.

This was the assertion made by Bishop Siluan Span when he spoke with ZENIT after Wednesday's celebration of Vespers at St. Paul Outside the Walls.

Benedict XVI led the liturgy, and with it, closed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The bishop of the Romanian Orthodox diocese for Italy and member of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church reflected on how things are changing.

ZENIT: What is the situation of ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox?

Bishop Siluan: I believe, despite voices that say that the ecumenical dialogue is in crisis, that in the last 15 years Christians of Eastern Europe -- we are talking of Romania Bulgaria, Russia, but in particular of the countries that are in the European Union -- having the possibility and the willingness to leave, made contact with the reality of all the Western countries. We must say that the Catholic Church in Italy, Spain and other countries manifested an openness and willingness to help, which was much appreciated by the Churches of the East, by the Orthodox Church.

ZENIT: What kind of relationships have been created?

Bishop Siluan: I speak for the Romanian Orthodox Church and I see that different relations have developed from those of the past. In the sense that the Romanian cleaning lady meets an Italian family in its reality. It is a grassroots ecumenism which was never the case before. The Italian family entrusts to her not only the grandmother or grandfather, but also the children. And when the elderly woman prays at night, she asks the Romanian Orthodox cleaning lady to read the Liturgy of the Hours to her. They go to church together and I see that they commend to me names so that we will pray for the persons they look after.

ZENIT: Hence, in daily life!

Bishop Siluan: This prayer for one another, this, let's say domestic faith, is a beginning of closeness and of dialogue that is more profound than that of the high-level commissions. This is also true of the relationship between our parish priests and the Catholics who house the greater part of our communities in Italy. It is a very important dialogue between the different communities, because, for example, in some churches the Catholic community prays in the early morning and the Orthodox at 10 or 11 o'clock.

We see the presence of Italians at the baptism of children and in our churches. Moreover, there are so many mixed marriages, between Romanian men and Italian

women and vice versa. Hence, it is a sort of dialogue without precedents.

ZENIT: What was determinant for this change?

Bishop Siluan: It must be said that during Communism, Romania could not have a dialogue of this kind. There was a representative who went out once or twice a year and who did not have the liberty to say what he wished to say. Hence, in these 15 to 20 years, unprecedented relations were created.

ZENIT: This is clear at the horizontal level, but between the religious?

Bishop Siluan: Although there are places and moments in which the dialogue is in crisis, relations have undoubtedly matured. I am thinking of meetings with Catholic monks, priests and bishops whom I met 20 years ago, in my case in France. Today we meet as old time friends.

There is no mistrust when we meet for the first time, not only between brothers but also between clerics. We had learned about one another only in books and notebooks, with a rather critical attitude.

Thus it wasn't easy to break in, but little by little we began to know individuals, to talk, to meet and to share what we could.

It is essential to share, food for example. It helps to overcome the mistrust that could not be eliminated by theological argumentations. — *Zenit*, Jan. 26.

YESTERDAY, 30 JANUARY 2012, THE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN BUCHAREST CELEBRATED THEIR PROTECTORS, THE THREE SAINT HIERARCHS: BASIL THE GREAT, GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.

On this occasion, the "Patriarch Justinian" Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Bucharest celebrated its protectors too. Many students, professors and faithful attended the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Saint Spiridon the New church - Patriarchal chapel by His Grace Ciprian Campineanul, Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch, assisted by a large group of priests and deacons.

After the Divine Liturgy, a remembrance service was celebrated for those who had passed away, the former professors and students of this educational institution.

At the end, His Grace Ciprian Campineanul delivered a sermon in which he urged the professors to take the Three

Saint Hierarchs as examples in order to form the students to be good priests.

"Let us not forget that these three great teachers and hierarchs were firm defenders of the right faith in the 4th century in a time when the Church was faced with heresies. From this point of view, the three saints are paradigms for the hierarchs, professors, students and all faithful. This is why I recommend this to our professors of the Theological Faculty who must contribute to the enlightenment of our students' minds with the knowledge of the works of the Holy Fathers. Nor must we ever neglect the meditative aspect of prayer because they all were people of prayer, both theologians, teachers, and people who prayed continually. From this point of view we want all those who study at the Faculties of Theology to have good knowledge of the Orthodox Theology, and most of all to be good priests," said His Grace, as Trinitas Radio station informs us. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Jan. 31.

ELEVEN OUT OF A TOTAL OF FIFTEEN BULGARIAN METROPOLITAN BISHOPS HAVE BEEN EXPOSED AS FORMER AGENTS OF THE COUNTRY'S FORMER COMMUNIST STATE SECURITY.

All eleven exposed Metropolitan bishops have collaborated with State Security's notorious 6th directorate, the one engaged in "fighting political diversion" during the Communist dictatorship in the Balkan country that ended in 1989.

The list includes Varna's Metropolitan Bishop Kiril who stirred controversy early in December 2011 when he turned up for service in a luxury Lincoln MKZ Hybrid.

Stara Zagora's Metropolitan Bishop Galaktion, who recently turned out to have been a member of the Board of Directors of a tissue bank, has also been exposed as a former secret agent.

Contrary to media rumors, Bulgaria's 97-year-old Patriarch Maxim is not among the former State Security agents in the high clergy, according to the list submitted on Tuesday by the so-called Files Commission, a special panel investigating the Communist regime secret files.

However, Bulgaria's current Chief Mufti Mustafa Hadzhi, his predecessor Nedim Gendzhev and the head of the Bulgarian Catholic Church Georgi Yovchev have all collaborated with the Communist-era State Security, it has been revealed.

The blacklist of former state security agents and collaborators already features

outgoing President and former Socialist leader, Georgi Parvanov, former constitutional judges, supreme magistrates, investigators, members of parliament, prominent and well-known former and current Bulgarian journalists, as well as ambassadors and diplomats abroad.

The Files Commission has pointed out that their investigation in Bulgaria's Orthodox Church is not over yet. -- *Sophia News Agency*, Jan. 17.

THESE DAYS GOD IS TESTING US, BUT OUR HOLY CHURCH WILL OVERCOME THIS ORDEAL, BULGARIA'S HOLY SYNOD SAYS IN A STATEMENT.

It was included in the greetings of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for the Saturday celebration of Patriarch Maxim's name day, read by the Plovdiv Bishop Nicholay.

The Holy Mass and the liturgy for His Holiness' name day were held in the Sofia "St. Nedelya (Sunday)" Church and lasted about three hours.

Bishops Galaktion, Neofit, Yosif and Simeon did not attend the services. All four are among the 11 bishops exposed as agents of the former State Security, DS.

"As if the other crosses you had to carry were not enough, now God assigned you with an even heavier burden - to accept our humble confession and repentance and give us pardon for sins," according to the Holy Synod's greeting to the Patriarch.

Metropolitan Nikolay is one of three bishops, together with Patriarch Maxim, for whom it was announced that they have not cooperated with DS.

"Take this cross Your Holiness, because only you can carry it, said Metropolitan Nikolay.

So far, only Vratsa Metropolitan Kalinik has asked his congregation for forgiveness, if they felt affected. Ruse Bishop Neofit said he does not feel guilty because he had been forced to collaborate. – *Sophia News Agency*, Jan. 21.

BULGARIA'S PRIME MINISTER BOYKO BORISOV HAS EXPRESSED HIS DISCONTENT OVER THE LARGE NUMBER OF FORMER COMMUNIST STATE SECURITY AGENTS AMONG THE COUNTRY'S HIGH CLERGY.

"The good thing is that the Patriarch is not an agent. But anyway, I am sure that this case will have its impact on people. I will look at these Metropolitan bishops in a different way now," Borisov told the 24 Chasa daily. He referred to the country's

97-year-old Patriarch Maxim whose name surprisingly did not appear in the list of former agents.

According to Borisov, the comment made by one of the ex-Communist agent bishops that "all power comes from God" was "a little bit cynical." However, he declared that he still has respect for the Bulgarian Orthodox church.

"I will kiss their hands because of the church and the belief in God. After all, since the Boss has let it happen, I will take it for granted like that bishop did. But apparently, the Boss has decided to bring about a power that will reveal all the secret files so that the laity can reach their own conclusions," Borisov added, referring to the members of the high clergy.

"The Boss" is how the Bulgarian Prime Minister habitually refers to God.

Borisov admitted that he expected "two or three" names to emerge in the high clergy as linked to the Communist State Security, but was surprised by their actual prevalence. – *Sophia News Agency*, Jan. 23.

THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH WILL COME OUT STRONGER FROM ITS ORDEALS AFTER THE ANNOUNCING OF A NUMBER OF SENIOR CLERGY'S AFFILIATION WITH EX-COMMUNIST SECRET SERVICES, said Plovdiv Bishop Nikolay.

Metropolitan Nikolay, a young bishop, was one of the very few Bulgarian metropolitan bishops to have no affiliation with communist State Security. 11 out of 15 bishops were revealed to have belonged to the services.

"In these days of ordeals for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, we have to come out and face the truth. But I believe that after this ordeal the Church will come out stronger," said Nikolay after a service Sunday.

At the same time, he was resolute that Bulgarian lay people need to know more about the Church's ties to State Security, and about the specific collaboration bishops afforded.

"Those implicated with State Security need to turn their prayers to God, for he is our supreme judge and forgiver," commented Nikolay.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is yet to come up with an official position on the situation, as a prior text negotiated at the Holy Synod was scrapped due to revision on the insistence of Nikolay.

Plovdiv metropolitan bishop Nikolay, 42, Bulgaria's youngest, has gained repu-

tation for single-handed religious devotion, zeal and even radicalism. – *Sophia News Agency*, Jan. 29.

ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS IERONYMOS WAS PUT IN A TOUGH SPOT FACED WITH INTENSE PUBLIC DISAPPROVAL FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF THE EPIPHANY DAY DOXOLOGY IN PIRAEUS.

Worshippers prompted him to talk to political leaders and stand beside the people. “Speak up, Ieronymos. Make a stand,” citizens shouted outside the Holy Trinity Church. Other people were shouting from afar “Show us some support, we only get a 500 euro salary, say something,” as his personal guards and strong police forces prevented them from moving closer.

According to the *Real News* web site, the Archbishop appeared to momentarily lose his temper and answered, unable to hide his discontent, “We’re fed up with words during all these years. We need action.”

Shortly after, Archbishop Ieronymos calmed down and stated that “the people are weary and we must stand beside them.”

It is the first time that the worshippers’ exhortations towards the Archbishop were so intense that he had to take a stand.

There were several people outside the Metropolis of Piraeus reminiscing about former Archbishop Christodoulos, who spoke boldly on events unfolding in the country and often clashed with the political leadership.

The Archdiocese, however, has already doubled the soup kitchens for poverty-stricken families, while it also recently inaugurated the community grocery store. – Lamprini Thoma for *Athens News*, Jan. 7.

THE HEAD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GREECE WILL SOON VISIT THE JAILED ABBOT OF VATOPEDI MONASTERY, EPHRAIM, IN HIS CELL AT KORYDALLOS PRISON.

The move by Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece comes after the Church’s Holy Synod agreed, after a two-day discussion, to issue an announcement in support of the jailed abbot.

In its decision, the synod criticises the fact that Ephraim was remanded in custody at Christmas, adding that the holy conventions of Mount Athos were violated.

The announcement continues by expressing the sympathy of the members of

the Holy Synod for the abbot and the wish and hope that he will be released soon.

Ephraim was placed in custody on December 28, accused of inciting officials to commit acts of fraud, perjury and money-laundering, a charge that can fetch him a jail term of several years. (AMNA, Athens News), Jan. 12.

ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2012, THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA RELEASED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT CONCERNING HIS EMINENCE, ARCHBISHOP SERAPHIM [STORHEIM]:

“The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America has been made aware that His Eminence, Archbishop Seraphim, the suspended Archbishop of Ottawa and Canada, appeared in a Winnipeg criminal court on January 18, 2012. Archbishop Seraphim is a defendant in a matter involving allegations of sexual abuse toward a minor or minors. The case has been committed for trial.

“Archbishop Seraphim originally was placed on a leave of absence on October 1, 2010, shortly after the Lesser Synod of Bishops had been informed that a police investigation had commenced. On November 30, 2010, the Holy Synod of Bishops changed his status to ‘suspended,’ and he retains that status. The Holy Synod appointed a Special Commission to conduct an internal investigation into the allegations. The Synodal Commission has been in communication with civil authorities and has held its investigation in abeyance so as not to interfere with or compromise the judicial process. Once the court matters have concluded, the Synodal Commission will complete its work and issue a report to the Holy Synod in accordance with the sexual misconduct Policies, Standards and Procedures of the OCA.

While this is a sad and stressful matter for all involved, the legal process must take its course in order to arrive at the truth and eventual resolution. Archbishop Seraphim has retained legal counsel. While taking an active interest in the proceedings, the OCA is not a party to the criminal action and has no information to impart regarding trial progress. As is always the case in Canadian criminal matters, he remains innocent until proven guilty in court.” – OCA Press Release, Jan. 21.

HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN JONAH OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA OFFERED THE OPENING PRAYER DURING THE PROGRAM THAT PRECEDED THE MARCH FOR LIFE IN WASHINGTON, DC, on Monday, January 23, 2012.

“Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, who is in charge of pro-life activities, invited the Orthodox bishops to stand together with the Roman Bishops, as we are of one mind in regards to Life, and for us to begin to alternate giving the opening prayer for the March,” Metropolitan Jonah said, reflecting on the March. “This year, they gave the honor to me to bless the opening of the March for Life on their behalf, as well as on behalf of the Orthodox. With me at that podium, at my request, was Cardinal-elect Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York.

“This is a significant ecumenical event, a strong gesture of unity, and a great symbol of the respect of the Roman Catholic Church for the Orthodox Church in America,” Metropolitan Jonah continued. “We are of one mind in opposition to abortion as a fundamental doctrinal and moral position, in accordance with the ancient Tradition of the undivided orthodox catholic Church.” – OCA Press Release, Jan. 25.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

STAFF MEMBERS AND CLERGY GATHERED IN NEW YORK’S ST. VARTAN ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, FOR A BRIEF SERVICE, TO PRAY FOR THE HEALTH AND RECOVERY OF HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP TORKOM MANOOGIAN, THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM.

The former Primate of the Eastern Diocese was admitted on January 19 to a hospital in Jerusalem, Israel, where he is resting comfortably but has been drifting in and out of consciousness. Patriarch Torkom will turn 93 next month.

In a quiet reflection at the service, Diocesan Primate Archbishop Khajag Barsamian spoke of the Patriarch as a great spiritual leader of the Armenian Church, and a figure of enduring stature in the worldwide community of Christian churches.

He said that the wellbeing of the Patriarch has a special importance to Armenians in America, where he is respected and loved as the Primate who led the Eastern Diocese for 24 years. Many current members of the Diocesan staff worked with him during that time, and

hold Archbishop Torkom especially close to their hearts.

Archbishop Barsamian led the noon-time prayer service, alongside other participating clergy: Fr. Sooren Chinchian, Fr. Simeon Odabashian, Fr. Mardiros Chevian, and Fr. Tateos Abdalian.

Diocesan staff members and several friends of the Diocese from the surrounding neighborhood in midtown Manhattan offered prayers for the Patriarch.

Archbishop Manoogian was originally admitted to Jerusalem's Hadassah Medical Center two weeks ago, but was released after two days. He became critically ill and was re-admitted on January 19, and has been under observation by the medical staff for pneumonia. Members of the Jerusalem brotherhood, as well as family members, have been by the Patriarch's side throughout his hospitalization.

Archbishop Barsamian is asking all of our pastors and parishioners to keep Archbishop Torkom in their thoughts, and to pray for his health and recovery. – Press Release, Eastern Diocese, Jan. 25.

ON 23 DECEMBER 2011, REV. DR. PAUL ROUHANA, THE NEW GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, VISITED HIS HOLINESS ARAM I. Mrs. Seta Hadesian, Director of the Diakonia and Social Justice Unit of the MECC, accompanied him.

Rev. Dr. Rouhana took office on 2 January 2012. The purpose of his visit was to inform His Holiness on his findings following his meetings with MECC staff, and his plans to implement the priorities set by the 10th Assembly. The General Secretary also discussed his plans for internal restructuring of the Council.

After listening to the General Secretary, Catholicos Aram I proposed that he also visit the Heads of Churches in the Middle East in order to hear their priorities for the Council.

In the end, Catholicos Aram I commended the new General Secretary on his approach to his new position, and the proposals he will take to the next Executive Committee meeting to be held in March 2012 at the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias. – Press Release, Catholicosate of Cilicia, Jan. 4.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) GENERAL SECRETARY REV. DR OLAV FYKSE TVEIT REAFFIRMED THE CHURCHES' COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, while stressing the importance of a common

vision for living together by Christians and Muslims in the Arab world.

Tveit was speaking at the Christian-Muslim consultation on "Christian Presence and Witness in the Arab World" organized by the WCC programs for Churches in the Middle East and Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches.

The consultation is currently taking place from 24-28 January at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, bringing together youth, scholars and Christian and Muslim leaders for a frank and dynamic discussion.

Tveit said the Middle East is of special interest for the WCC, and articulated the historic significance of Christian presence in the Arab world, where he believes faith plays a major role, reflecting on a declaration of the WCC's Central Committee meeting of February 2011:

"Our living faith has its roots in this region and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches, who have their own roots from the apostolic times."

"Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, and civilizations, which is a sign of God's love for all humanity, will be endangered," said Tveit.

He appreciated the participation of a range of Muslims in the consultation, who he says, have emphasized their commitment to strengthen the Christian presence in the Middle East. He said that it is through their action for the common good that people in the Arab world can accomplish peace, justice, freedom and harmony.

"We will certainly want to make clear to our wider constituency, the WCC's extensive experience over many years of how Christians and Muslims continue to work together constructively for the common good," he said.

Tveit also pointed out the challenges faced by the Christians in the Arab world, and the sense of insecurity they feel, due to political divides and persistent conflicts.

The WCC has addressed over a number of years the issue of emigration of Christians from the region resulting from the occupation and war in Iraq and the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

He said, "We know that the changes in the Arab world over the last year – and changes still to come – have also left many Christians, along with many Mus-

lims, feeling uncertain and even afraid for their future."

Highlighting the efforts of churches struggling for justice and peace in Israel and Palestine, Tveit said that the situation is of great concern for Christians in Jerusalem, as well as people of other faiths. – WCC Press Release, Jan. 27.

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESAN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL HELD ITS LAST SESSION OF 2011, MEETING ON DECEMBER 19TH AT THE ARCHDIOCESAN COMPLEX IN TEANECK TO DISCUSS TWO MAJOR ISSUES AT HAND. These include the Youth Director position for the Archdiocese and amendments to the parish by-laws.

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim and the Council membership received a progress report on the Youth Ministry initiative and the selection process for a Youth Director. Naim Ghassali, Chairman, along with the committee membership reported to His Eminence that they have already interviewed two candidates for the position. The chairman explained that the interview process was intense and required several meetings with the candidates and is still on-going. A job description has been developed and requirements for the position clearly spelled out. The committee membership asked the council to submit additional names since the feeling was that two candidates were not sufficient. The job description document will be forwarded to the Council membership for their reference. A discussion was held concerning the funding for the position and included the individual churches' participation in underwriting the cost and private sponsorships.

Jack Darakjy, who is spearheading the parish by-laws amendment effort, reported that the initiative is on schedule. Several amendments have been made and an updated draft of the document will be forwarded to the Council membership for further review before finalizing the parish by-laws.

His Eminence thanked Dr. Yamo Deniz, Council President for all his efforts. The Archbishop also thanked the Council membership for all their hard work during 2011. He also gave special recognition to Council member Abboud Shakarjy, who travels from Washington DC to attend these meetings, wishing him and all the Council membership God's Blessings.

In his benediction, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim asked the Almighty

to bless His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, our beloved Patriarch, wishing His Holiness good health as we embark on 2012 and all the challenges that the new year will present. – Press Release, Syrian Orthodox Eastern Diocese, Jan. 1.

ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, MEMBERS OF THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES MET AT THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICES IN TEANECK, NJ FOR THEIR BIENNIAL MEETING. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim welcomed the participant hierarchs and clergy on behalf of the Eastern Archdiocese. His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, chaired the meeting. The meeting was also attended by His Eminence Archbishop Mor Titus Eldho, of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church and His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, as well as, clergy representing the Coptic and the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.

The meeting began with a short morning prayer. Discussion topics included plans being made for a youth retreat to be hosted by the Syrian Orthodox Church and possible daylong regional meetings of Oriental Orthodox clergy.

Participants also spoke about their respective Christian education programs and reviewed the Oriental Orthodox Concelebration of the Divine Liturgy held last November at the Coptic Orthodox Church of Archangel Michael and St. Mena in Staten Island, NY. Next year's concelebration will be hosted by St. Leon Armenian Church of Fair Lawn, NJ.

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Eastern Diocese's Ecumenical Director, and Archbishop Karim spoke about the participation of Oriental Orthodox churches in the Christian Churches Together organization and presented updates on the ongoing dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. Turning to developments overseas, participants discussed the situation of Copts in Egypt and Christians in Syria.

The Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan gave a presentation on the new website of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which can be accessed at <http://www.scooch.org/>

In addition to Archbishop Karim, Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar, Rev. Fr.

Aziz Hadodo and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun were also present.

The meeting continued over lunch prepared by the Ladies Auxiliary of St. Mark's Cathedral. – Press Release, Syrian Orthodox Eastern Diocese, Jan. 17.

CHRIStIAN LEADERS IN EGYPT ARE MEETING TO DISCUSS OPENING A DIALOGUE WITH ISLAMIC GROUPS AS A WAY OF ADDRESSING SECTARIAN VIOLENCE.

Ahead of the Eastern Christmas celebrated on 7 January, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church leader, met on 5 January with Anglican Church leaders, according to news reports, to discuss how they could begin "constructive dialogue" with the Islamists who have won a majority in Parliament.

The meeting came as the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party secured a clear win in the elections that began on 28 November.

In the recent past, the two groups, seen as fundamentalist, have been associated with threats and attacks on Christians. But the Coptic and Anglican leaders said they had received many positive statements from the groups' members, which affirmed Christians as equal citizens.

According to the Egypt Independent newspaper, the leaders said that in view of the declarations, dialogue between Christians and moderate Muslims would benefit the country. The two religions also said they would respect the people's choice in Egypt's first democratic election, according to the newspaper.

With the two Islamic parties securing more than 65 per cent of the votes, Hussein Mohammed, the Brotherhood party leader, said in a news release on 31 December that anyone attempting to cause division must be stopped.

"There are many things in common between Christians and Muslims in history, the nation and the future that must be preserved," he said. "Copts (Christians) in Egypt are fully pledged Egyptians with the same rights as us."

In spite of this statement, extremists have sent several threats to Christians in Nag Hammadi, ahead of the Christmas celebrations, according to Barnabas Fund, a UK based charity. This was the scene of a massacre on the same day in 2010, according to the group.

Threats of violence, burning of churches and houses, and murder of Christians by Islamic extremists have increased in Egypt since a year ago, when the "Arab

Spring" popular uprising topped the government of longtime leader Hosni Mubarak. – Fredrick Nzwili for *ENI*, Jan. 6.

THE CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS OF SOUTHWARK, MOST REV KEVIN McDONALD AND THE COPTIC ORTHODOX BISHOP ANGAELOS MARKED THE WEEK OF CHRISTIAN UNITY TODAY, WITH THE LAUNCH OF THE FIRST BOOK COMPILED BY THE CATHOLIC-ORIENTAL ORTHODOX REGIONAL FORUM: 'JOINT STATEMENTS BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC AND ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES'.

The book includes statements by Pope Benedict XVI and by the leadership of the Syrian, Coptic and Armenian Orthodox Churches. It aims to increase ecumenical cooperation and raise people's awareness of Catholic and Oriental Orthodox similarities, rather than differences.

Speaking at the launch at the offices of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Bishop Angaelos, who co-chairs the Forum with Archbishop McDonald, said: "We're facing serious threats of increased secularism and marginalization of religion in general and Christianity in particular. As members of first century churches we really need to both live and introduce people to the wealth, meaning and value of what it means to witness and live our Christianity today.

"It's very easy to become theoretical about theology and forget that we are talking about our faith in the incarnate word, in salvation and in the presence of God. We forget to speak in communion of what we can have in common."

Bishop Angaelos gave the example of the time he sent a letter of support to the Catholic Church during the adoption issue a few years ago because of the common stance.

"When you're in a dialogue, it's not about compromise, it's about reaching deeply into the Biblical routes in such a way that convergence can be developed," said Archbishop McDonald. "The purpose of publishing this book is precisely to engage people in this process at a local, grass-root level.

"We're not talking about agreed statements from theologians that have yet to be ratified," said the Archbishop of Southwark. "We're talking about agreed statements to which the Catholic Church is already committed."

"These differences will be resolved

because Christ makes one promise about one flock and one shepherd and we will be unified one day," said Bishop Angaelos. "We have a lot in common, which far outweighs our differences.

"We have so much happening this year with the Olympics and the Diamond Jubilee so there needs to be a very clear Christian voice. Also, if our faithful don't see us working together, it's pointless to preach about love, forgiveness and acceptance from the pulpits."

The General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church said he also hopes to have shared prayer gatherings in the future to get more people involved.

Other members of the Forum attending were Abba Seraphim; His Grace Bishop Vahan Hovhannesian; Mgr Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham; Mgr Paul Hendriks, Auxiliary Bishop of Southwark, and Father Peter Farrington (co-Secretary). – Estefania Aguirre for *Independent Catholic News*, Jan. 23.

COPTIC POPE SHENOUDA III WILL RETURN TO EGYPT ON SUNDAY (JANUARY 29) AFTER UNDERGOING MEDICAL TREATMENT IN THE UNITED STATES.

The state-run Middle East News Agency said his doctors agreed to release him from the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, as his condition is now stable.

The Pope's treatment lasted nearly two weeks, during which time he underwent comprehensive treatments for his kidneys, heart and leg. He had surgery on them in 2008.

A source at the Pope's office said medical reports showed improvement in his body's vital functions.

The Pope delivered his usual Wednesday sermon live on air from the hospital, and seemed to be in good health.

He congratulated Egyptians on the first anniversary of the 25 January revolution, and greeted the newly formed Parliament and its elected speaker, Saad al-Katatny. – *Egypt Independent*, Jan. 26.

COPTIC POPE SHENOUDA III, THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF EGYPT'S COPTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, IS IN DETERIORATING HEALTH, THE HEAD OF THE EGYPTIAN GENERAL COPTIC ASSOCIATION SAID ON JANUARY 31.

Shenouda, 88, "suffers from kidney disease and diabetes," said Sherif Doss, but said he was still "functional."

Bishop Basanti of Helwan governorate denied rumors that the Pope is in a

coma.

"He is well and under good medical care," the bishop insisted, saying that he would give his regular weekly address Wednesday evening.

Egypt's population is roughly 9% Coptic Christian, according to the U.S. State Department.

Doss said he would expect 2 million Coptic Christians out on the streets for Shenouda's funeral when he dies, but predicted there would be no violence.

Shenouda has been in poor health on and off for many years.

"He has been leading the church for 38 years and is a beloved man who is highly respected," Doss said.

When a Coptic Pope dies, all 150 bishops of the church's Holy Council appoint an acting Patriarch until a vote is conducted for a successor, Doss said. Thousands of bishops, priests, and monks are eligible to vote.

The most senior bishop usually takes the role of acting Patriarch. In this case, that would be Bishop Michael of Asiut. If he declines, Bishop Bakhamios of Behira is next in line, Doss said. – Mohamed Fadel Fahmy for *CNN*, Jan. 31.

The Catholic Churches

THE HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH (UGCC), MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW TO CHANNEL 5 THAT THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE UGCC FOR A PATRIARCHATE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIFIED NATIONAL CHURCH DO NOT CONTRADICT EACH OTHER.

He said that that the UGCC will make an effort to continue the ecumenical dialogue "together with our Orthodox brethren." "I can say that during less than a year of my leadership of the church, I managed to establish friendly and constructive relations with all the Orthodox Churches acting in Ukraine. Perhaps, it is only the first step or half a step, but I hope that these steps will continue during the new year. And we will continue to pray and think about one national church in Ukraine in our efforts to reach unity," said the hierarch.

According to him, the church develops as it advances forward. "We always say that each local Eastern Church in its development progresses toward the Patriarchate, but we also realize that our Patriarchate will have an ecumenical dimension. So we will always try to progress together, not to grow in power against

someone but to grow together with all our brethren in the faith, with whom we have more things in common than not," said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, reported the Information Department of the UGCC. – *RIUS*, Jan. 10.

THE HOLY FATHER, IN ACCORDANCE WITH CANON 185 PARA. 1 OF THE CODE OF CANONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES, GAVE HIS ASSENT TO THE CANONICAL ELECTION CARRIED OUT BY THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE MARONITE PATRIARCHAL CHURCH OF Fr. Michel Aoun, "sincellus" for the clergy of Beirut of the Maronites, Lebanon, as bishop of Jbeil-Byblos of the Maronites (Catholics 250,000, priests 94, religious 78), Lebanon. The bishop-elect was born in Damour, Lebanon in 1959 and ordained a priest in 1984. He has worked as a pastor and educator in Lebanon and as rector at seminaries in Cairo and in Rome. He is also vice president of "La Sagesse" University in Beirut.

In addition, in accordance with canon 185 para. 1 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, the Holy Father gave his assent to the canonical election carried out by the Synod of Bishops of the Maronite Patriarchal Church of Fr. Elias Slaiman Slaiman, professor and judge in the Lebanese ecclesiastical tribunals, as bishop of Lattaquie of the Maronites (Catholics 33,000, priests 28, religious 51), Syria. The bishop-elect was born in Hekr Semaan, Syria in 1951 and ordained a priest in 1987. He studied in France where he also served as vicar at a parish in Paris. He has worked as chaplain of "La Sagesse" University in Beirut and vicar general of Damascus, Syria.

Pope Benedict also, in accordance with canon 185 para. 1 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, gave his assent to the canonical election carried out by the Synod of Bishops of the Maronite Patriarchal Church of Fr. Mounir Khairallah, "protosincellus" of Batrun of the Maronites, Lebanon, as bishop of Batrun (Catholics 69,800, priests 56, religious 95). The bishop-elect was born in Mtah-Ezziat in 1953 and ordained a priest in 1977. He studied in France where he also worked in pastoral care in Parisian parishes. On his return to Lebanon he served as secretary of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod, as seminary professor and as pastor in a number of parishes. – *VIS*, Jan. 19.

POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS NAMED BISHOP WILLIAM C. SKURLA OF THE BYZANTINE EPARCHY OF PASSAIC, N.J., AS ARCHBISHOP OF THE BYZANTINE ARCHDIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH.

Archbishop Skurla, 55, will succeed Archbishop Basil M. Schott, who died in June 2010.

The appointment was announced Jan. 19 in Washington by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

His enthronement -- as the Eastern Catholic installation ceremony is known -- will take place April 18 in Pittsburgh.

The Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh is the only self-governing Eastern Catholic Church in the United States, meaning it is directly under the authority of the Pope rather than a Catholic Patriarch in Eastern Europe or the Middle East. It stretches from Erie, Pa., to Texas and has 58,000 parishioners and 65 priests in 78 parishes.

William Charles Skurla was born in Duluth, Minn., June 1, 1956, and attended local Catholic and public elementary schools. He graduated in 1974 from Chisholm High School, Chisholm, Minn. He attended Deerfield Academy postgraduate program in Deerfield, Mass., from 1974 to 1975. He then attended Columbia University in New York, graduating in 1981 with a concentration in philosophy in 1981.

He entered the Byzantine Franciscan community in Sybertsville, Pa., in 1981 and studied for the priesthood at Mary Immaculate Seminary in Northampton, Pa., receiving master's degrees in divinity in 1986 and theology in 1987.

Ordained a Franciscan priest in 1987, he was incardinated nine years later into the Eparchy of Van Nuys, Calif., where he served as pastoral administrator at St. Melany Byzantine Catholic Church in Tucson, Ariz., from 1993 until 2002. The eparchy is now known as the Holy Protection of Mary Eparchy of Phoenix.

Archbishop Skurla was named to head the Van Nuys Eparchy and ordained a bishop in 2002. He became head of the Passaic Eparchy in early 2008. On the national level, Archbishop Skurla is a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee, Priority and Plans Committee and National Advisory Committee. He also serves as episcopal chairman of the Intereparchial Vocation Directors and Intereparchial Youth Commission.

The Pittsburgh Archeparchy is the

metropolitan see for the three U.S. Byzantine dioceses -- Passaic, Phoenix and Parma, Ohio. -- *CNS*, Jan. 19.

THE NEW APOSTOLIC NUNCIO IN UKRAINE, ARCHBISHOP THOMAS GULLICKSON HAS BEEN IN OUR COUNTRY FOR ONLY A FEW MONTHS. He presented his credentials to the President of Ukraine in November 2011. Our publication spoke with the Vatican ambassador about his impressions of Ukraine and local church life.

- Your Excellency, you've only been in Ukraine for a short time now. What are your impressions of our country?

I've been in Ukraine for only a few weeks. In addition, my only experience in the Slavic world was living in Prague in 1990-93. I also lived in eastern post-communist Germany for over eight years. Therefore, I like to make comparisons. It is interesting for me to evaluate the development of Ukraine over the 20 years of its independence. A lot of things catch my eye. The temptation is to make a superficial, but not accurate assessment. From what I have seen, I have been most struck by social stratification and the gap between the rich and the poor.

- What did you know about Ukraine before you came here? Did you want to come here?

I was happy when I found out that the Holy Father wanted to send me to Ukraine. I had always had good relations with Slavs. Later I was told that Ukraine was a country with dynamically developed Christianity. In other words, I am very happy that I have such a large and interesting field of activity.

- What do you want to do in this field and what tasks do you set for yourself?

My main task, the same one I had for almost 7 years when I was in the Caribbean, is to be the "link" between the Holy Father and Ukraine. I want to perform this task so that my work and ministry brings the Holy Father closer to Ukraine.

- You are a thread of unity between Ukraine and the Vatican on the one hand, and on the other your task is to maintain contacts with representatives of the Ukrainian government and the president. Today, many countries in the West are trying to defend democracy in Ukraine. What is the Vatican's task in this area?

The role of the papal representative, as well as his diplomatic mission, is not solely a political role, as it is today in the world. For example, when I read the newspaper *Den* or *Kyiv Post*, I see discus-

sions about Ukraine's political sphere. The Holy See cannot be on one side or the other and say what consequences this will have because we refer to the next level, the quality of life in God. As for policy, the Holy See cannot point to specific directions of policy development. In other words, I came to Ukraine not to offer advice on state policy. I keep company with bishops and other representatives of the church, and support them. For example, recently I supported Patriarch Sviatoslav and his statements regarding Ukraine's penitentiary system.

- What are your impressions of Patriarch Sviatoslav? Will you become friends?

I have a very good impression of him, and I hope for a friendship. My task is not to tell him what to do, but to listen to him and observe his ministry in the church and the world.

- How would you evaluate the relations between the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine?

The situation here is very interesting and unique in the whole Catholic world. In every country where there is the Catholic Church, the senior sister church always bears responsibility for church life. An example of this would be Romania, where there is both a Western and Eastern Catholic Church. The situation is quite different in Ukraine. The UGCC is the largest Eastern Catholic Church and it is the leading Catholic Church in Ukraine. Ukraine is a very interesting laboratory, which should be examined. Here you can find the key to the future of the church and ecumenism.

- Although the UGCC is the largest Eastern Catholic Church, it is also, says His Beatitude, a global church, because today a third the church is abroad.

This is true, and this, in a sense, is a challenge for His Beatitude and for the church which is located there. If we look at Brazil, for example, then we can see that despite the fact so many years have passed since the first immigrants arrived, their descendants still feel Ukrainian.

- What should Ukrainians know about you?

I still don't know Ukrainian, but am slowly learning. This is my second time being head of a diplomatic mission, and this makes me happy. -- *RISU*, Jan. 23.

THE MEETINGS OF THE 15TH (30TH) SESSION OF THE PERMANENT SYNOD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK

CATHOLIC CHURCH WERE HELD ON JANUARY 20-23, IN KYIV.

During the first two days of its activity, the members of the Permanent Synod were busy with the preparation of the Synod of Bishops of UGCC, which will take place in September of this year in Winnipeg, Canada, and considered a number of questions related to the life of the church in the period between the synods.

In particular, they heard the reports from the Eparch of New Westminster, Bishop Ken Nowakowski, the head of the working group on the implementation of the Strategy of Development of the UGCC for the period until 2020, the head of the Patriarchal Liturgical Committee, Bishop Venedykt Aleksiiichuk, and the head of the Patriarchal Committee on Matters of Monastics Hieromonach Petro Baran.

On January 21, a meeting of the Permanent Synod with the clergy of the Kyivan Archeparchy was held. It was attended by Auxiliary Bishop of the Kyivan Archeparchy Yosyf (Milian), numerous priests and deacons from central Ukraine, workers of the Patriarchal Curia and sem-

inarians of the Kyivan Spiritual Seminary.

After the hierarchical liturgy led by Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, a discussion was held on the state of development of the church in the central and eastern regions of Ukraine and the prospect of evangelization activity in future.

The members of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC noticed a growth in the number of the faithful in the UGCC communities in the east and took into account the information on the difficulties faced by the clergy in their pastoral ministry. These questions will be the subject of discussion at the Permanent Synod in its search for ways to provide better spiritual care for the faithful of the UGCC in the east of Ukraine.

In order to familiarize themselves with the life of church communities, on January 22, the members of the Permanent Synod celebrated services in various communities of the Kyivan Archeparchy of the UGCC. – *RISU*, Jan. 24.

AN EDITORIAL IN THE *MALAYALA MANORAMA DAILY* OF JAN 28, 2012 HAS PRAISED THE EMERGING

ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS EXPRESSED BY THE KERALA CATHOLIC BISHOPS COUNCIL (KCBC)

KCBC had recently finalized its Ecological Mission Statement in Dec. 2011. The document on ecology aims to promote greater awareness among the faithful on how to follow green spirituality as a Christian. It includes plans to adopt green architecture for Church educational buildings, promote solar energy and discourage the use of plastics. It states that any exploitation of nature amounts to a sin against God. The directive would be included in a pastoral letter to be circulated among dioceses in February 2012.

Earlier, the Syro-Malabar Research Centre (LRC) had organized a Research Seminar on Ecology at Mount St. Thomas, Kochi (24-26 November, 2010). It included several papers and panel presentations on Ecology in the Bible, Eco-Ethics, Eco-Spirituality and Eco-Resemblance in Christian Art, Culture and Literature. – Press Release, Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Jan. 30.



The members of the International Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue with His Holiness Patriarch Paulos I in Addis Ababa, January 2012

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