

Metropolitan Philaret of Blessed Memory

A short biography by The True Vine staff

A great page in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has been turned. An entire chapter of it has come to an end. Extinguished is the great candle of our First Hierarch's life. Closed are the lips, which proclaimed to the whole world the pure and unsullied confession of the Orthodox Faith. When the report of his end spread throughout the entire earth, the Orthodox world shuddered, for silenced was the voice of the Orthodox Church's conscience.¹

THUS begins the sermon delivered during the funeral service for the blessed Metropolitan Philaret, whose sanctity was recently revealed to us when his relics were found to be incorrupt. What manner of person was this holy man who spoke out so courageously in defense of the Truth?

He was born on March 22, 1903, in Kursk, Russia, a city located approximately midway between Moscow and the Crimea, and his name in the world was George Nikolayevich Voznesensky Brought up by believing parents (his father was a priest), young George was pious from his youth. When he was six years old, the family moved to Blagoveshchensk on the Amur River at the Manchurian border, where they lived with his father's parents. George attended secondary school there until 1920, when the family emigrated to Harbin, in Manchuria, China, to escape the persecutions resulting from the Bolshevik Revolution. Over the next two decades, because of the influx of Russian refugees, Harbin grew to become the largest Russian city outside the Soviet Union, boasting a population of 140,000 Russians at its peak on the eve of the Chinese Communist takeover in 1946.

A year after the family's arrival in Harbin, George's mother reposed, and his father, after being tonsured a monk with the name Dimitry, was consecrated as bishop of Hailar, in the Russian Church Abroad. (At this time all Russian Orthodox Churches in China were part of the Russian Church Abroad.)

In Harbin, the future Metropolitan attended the Russo-Chinese Polytechnic Institute from which he was graduated in 1927 with a degree in electromechanical engineering. Then, being drawn to the Church, for four years

¹Thus did the then Archbishop Vitaly speak of Metropolitan Philaret in 1985; but, alas, since his own election as Metropolitan, the ROCA has not followed in the footsteps of his honorable predecessor. (Original Russian text of this sermon *is* found in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus*, No. 23, 1985, p. 4; for an English translation, see *Orthodox Christian Witness*, Vol. XIX, No. 19, 1985 pp. 3-4.)

he studied pastoral theology at the Saint Vladimir Institute. Near the end of his studies, he was ordained a deacon, and soon afterwards, in 1931, a priest. Upon completing the course at the institute, he was tonsured a monk, receiving the name Philaret in honor of Saint Philaret the Almsgiver. In 1933 he was elevated to the rank of hegumen, and in 1937 to that of archimandrite.

Father Philaret was known among his acquaintances as a quiet and kind man, easily approachable and always ready to help others. He performed the divine services with compunction born of deep faith and was an inspired preacher. From his earliest years as a priest, he attracted many people seeking advice and spiritual comfort. Our Saviour granted him the ability immediately to comprehend a person's spiritual state and approach him in exactly the right way. The faithful flocked to his church, and at the door of his modest cell there was always a line of people waiting to consult him.

In his personal life he was a strict ascetic. Most important of all, he was a man of prayer; a man who, in his humility, relied entirely on God. Through him God worked many healings of the sick in China. Among them was a young child, Nikita, who was so ill that the doctors had given up hope of his recovery. His parents summoned Father Philaret, who came and prayed. Then he told the parents, "Don't worry, he won't die." And in fact, the child did become well. As little Nikita Chakirov was growing up, his parents would say to their son whenever they saw Father Philaret, "You see that monk? It's through his prayers that you are alive. He prayed for you when you were close to death, and you recovered." So it was that Nikita was in awe of this holy priest and became deeply attached to him, later becoming his deacon and following him from continent to continent.

In addition to his other duties, Father Philaret served as an instructor at the Saint Vladimir Institute, where he himself had studied. A former colleague at the institute recalls:

Father Archimandrite Philaret undertook the great, celestial, and pastoral activity of teaching. The faithful would pack the churches where he was serving. Harbin's Orthodox people, rich and poor, loved him. Archimandrite Philaret's name was widely known even outside the diocese of Harbin. He was kind and accessible to everyone who turned to him; and many people did. When they went to him, they knew they would receive good advice and find consolation and help. Father Archimandrite Philaret was quite strict with himself; he was known to be a true ascetic.

And what a rare memory our good, kind Vladyka had! Whenever we saw him, he showed great interest in all aspects of our lives. He didn't have to be reminded of our needs or difficulties; he already knew what

we wanted to discuss and gave ready answers.¹

In the 1920's, political instability in China allowed the Japanese successfully to demand certain prerogatives in Manchuria, one of which was permission to base the Japanese Kwantung Army there. During the 1930s, this Japanese force moved to occupy all of Manchuria and set up a puppet state under China's last emperor, P'u-yi. Holding Manchuria as a virtual colony, Japan developed the region until it became the most economically advanced in China. Metropolitan Philaret later told how terrible trials arose with the coming of the Japanese and how the frail and ailing Metropolitan Meletius (Zaborovsky), who was head of the Church Abroad in China, displayed great courage in standing up for the Faith and in defending his people when the Japanese wanted them to worship their goddess Amaterasu.

When Soviet troops occupied Manchuria in 1945, life for the Russian émigrés there became still more difficult. The Soviets set up clubs and youth centers to gather together the émigrés and encourage them to return to the Soviet Union. The communists promised them free education in their homeland, telling them that in exile they would always remain second-class citizens and foreigners.

Deceived by the Soviet claim that the Church in Russia was now free, the aging Metropolitan Meletius placed himself and his clergy under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. (At that time the Soviets successfully spread disinformation throughout China that Metropolitan Anastasy [Gribanovsky], the chief hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, was dead and that ROCOR had dissolved.) Because feelings toward the Soviets had mellowed since the USSR became part of the Allied effort against the Nazis, and because of Stalin's tactical ploy to relax the persecution of the Church during World War II so as to secure the cooperation of the people for the war effort, many Russians, clergy and laity alike, were taken in and returned to Russia. Among them was Archimandrite Philaret's own father, Bishop Dimitry; but the foresighted Father Philaret, although involuntarily found within the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate as a clergyman of the Harbin diocese, adamantly refused to accept a Soviet passport. Moreover, he never gave anyone a blessing to go back. When families came to him asking for *molebens* (prayer services) for a safe repatriation, he would say, "I don't bless you to go. I don't celebrate *molebens* for anyone returning to Russia." When a newspaper reporter interviewed him about the Soviet government's wisdom in allowing the Russian emigres of Harbin to be reinstated as citizens of their native land, he boldly replied, "I don't consider it possible to accept Soviet citizenship, and I will not accept it until I have seen facts that convince me 100 percent, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Soviets are no longer persecuting religion, dissem-

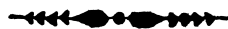
¹*Orthodox Life*, No. 6, 1985, p. 3.

inating anti-religious propaganda, or baiting the Church's servants, and that the Church — which has been banished from the State, not `separated' from it — has once more taken her rightful place within it."

On another occasion, after reading in an issue of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* that Lenin (the mastermind behind the Russian Revolution and a rabid persecutor of the Orthodox Church) was considered a great benefactor of the human race, the archimandrite expressed his indignation in a sermon, which became internationally famous. In spite of frequent warnings and threats, he courageously declared that he had "never defiled his mouth and his prayers by praying for the servants of the Antichrist." His fearless denunciation of the godless communists enraged them so much that they set fire to his cell, determined to burn him alive. Through God's mercy, Father Philaret was able to escape by jumping from a second-floor window. But he received deep burns that left the lower part of his face slightly disfigured and his head permanently inclined to one side.

During his years in China, Archimandrite Philaret corresponded first with ROCOR's chief hierarch Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), whom he greatly admired, and, after Metropolitan Anthony's repose, with Metropolitan Anastasy. In fact, one of his greatest griefs on leaving China was the loss of his correspondence, especially of Metropolitan Anthony's letters, the testament of a great and God-bearing man.

During the 1950's, as the political situation in China worsened under the Chinese communists, the Council of Bishops initiated the first of many attempts to get an exit visa for Archimandrite Philaret. Sometimes visas were unobtainable, and at other times the archimandrite refused to leave his flock without a protector, but finally, in 1962, he was granted permission to go to Hong Kong. From there he departed for Brisbane, Australia, where a significant number of his former parishioners had settled. Not long after his arrival, in 1963, at the request of many, he was consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Brisbane under Archbishop Savva (Raevsky).



By the time of Metropolitan Anthony's repose in 1936, Metropolitan Anastasy had already received the title of Metropolitan and had been the acting First Hierarch of the Church Abroad for more than a year. So his official election to the position followed as a matter of course. It was very different in 1964 when Metropolitan Anastasy, now too old to continue performing his duties, summoned the ROCOR bishops to meet and elect his successor. During the Paschal season, on Sunday, May 4/17, the bishops gathered in the Synod cathedral in New York City to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and, fortified by our

Saviour's precious Body and Blood, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, they served a *moleben* before the miracle-working Kursk icon of the Theotokos, beseeching her help in their deliberations.

The eleven-day council seemed hopelessly deadlocked between two candidates, Archbishop Nikon (Rklitsky) of Washington-Florida, and Archbishop John Maximovitch (now Saint John of San Francisco). The impasse lasted until Archbishop John himself, in consultation with Metropolitan Anastasy and clearly guided by the Holy Spirit, made the unusual proposal that the Synod choose as its leader Bishop Philaret, the most recently consecrated hierarch among them. Knowing his reputation as a man of prayer and a staunch defender of the Faith, the bishops recognized this choice as the will of God, and on Mid-Pentecost, May 14/27, 1964, they unanimously elected Bishop Philaret the new Metropolitan.

The new First Hierarch's enthronement took place the following weekend and was filled with such grace and solemn joy that many recalled it as a second Pascha. Father Dimitry Alexandroff, now Bishop Daniel, who is knowledgeable in the traditions of the Church, discovered the text of the enthronement ceremony used in old Moscow, and the bishops used this service in New York, reinforcing in the minds of the faithful the continuity of the Church, even in exile. When the vigil ended after the reading of the First Hour, the church was suddenly awash in a sea of light, the Royal Gates were flung open, and the new Metropolitan emerged wearing the customary purple bishop's mantle and black cowl. The blue mantle and white cowl of the Metropolitan, which had been blessed in the altar by Metropolitan Anastasy, were then brought out by the two senior hierarchs, Archbishop John (Maximovitch) and Archbishop Alexander (Lovchy). Crying out "*Axios!*" (Worthy!) and echoed by the other bishops and clergy, the senior hierarchs arrayed the new Metropolitan in the vestments of his office, and everyone approached to congratulate him and receive his blessing.

On Sunday morning he was escorted into the church to be vested by Archbishops John and Alexander, who again cried out, "*Axios!*" Sixteen prelates participated in the Liturgy. When Metropolitan Philaret delivered a sermon on the day's Gospel about the Samaritan Woman wherein he emphasized the commandment of love, he touched every heart, not only by his words, but also by his unassuming simplicity, directness, and complete lack of artificiality. At the end of the service, he addressed Metropolitan Anastasy, affirming that the retired chief hierarch was the continuing spiritual head and father of them all. Then the new Metropolitan placed a second *panagia* upon the elderly Metropolitan, and, in his turn exclaimed, "*Axios!*"

That evening, at a public assembly held to introduce the new Metropolitan to all the faithful, he spoke of the great courage and unshakeable faith that would be required of the faithful Orthodox in the trials to come. Those qualities, he said,

would be demanded above all from the head of the Church, who would have to possess the combined virtues of Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, and Saint John Chrysostom. He added that he was unable to discover the least trace of those gifts within himself, but that anything is possible through prayer. Therefore he implored all the people to remember him daily in their prayers.

As an interesting aside and additional evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit, when Bishop Philaret arrived in New York as the youngest hierarch attending the council, he carried with him a small *panagia* depicting the Annunciation. This *panagia* had belonged to Metropolitan Meletius of Harbin, who, shortly before his death in 1946, gave it to his cell attendant, Father Polycarp (Gorbunov), saying, "There will be much confusion in the world, and at the end of the war you will leave China. Take this *panagia* with you. One day you will travel, and I want you to give it to the Metropolitan, the Ruling Bishop of the Church Abroad, in person. Give it to him directly, not through an intermediary."

When the Soviet Army entered Manchuria, followed by the Chinese communists, Father Polycarp left with the others, traveling first to the Philippines and then on to Australia. When the time came for the Council of 1964, Father Polycarp had too little strength left to travel to the United States,¹ so he entrusted the *panagia* to Bishop Philaret, asking him to present it to the newly-elected Metropolitan as a gift from the Russian émigré community from China. He added that he was being disobedient since he had been told to present the *panagia* in person, but he added, "You're a bishop, and you will be able to give it to him at once after the election." Little did Father Polycarp know that he was not being disobedient at all, but had given it to the future Metropolitan himself. This small, plain *panagia* became Metropolitan Philaret's favorite.

Metropolitan Philaret served as First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad for twenty-one years, until his repose in 1985. Rather than suffering spiritual harm from his lofty position, he remained an unassuming monk, shy, quiet, and humble. He was often surrounded by children and young people, whom he loved because of their directness and simplicity. He strove to lead them to salvation through his words and example, and he wrote a catechism for them entitled *On the Law of God*. It is significant that the Metropolitan's patron saint was Saint Philaret the Almsgiver, since after his repose it was discovered that he had imitated the Almsgiver of old by secretly helping innumerable needy people.

¹Later, however, Father Polycarp did come to America. He reposed at Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York, in 1970.

Metropolitan Philaret presided over four glorification services, confirming the sanctity of several well-known saints and a whole host of martyrs: Saint John of Kronstadt in 1964, Saint Herman of Alaska in 1970, Saint Blessed Xenia of Petersburg in 1978, and the Royal Martyrs, New Martyrs, and Confessors of Russia in 1981. Because of the great number of these latter, more saints and martyrs were glorified during Metropolitan Philaret's tenure than during that of any other ruling hierarch in the history of the Church.

The Metropolitan showed personal spiritual concern for all the dioceses in the Church Abroad. When Archbishop Nikodim (Longinov) reposed in England in 1977, the Metropolitan took over his duties there until a new bishop could be appointed. During that period the Metropolitan traveled to England several times, taking a lively interest in the missionary activities there. The Brotherhood of Saint Edward was established by his decree, and under his guidance plans were made to enshrine Saint Edward's relics in the Brotherhood's church. He also made voyages to visit the faithful in Australia, many of whom were his former parishioners.

Metropolitan Philaret guided the Church during a dreadfully trying period in her history. By the time he became Metropolitan, many of the earliest Russian émigrés were old or had died, and so he encouraged the establishment of small American mission parishes and monastic sketes. During his tenure, he also received many Orthodox Christians from other ethnic backgrounds into the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. These Orthodox, many of them Greek, had fled those innovating jurisdictions, which had abandoned true Orthodoxy, and were seeking spiritual shelter. It is noteworthy that the Metropolitan received these clergymen without demanding from them a canonical release from their ecumenistic former bishops. Assimilating these new groups required a great deal of love and spiritual discernment, but the Metropolitan firmly believed that holy Orthodoxy, since it is the Truth, can surmount all ethnic barriers. As he wrote in the encyclical issued by the Bishops' Council of 1983 at which the heresy of ecumenism was solemnly anathematized: "While those of different nationality and previous culture who have joined our Church may sometimes pose one pastoral problem or another, we view this calmly, remembering that before the face of God there is neither Greek nor Jew, Russian, American, or any other sort of distinction according to origin. All are felt to be our beloved children who have a common goal: to preserve unharmed the faith of the Holy Fathers and to save their souls, whatever the external conditions surrounding us."

Metropolitan Philaret was uncompromising in matters of the Faith. His love for the truth was perhaps his most outstanding characteristic and greatest strength.

¹*Orthodox Life*, No. 6, 1983, p. 15.

He referred to the truth repeatedly in his sermons: "Indifference to the truth is one of the greatest misfortunes of this age of apostasy" "Love of the truth should be the most important thing." "This indifference and lack of love for truth is what prevented him [Pilate] from seeing and understanding that before him stood the living answer to his question — Truth Itself Incarnate." "Where truth is, there is God." "Be a fighter for the truth." The Metropolitan was himself a mighty fighter for the truth. He recognized that the great temptation — or "contagion" as he called it — of our time is the heresy of ecumenism.

When Patriarch Athenagoras (Spirou) of Constantinople lifted the anathemas of 1054 against the Papacy, and Archbishop Iakovos (Koukouzis) in America held public services for the "union of the churches," the Metropolitan wrote letters to these hierarchs, warning them and entreating them to remain steadfast in the Truth. And when other Orthodox hierarchs began to participate increasingly in the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical activities, the Metropolitan wrote, in 1969, his "First Sorrowful Epistle" to the Primate of all the Orthodox Churches. The letter was characterized by such patristic statements as the following: "The Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church have exhorted us to keep the Truth of Orthodoxy as the apple of our eye. . . . The Seventh Ecumenical Council says, 'We keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical traditions handed down to us, whether in writing or by word of mouth.' . . . If a particular evil penetrates into all our Churches, it becomes a matter of concern for every single bishop. . . . Even by silence truth can be betrayed."

When the first epistle went unheeded, it was followed by a "Second Sorrowful Epistle" in 1971.' Then in 1975 the Metropolitan appealed once more to the Primate, denouncing the infamous *Thyateira Confession* — a book written by Archbishop Athenagoras (Kolckinakis) of Thyateira, published with the blessing of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in which the author declares that a "new understanding" among Christians today allows us to have common prayer and sacramental communion with the heterodox.

Finally, in 1983, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad promulgated the Anathema against the heresy of ecumenism. All these aforementioned documents and decrees stand as landmarks in the Church's struggle to preserve purity of doctrine and tradition at a time when Saint Peter's injunction to "save yourselves from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40) applies not to the corruption of a pagan society, as in his time, but to an apostate Christian society that repeatedly rejects the truth.



¹These Sorrowful Epistles and other important works by Metropolitan Philaret appears in Issue 31 of *The True Vine*.

Throughout his life, the Metropolitan avoided doctors and medical treatment as much as he could, but by the summer of 1985 he had been ailing for quite a while. In August he underwent minor surgery, and the doctors assured him that his health would hold for another five years. However, their hopes were unfounded, and in the autumn he began to decline. He continued to attend Liturgy almost daily, but by November he was no longer able to serve. On Sunday, October 28 /November 10, the Metropolitan appeared in the Synod cathedral for the last time and gave his last sermon. His personal physician had determined that he needed a difficult operation, and he was to be admitted to the hospital on Thursday, November 8/21.

Protopriest Konstantin Fedoroff, one of the Metropolitan's spiritual sons, recalls some of the events of the week preceding the Metropolitan's repose. On Monday, the Metropolitan's condition was so bad that he woke up his confessor, Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), in the middle of the night and asked him to hear his confession and give him Holy Communion. After that he felt a little better. The next day Protodeacon Nikita called Father Konstantin to come and serve a *moleben*, which he often did when the Metropolitan was ill. Father Nikita read the evening prayers in the Metropolitan's room and asked Father Konstantin to spend the night. When the Metropolitan woke up, he asked Father Konstantin to bring him Communion. Instead of taking the Holy Mysteries himself like a bishop, he insisted that Father Konstantin give them to him. Afterwards Father Konstantin knelt by the bed and said, "Vladyka, don't leave us." The Metropolitan just smiled and said, "It's all right. Don't worry."

A little while later, one of the teachers from the Synod school brought in a little girl who was crying and refused to take her examination because she thought the Metropolitan had been taken to the hospital. She wouldn't believe it when she was told he was in his room. When the Metropolitan put his hand on her head, she calmed down at once. He talked to her gently, with words of comfort.

Father Konstantin stayed a few more hours, but he had to return to his own church to serve the vigil for the feast of the Archangel Michael. At about seven o'clock the next morning, Father Nikita called him to say that the Metropolitan was dying. That was November 8 /21, the day he had been scheduled to enter the hospital, but the Lord spared him that ordeal, and he reposed peacefully in his own bed on the feast of Saint Michael and all the Bodiless Powers. The canon for the departure of the soul was read, and the Metropolitan's own clergy lovingly clothed and vested him and placed him in his coffin.¹

¹The account in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus* (No. 22, 1985, p. 2) states clearly that: "By sending him a peaceful end during sleep in his own cell, the Lord delivered him from the hands of the employees of the funeral home. Vladyka was dressed and vested by the hands of the clergy, and placed by them in a coffin brought to the building." This refutes the blasphemous assertion by some (even among the clergy of ROCOR) that supposedly the body of Metropolitan Philaret is not incorrupt, but rather that it had been embalmed.

The news of the Metropolitan's repose spread so quickly that the Synod could barely cope with the flood of telephone calls. Archbishop Vitaly (Ustinov), the Synod's deputy president (soon to be elected Metropolitan Philaret's successor), arrived from Canada and celebrated the first *pannikhida* (memorial service) that evening with Bishop Gregory and Bishop Hilarion (Kapral). *Pannikhidas* were served morning and evening, and the Holy Gospel was read at the Metropolitan's coffin without interruption, except during regular services. At the vigil on Saturday night, the Proemial Psalm (No. 103) was chanted to music composed by the Metropolitan himself, and at Liturgy the next day the choir chanted several more of his compositions.

Immediately after the Liturgy, the funeral service began. Eight bishops, forty-six priests, and nine deacons took part in the service, and almost 1,000 people were present, filling the church to capacity, as if it were Pascha. In spite of their loss, they all felt an overwhelming sense of unity and peace as they prayed for the repose of their beloved Chief Hierarch. The children were heartbroken, because they looked on him as a father; and in fact, he loved them as their own parents did.

Three sermons were delivered at the Liturgy and the funeral, and towards the end Archbishop Vitaly read the Metropolitan's spiritual testament, which had been found in his typewriter after his repose.

"Hold that fast which thou hast." (Apoc. 3: 11)

These words, taken from the sacred book of the Apocalypse (Revelation), in our time, in our days that are evil and full of much sorrow and replete with scandals, have a special meaning. They remind us of that precious spiritual wealth which we, the children of the Orthodox Church, possess.

Yes, we are rich. And this spiritual wealth is that which the Holy Church has, and which belongs to all Her faithful children. The teaching of faith — our wondrous, saving Orthodox Faith; the greatly numerous and living examples of the life of people who have lived according to faith, and of those who have attained that spiritual purity and height which is called sanctity; the beauty and majesty of our Orthodox Divine Services, and the living participation therein through faith and prayer, the fullness of a spiritual life of grace, opened unto each and every one, and as the crown of all, the unity of the children of the Church in that love of which our Saviour spoke: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."¹ (John 13:35)

¹Russian text in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus*, No. 22, 1985, p. 1; English text in *Orthodox Christian Witness*, Vol. 19, No. 15, 1985, p. 2. Photocopies of Metropolitan Philaret's testament were distributed at his funeral.

The funeral ended with a solemn procession. The clergy lifted the coffin and carried it around the interior of the church, placing it in the center again so that the people could bid the Metropolitan farewell with the last kiss.

The coffin was then taken to the convent of Novo-Diveyevo in Spring Valley, New York, for the night. Early the next morning it was transported to Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, for burial. The Liturgy there was followed by a solemn *pannikhida* and several eulogies. The clergy bore the coffin around the church and then out to the cemetery chapel of the Dormition where, after a short service, it was placed in a niche in the crypt under the chapel. This damp crypt was supposed to be only a temporary arrangement until a permanent resting-place could be prepared under the main church. Yet there his relics remained for many years.



In 1998, the Synod of Bishops at last decided to transfer Metropolitan Philaret's remains to the recently enlarged burial vault under the altar of the cathedral church at Holy Trinity Monastery, as a more fitting permanent location. The translation of the coffin was scheduled to be carried out on November 8 /21, the date of the commemoration of the feast of the Archangel Michael. The same day marked the thirteenth anniversary of the repose of Metropolitan Philaret.

To be certain that the coffin was secure and that all would go well, the abbot of the monastery, Archbishop Laurus (Skurla), decided to remove the coffin from the vault a few days ahead of time, to open it, and examine Metropolitan Philaret's remains. Over the years, both at Synod headquarters in New York and at Jordanville, those in charge had sought to ignore Metropolitan Philaret's ecclesiastical stance, and had neglected his memory.¹ The damp crypt where his remains lay was dirty; the tomb was

¹Pious spiritual children of Metropolitan Philaret have more than once noted the contrast between the utter neglect shown to his memory and remains, and the lavish commemorations served for Jose Munos, guardian of the Montreal Iveron icon. In 1998, for example, *Orthodox Life* (No. 5, pp. 21-22) reported on the elaborate memorial service held on the first anniversary of Jose's murder: "The large, traditional, Russian-style cross is cut from black marble. A small copy of the Iveron Myrrh-streaming icon of the Mother of God is inlaid at the top of the cross, and icons of Saint Joseph the Betrothed and Saint Ambrose of Optina are inlaid at the ends of the horizontal bar. The base supporting the cross has the following inscription in Russian on the front and English on the back. ...The ground in front of the monument is framed in the same black marble, with a small section filled with sand for candles. A bed of baby's breath with a big cross made of red carnations covered the bare soil on top of the grave, and the faithful placed candles among these flowers and created a sea of light.... Archbishop Laurus presided.... The services were very solemn.... This was the appropriate culmination of the first year of Jose's repose. The faithful were left with the feeling that Jose had been duly honored and prayed for in the proper Orthodox manner...." All this while Metropolitan Philaret's relics lay ignored and neglected already for thirteen years in a "temporary" vault only yards away.

covered with dust and cobwebs. Yet the wooden coffin, when brought forth, was undamaged.

The discovery of Metropolitan Philaret's incorrupt relics took place on Tuesday, October 28 /November 10, 1998.¹ As the monastery brethren softly chanted "Holy God," Archbishop Laurus and other monastic clergy lifted the lid of the coffin. Beneath it they saw the incorrupt body of the holy Metropolitan, covered by a mass of flowers, which had crumbled into dust.² There was no odor of decay. When the dust was brushed away, the Metropolitan's vestments looked as if they had just been put on him, and the Gospel and other items in the coffin appeared to have just been placed there (although the metal clasp of the Gospel had disintegrated). Crossing himself, the archbishop lifted the *aer* covering the Metropolitan's face and beheld it. It appeared somewhat dry, but the skin and beard were completely intact and natural-looking. When the hands and face were washed with rose water and wine, the skin darkened a little; but the Metropolitan's legs, when uncovered and not washed, retained their natural color.

The news that the holy Archpastor's body was incorrupt spread like lightning, and many of his devoted followers flocked to the monastery for the translation of his relics, which was to take place a few days later. At three o'clock in the afternoon on the eve of the feast of the Archangel, the coffin was brought from the cemetery and carried into the cathedral. It was draped with the Metropolitan's mantia that had covered it whole and undamaged for thirteen years in the damp crypt. Before the vigil, Archbishop Laurus and the other clergy served a solemn *pannikhida*.

Eighteen priests and eleven deacons took part in the Divine Liturgy the next day, and more than 300 people were present. After the Liturgy, Archbishop Laurus told the faithful how he had found the relics incorrupt,

¹There has been some confusion as to the exact date of the first uncovering of the relics. In *Orthodox Life*, (No. 6, November-December 1998) and in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus* (No. 2, January 15 /28, 1999 (No 2) in an article written by Protopresbyter Valery Lukianov, the discovery was reported to have taken place on Tuesday, November 4/17, i.e., five days before their reburial. Other reports give other dates. The correct date can be determined from the eyewitness account posted on the Internet by Father Gregory Naumenko; see: orthodox@listservindiana.edu, Thursday, November 12, 1998, which repeats his posting on priest@pomog.org. Apparently Father V Lukianov correctly recalled that the opening of the relics had taken place on a Tuesday, but he confused the actual dates.

²Yet this awesome discovery was not reported in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus* until the end of January 1999 (No. 2)— six issues after the event. Not even a short announcement was inserted in one of the earlier issues of the paper. However, feature articles did appear on such important topics as the fiftieth anniversary of Holy Trinity Seminary, and the seventieth anniversary of *Pravoslavnyaya Rus*. (The issue of *Orthodox Life* which contains an account in English, although dated "November-December 1998," actually appeared in print after the *Pravoslavnyaya Rus* report, as can be seen from time references within the text itself.)

and, acknowledging the disappointment of many who had begged him to open the coffin for veneration during the festal services, he claimed that he could not do so without permission from the Synod of Bishops. He said it would be up to the council to decide whether to glorify the Metropolitan, and he urged the faithful to pray about the matter.¹ Although many people who revered the former First Hierarch were saddened because they had not been able to venerate his incorrupt relics and were bewildered by the fact that Metropolitan Vitaly had not been present² for the translation, they were conscious that they stood in the presence of sanctity during these services, and the atmosphere remained one of reverential awe and quiet joy. It took a long time for the faithful to venerate the coffin. Then six clergymen who had been ordained by the Metropolitan lifted the coffin and carried it around the church to its final resting place in the crypt under the altar, where it was lowered into the ground.



The reminiscences of many people who knew the Metropolitan help to illuminate his character. Up until just before the end of his life, he never missed a divine service. He had a quiet sense of humor, often finding inadvertent mistakes in the services amusing. During the Divine Liturgy, however, he served with total concentration. One priest remarked that he had never seen anyone so prayerful before the throne of God.

The Metropolitan was a monk through and through, and he knew the four Gospels by heart, as well as many of the writings of the Holy Fathers. He gave strong patristic sermons in the spirit of Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great. His sermons had the sound theological content of a Faith unchanged in doctrine since the time of these great Fathers. He liked to preach and did so frequently, not only at Liturgy, but at other services as well.

¹In reporting these events, *Pravoslavnaya Rus* (No. 2, January 1999, p. 3) said that a commission was to be set up to investigate and report to the Bishops' Sobor. As of winter 2000 — already two years later — no word has been heard of such a commission even having been formed.

²Some have asserted that Metropolitan Vitaly was not able to be present because of the injury he had sustained after falling outside the Synod headquarters in New York City, but such is not the case. Metropolitan Vitaly fell on Tuesday, November 11 /24, after having failed to attend the translation of Metropolitan Philaret' relics on the previous Saturday, November 8/21. Actually, the relics were first opened on Tuesday, October 28/November 10, 1998. When the relics were found to be incorrupt, "Archbishop Laurus immediately informed the members of the Synod of Bishops... " (*Pravoslavnaya Rus*, No. 2, January 1999, p. 1). Thus Metropolitan Vitaly (and the other hierarchs of ROCOR) had eleven days to arrive at Jordanville, and he fell only on Tuesday, two weeks after the first uncovering of the relics.

Metropolitan Philaret was a source of strength and comfort for the people who confessed to him or brought him their troubles. His spiritual children testify that when they walked into the room to see him, their troubles would vanish immediately, and they would be at peace. Often they could not even remember what they had come to say, because in his presence their problems had shrunk to insignificance. This happened because of the Metropolitan's great inner strength and his way of anticipating people's needs, so that he brought consolation by a word or just a gentle look.

Although he was not used to Byzantine chant, he loved the Greek monastery in Boston for its fidelity to Orthodoxy, which he shared.¹ During his early years as Metropolitan he visited the monastery annually, often bringing with him the Kursk icon of the Mother of God. At night he would keep the icon on an analogion in his room, with an icon lamp burning in the corner. The door to his room would not stay completely shut, and once, a monk passing in the wee hours of the night, saw light pouring through the crack, much more light than an icon lamp alone could produce. Glancing in, he saw the Metropolitan standing before the Kursk Mother of God with his hands lifted in prayer, a supernatural effulgence surrounding him.

A man of prayer, the Metropolitan said that we should look upon the minutes we spend in prayer as the most important minutes of our lives. Father Konstantin tells how he discovered the closet where the Metropolitan used to pray. It was literally a closet, containing only a small mounted print of the Kursk Mother of God, a tiny analogion, and a little candlestand with a candle stub. There the Metropolitan would hide and commune with our Saviour in secret.

There was another closet at the hermitage in Mahopac, New York, but this one was filled with fishing gear. The Metropolitan was a master at chess, but he loved fishing most of all. A pond had been built for him at the Lesna Convent in France, and there was also a pond at Mahopac, with an island in the middle reached by a bridge. There he could be found, an old monk sitting on a bench, fishing while surrounded by children. He was a good fisherman, but while he fished he joked with the children and talked to them about spiritual things. He wanted to touch their hearts, to give them something to cling to in these dreary times, and to teach them about love. He caught many a fish, but he caught many more hearts, and in his gentleness and meekness, he calmed many storms.

¹As the Metropolitan wrote in 1979 in a letter to Abbess Magdalena of the Lesna Convent: "...we really do have a place where we have a flock in common with other ministers of the Orthodox Church. And that is Boston. We have our parishes there, and the monastery of Archimandrite Panteleimon is located there too. And it has Greek practices and Typicon. All the faithful there attend both one and the other equally, since that monastery is of our jurisdiction, is absolutely Orthodox, and has our Orthodox 'spirit,' despite the difference in Typicon and practices" *The Struggle Against Ecumenism* (Boston: The Holy Orthodox Church in North America, 1998), pp. 184-85.

The Metropolitan was also fond of music and played the piano. He had a pleasant baritone voice and loved to chant during the services. As noted above, he also composed church music. His compositions were harmonized and perhaps a little sentimental, but were invariably compunctionate and expressed love for our Saviour.

People sometimes misunderstood the Metropolitan, taking his silence and forbearance for weakness. In fact, in important matters his convictions were unshakeable, yet he was patient, often waiting for bad things to change and for people to repent. But when he decided it was time to act, he did not hesitate, and his decision was final. He was perhaps more direct and less diplomatic than his predecessors, Metropolitans Anthony and Anastasy. The Holy Fathers were his guides, and once he had satisfied himself as to what they would have done in a given situation, he spoke his mind. As an example, in 1983 Metropolitan Philaret asked the fathers of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, in Brookline, Massachusetts, to compose a text anathematizing the heresy of ecumenism,¹ and it was through his own personal sanctity and spiritual authority that he led the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia to adopt this anathema against the heresy of ecumenism.

One of the great lies spread by the evil one in this century has been the heresy of ecumenism, which claims that all churches and religions possess some part of the truth. In the false name of love and tolerance and eventual "reunification" of Christianity (as if the True Church has, or ever could, fragment!), people are urged to pray with heretics, schismatics, and even non-Christians. The Metropolitan saw the deadly peril of ecumenism, wrote against it, and preached against it frequently. "If we seek to adapt ourselves to the errors of this age by being silent about the truth, or if we embrace corrupt teachings to please this world, then we are giving people in search of the truth a stone instead of bread," he wrote in his epistle "On the *Thyateira Confession*."² But this vital issue was often ignored or minimized by many within the Church Abroad.

As the Russian émigrés adopted the languages and cultures of the countries where they had settled, they began to have more contacts with other Orthodox, most of whom belonged to New Calendar, Sergianist, or ecumenistic jurisdictions advocating modernist and ecumenical "reforms." Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the other "Orthodox" churches moved ever deeper into error, and contacts with them that might have been tolerable twenty or thirty

¹Actually, three different versions were submitted. These were translated into Russian, and then one was chosen as the official text. After the Sobor, Archbishop Alypy (Gashanovich) translated the anathema into Church Slavonic so that it could be used in the service for the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

² *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 26, No. 2, March-April 1976, pp. 21-25.

years earlier were no longer appropriate.

In addition, many Russian Orthodox clergy and laymen outside Russia were naturally enthusiastic about Father Dimitry Dudko and other Soviet church dissidents who fought and suffered for the freedom to preach Orthodoxy openly in the USSR.¹ Although the dissidents had not left the state-supported Sergianist Moscow Patriarchate — which prayed for and exalted the atheist communists, betrayed its own faithful to the KGB for the Soviet "crime" of practicing Christianity, and remains today deeply involved in ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic and other denominations — many clergy in the Russian Church Abroad encouraged (and still do encourage) contacts, common prayer, and intercommunion with them.

Yet as long as Metropolitan Philaret was alive, he was able to rein in, to some extent, the ecumenical tendencies of those ROCOR bishops and clergy who were not firmly grounded in the proper ecclesiology of the Church. He spoke out strongly against their violations of the canons, and as the head of the Church Abroad and its official voice, he stood for the Truth. Unfortunately, after his repose, there was no one to restrain the spread of these tendencies within the Church Abroad.

During the years since his repose, Metropolitan Philaret's memory and his ecclesiological stance have been largely ignored within ROCOR, except for mere lip service always expressed in vague generalities.² Few of his ecclesiological works have been republished; rarely is his view or position on any important issue cited.

Recently some ROCOR clergy have even begun an active campaign to discredit Metropolitan Philaret's authority as a prominent church figure whose pronouncements on matters of faith should be considered and heeded. Now he is declared to have been a poorly educated provincial who moved outside the circles of "World Orthodoxy," lacked sufficient contact with the world at large, was unaware of ROCOR's true fundamental positions, was a poor administrator totally dependent on others, and who suffered from an isolationist attitude. The purpose of this sort of rhetoric is obvious. Still, one wonders what such people would have to say concerning the shepherd-boy and king, Prophet David, or the rustic band of ignorant fishermen from Galilee who sought to convert the Roman Empire! "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to con-

¹For Metropolitan Philaret's view of Father Dimitry Dudko and the dissidents, see his letter on this subject in *The Struggle Against Ecumenism* (Boston: The Holy Orthodox Church in North America, 1998), pp. 196-210.

²For example, *Pravoslavnyaya Rus* (No. 21, 1999, p. 5) carried a photograph of Metropolitan Philaret beneath the headline: "On the First Anniversary of the Finding of the Honorable Relics of Metropolitan Philaret." However, the accompanying article actually contains the reminiscences of a Russian journalist from Harbin, and Metropolitan Philaret figures in his account only in passing. Would not a reprint of one of Metropolitan Philaret's sermons or talks have been more appropriate and edifying?

found the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Cor. 1: 27-29).

But now the mouths of all Metropolitan Philaret's critics have been shut by the powerful right hand of the Lord God Himself, Who has revealed unto us the incorrupt relics of His faithful servant, thus putting a divine and eternal seal on his witness for the Truth and the Faith.

Metropolitan Philaret's last exhortation to his spiritual children was: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown!" (Rev. 3:11). So let us hold fast to the true faith and dogma, which we have received from our spiritual fathers who have gone before us. And let us always cherish and keep that which has been bequeathed to us by our beloved Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory: communion with the true Catacomb Christians, and not with the Moscow Patriarchate; the witness of the great cloud of New Martyrs glorified during his episcopacy; the anathema of ecumenism, which puts a hedge round about the vineyard of Christ, the Orthodox Church; and love among ourselves. Amen.

O HOLY CONFESSOR METROPOLITAN PHILARET,
INTERCEDE FOR US!



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Saint Philaret's biography was originally printed in Issue 30 of *The True Vine*. For a complete life of Saint Philaret including many photos, please contact The Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston (www.homb.org).