



NEW YEAR WISHES

On Wednesday 12 January, the traditional Christmas and Theophany party organised by Archbishop Gabriel took place in the Archdiocese offices

About 50 people gathered for the occasion: priests, churchwardens and people involved in different church activities, coming mainly from the Paris area.

In his short speech, Archbishop Gabriel expressed his gratitude to the parishes of the diocese for their vitality and their ongoing activity. He was also grateful for the significant improvement of inter-orthodox relations in our countries and expressed the wish that this continues in the new year.

Then everybody met around an excellent buffet. Everyone enjoyed this friendly meeting which gave an opportunity to meet, socialise, share experiences or ideas, ask questions to the Administration Council or talk to Archbishop Gabriel.



ARCHBISHOP GABRIEL

On Thursday January 27 Archbishop Gabriel underwent surgery at the Maastricht Hospital. The operation, which lasted two hours, went well. Archbishop Gabriel wishes to thank all those who supported him with their prayers.



MGR SERGE



On Saturday the 22nd of January 2011, anniversary of His Eminence Serge's (Konovaloff +2003) lying down in Christ, the chapel of the Dormition at the cemetery of Saint Geneviève des Bois received its rector, His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel of Comana.

His Eminence Gabriel celebrated the Divine Liturgy along with Father Andrew of Montargis, Father Roman d'Asnière and Hierodeacon Athanasius of St. Jean's parish at Meudon, also assistant to His Eminence Gabriel. Reader Alexis Ciolkovitch directed the choir.

At the end of the service, a pannikhida was held in the basement, sung upon the tomb

of the deceased hierarch. In the evening, another pannikhida was celebrated at the Cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky in the memory of His Eminence Serge. His Eminence Serge Konovaloff served as Archbishop of our diocese from 1993 until 2003; he was the predecessor of His Eminence Gabriel.

On his tomb are written these words from Revelation 2:2, "I know your works, your labour, and your perseverance." Memory Eternal!





It was during the 1920's that a Russian parish established itself in Liege around Fr Vladimir Fedorov and at the heart of an orphanage founded by Mrs Kouzmina-Karovaïeva. She found refuge in accommodation put at her disposal after her expulsion from Istanbul. In 1926, the orphanage moved to Brussels. A priest was designated, who, like his successors constantly had to look for somewhere to celebrate the services: houses, old catholic chapels. After the destruction of their building by a bomb dropped in 1944, the priest Fr Valent Romensky and the faithful undertook to build their own church. It was built in the style of the Novgorod churches designed by the architect Iztseenov who came to notice in Russia, in 1914, when, to celebrate the 300 years of the reign of the Romanov family, a floating church was built which he had overseen.

Founded by the first immigrants, those of the October Revolution, the church has seen a succession of waves of immigration: of people displaced by the Second World War to the asylum seekers of today. But the parish has also taken roots in the city and it is open to the world

which surrounds it. People of many different nationalities attend, including a good number of Belgians, and participates in the life of the church of Christ through œcumenical contacts, welcoming numerous groups of visitors and welcoming all, within canonical regulations, to the services.

On Sunday the 9th January the Sunday after Christmas -, His Eminence Archbishop Gabriel came to the Russian parish of Saints Alexander Nevsky and Seraphim of Sarov in Liege (Belgium), accompanied by hierodeacon Athanasius and deacon Paolo Perletti of the parish of Saints Panteleimon and Nicholas of Brussels (Demot Street). During the pontifical liturgy concelebrated with the rector, Fr Guy Fontaine and Fr John Devaere, he ordained to the diaconate Athanase Xamo and Bruno Poretta to the sub-diaconate in the presence of many faithful and friends.

The choir ensemble "Lauda" from St Petersburg, visiting Liege, had expressed the desire to participate at our Divine Liturgy and therefore uplifted the celebration with their beautiful singing and then gave a little recital of koliadki during the meal which followed.

At the end of the Liturgy, Vladyka thanked the wife of the new deacon as well as

the whole community for having allowed the flourishing of this vocation and warmly urges them to support and to love the new deacon while praying for him. He also invited the community to remain united and to get involved with the Church, be there divisions and in spite of difficulties.

Fr Guy had to, for his part, say that considering the ordinations of this day the parish of Liège had «given» a hypodeacon, three deacons and a priest, adding an archbishop even since Mgr Gabriel was himself the rector for more than ten years.



ALEXIS OBOLENSKY'S ARTICLE IS THE TEXT OF HIS SPEECH AT THE SYMPOSIUM ON «EMIGRATION AND RUSSIAN SPIRITUAL CULTURE IN THE WEST,» WHICH TOOK PLACE FROM OCTOBER 4 TO 6 2010 IN THE PREMISES OF THE CENTRE UNIVERSITAIRE MÉDITERRANÉEN (CUM). THE SYMPOSIUM WAS ORGANIZED BY THE ASSOCIATION «MEDITERRANEAN ENCOUNTERS, CULTURE AND THEOLOGY,» IN COLLABORATION WITH THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PARISH OF SAINT-NICOLAS NICE. IT WAS PART CELEBRATIONS HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ANNEXATION OF NICE TO FRANCE AND PRESENCE OF A RUSSIAN COLONY ON THE RIVIERA.

Why is it that from the second third of the 19th century, communities of Russians resided on the borders of the Kingdom of Sardinia? Nice was on the road that led the enlightened traveller towards Italy of Art. But does this sufficiently account for the emergence of what would soon be perceived as a small colony?

The impossibility to travel, for the subjects of the Russian Empire around the end of the reign of Nicholas I, concerned less well-to-do aristocratic families than it did intellectuals. After the Napoleonic campaigns and the troubles with the "Decembrist" revolts at the time of Nicholas I's ascent to the throne, the emperor believed the influence of the French on the Russian army during their last stay in Paris was to blame for their dissidence. He was persuaded that France was the source of all sedition. Nevertheless, almost a century later, the French and French culture would arouse in the Russian elite an unflagging infatuation.

The rule preceding Nicholas I was marked by its receptiveness to Enlightenment ideas. The Jesuits opened a school for noble sons, and Christian societies were permitted to disseminate Bibles in the Russian language. While Nicholas I's arrival brought an end to this openness, the seed had nevertheless been planted.

Russians who had converted to Catholicism preferred exile. Liberal Catholics frequented Madame Svétchine's lounge in Paris, while a certain Princess Volkonsky in Rome welcomed her fellow countrymen who came to visit the Eternal City.

The revolutionary wave of 1848 in Europe further provoked the hardening of Nicholas I's policies, which defended his authority against all subversive actors. Among these were numerous aristocratic families who had been affected by the repressive nature of the Decembrist revolts. They felt useless, and given the possibility, preferred to spend several months

of the year in Europe with the exception of the summer months when they would stay at their properties in the Russian countryside. Wary of the aristocracy who had betrayed him, Nicholas favoured the ascension of impoverished sons of the nobility or of priests, who received careful training, often

in German universities, preferentially in economics or law. Thus was created a pool of civil servants faithful to the power that had given them everything.

Initiated by the Empress Dowager Alexandra Fiodorovna in 1857, the Greco-Russian church established in Nice was also originally supported by:

Count Vielgorsky	Count Goudovitch
Countess de Orestis	Baron Fredericks
Count Stakelberg	Prince Baratynsky
Prince Troubetzkoy	Count Zoubov
Prince Golitsyne	Count Bobrinsky
Baron Tiesenhausen	Count Chouvalov
Prince Viazemsky	Count Apraxine
Prince Obolensky	etc.

In 1854, France, England and the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia allied with Turkey in order to counter Russia's advances in the Balkans. Nicolas I allowed for these contradictions of his policy, while at the same time championing to become the Defender of his Orthodox subjects oppressed by the sultan, and of his own legitimacy against subversive leaders among these same Orthodox peoples.

At least one year after the Treaty of Paris that had ended the Crimean War, the widowed Empress Alexandra Fiodorovna came to Villefranche to ratify an agreement authorizing Russian ships crossing the Mediterranean to obtain fresh supplies of coal at the port's harbour.

The Empress sojourned in Nice, having moved into a villa that occupied an Orthodox chapel. There she met with a delegation of Russian winter vacationers, accepted to put an application forward and granted her support to the construction of the Orthodox Church. One year later, the land was obtained, the plans realized, and the church of Saints Nicolas and Alexandra was inaugurated in December 1859, consecrated in January 1860.

Immediately established was in fact a parish that was only open for seven months of the year, with a priest appointed by the Holy Synod of Saint Petersburg. Official documents, a letter from Prince Gortchakoff, and ministers of Foreign Affairs of the time attest to the fact that it was a private church outside of the department's responsibilities. Prince Gortchakoff encouraged Russians living permanently in Nice to form an inalienable capital, whose revenues served to take care of the priest, his family, and a cantor. Six months later, Nice was reattached to France.

The church was constructed in a classical style, at the time even accepted in Russia, so as not to offend the Sardinian authorities who were wary of the installation of temples of other Christian confessions, such as Anglican, Lutheran or Greco-Russian.

The first rector, Archpriest Spéransky (1859-1867), was also a chaplain of the Court of Justice. The priest, Vassili



*17 janvier 1912, inauguration de la cathédrale de Nice
Le chœur et son chef, M. Solar (tachèque). Près du porche, la grande-duchesse Anastasia
Mikhailovna, et près d'elle le prince Alexandre Gueorguievitch Romanovsky, duc de Leuchtenberg.*



1932, devant cathédrale, une visite à Nice
de Mgr Euloge

Prilējaiev (1863-1867), administered the Extreme Unction to the Tsarevitch Nicolas in 1865 and celebrated his funeral. This same Father Vassili took the lead in discussions with the local authorities and representatives of the Anglican Church regarding the foundation of the Russian cemetery at Caucade, which was later inaugurated in 1868.

Builders and contributors of the church drew up a "Charter of the Orthodox church of the city of Nice", establishing a church council with a representation of the faithful as management. Some priests had difficulty with this particularity. In 1862, the priest of the chapel at the Embassy of Paris ordered the council's dissolution. Thus began a series of discussions concerning the preeminence of laity or clergy. The prototype statutes adopted by the Council of Moscow in 1918, which allowed to the laity a certain importance in the management of parishes, were therefore put to the test in Nice.

The rapprochement with France, the arrival of the Iron Wall and the trend of winter vacationing on the Côte d'Azur, all accelerated the development of this Russian colony. Emperor Alexander II and his spouse, the future Alexander III, Princess Dagmar of Denmark (who would later become Empress Maria Fiodorovna), numerous members of the imperial family and their European cousins visited on various occasions.

In 1887, Father Serge Lioubimoff was ordained rector of the parish, a post he kept careful watch over until his death in 1918. He was charged to expand the parish whose minimal membership was inadequate. He became interested in the plans of Alexander III's widow, Empress Dowager Maria Fiodorovna. On the soil of her commemorative chapel to Tsarevich Nicholas, property of Emperor Nicholas II, was established "the new Russian Orthodox church of Nice." He deployed all his tact to reconcile the hierarchical principles that founded the imperial powers with the independent spirits of Russians residing in Nice.

The construction of the new church, beginning in 1903, went well despite a notable interruption due to the Russo-Japanese War and the first Russian Revolution in 1905. The church, dedicated to Saint Nicholas and Alexandra, and in honour of the reigning Emperor and his spouse, was inaugurated in December 1912. The times had changed. Through its iridescent style, the edifice claimed to be a testimony to the vitality of the Russian Orthodox faith, to the originality of Russian architecture, and the magnificence of the Empire.

Nice, however, was emptied of the majority of its foreign residents during the First World War. The parish nevertheless remained open for the hundred or so people who resided on the coast.

Contrarily, the Russian Revolution of 1917 provoked a

wave of emigration firstly in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and later in France. It was at this time that the vocation of churches in Nice would fundamentally change. The approximately 2000 intermittent residents on the eve of the war would eventually expand to more than 5000 refugees, the majority of whom had lost everything including their homeland, roots, fortune and social position.

Eventually, Father Alexander Sélianoff, who was happily received by the parishioners who had refused to accept the rector appointed by the Synod, succeeded Father Serge Lioubimoff. At his death, Father Sélianoff was replaced by Father Nicholas Podossénoff, to whom would fall, with the help of the diocesan administration in Paris, the responsibility of founding the Association of Worship (based on French laws passed from 1901-1905), which manages the churches of Nice to this day.

However, more than an administrator, this new community needed a man of faith and prayer. Son of a priest, former Bishop of Bialistok expelled by the Polish authorities, Archbishop Vladimir Tikhonitsky (1873-1958) was named rector of the parish of Nice by Metropolitan Euloge in 1925, remaining in this position until 1945. Through his gentle yet firm character, he succeeded after a few years to pacify a community torn by political and ecclesiastical turmoil, often orchestrated by influential officials instructed by Soviet authorities.

In 1922 in the USSR, the "Living Church" was born, ready to collaborate with the current regime. Patriarch Tikhon, who occupied the recently restored patriarchal throne (1918), was arrested and reduced to the laity as a wave of religious repression brought bloodshed to the country. In 1922 he had fortunately been able to charge Metropolitan Euloge Guéorguievsky with the administration of Russian parishes in Western Europe, before his death in 1925. Accused of having been in contact "with the Soviets", the Metropolitan's authority was contested by the Synod of Emigrant Bishops at Karlovitsky in 1921, the head of which being the former Metropolitan of Kiev, His Eminence Antoine Khrapovitsky. Some parishes joined themselves to the latter.

Due to the increase in religious persecutions, His Eminence Euloge lost his trust in the Russian Church. Having been relieved of his post for insubordination, in 1931 he put himself under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, creating the Exarchate of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe.

Within the emigration were represented all kinds of backgrounds: members of Court, important government functionaries, military including officers of all ranks as well as soldiers, intellectuals, artists and representatives of liberal professions. Their political loyalties and opinions were varied, yet henceforth they shared one thing in common-exile. Numerous were those, whether having previously gone to Church or not, who presently turned to the Church for its immateriality, the only institution that had thus far resisted the present political debacle. If they had not freely given themselves to Christ, destiny in a sense took over, and it was possible to witness sincere conversations among them. His Eminence Vladimir, assisted by a priest of great humanity, Father Alexander Eltchaninoff, as well as three other priests, despite his fragile health, unfurled an intensive pastoral mission and charity. In the early 1930s, the parish comprehended more than five hundred contributors; numerous associations that provided aide to the elderly, invalids, children and handicapped, and a Russian school that prepared students for their bachelor's degree. The idea that the present Bolshevik adventure was not viable made life difficult.



1947 Dans le parc de la cathédrale, le groupe du catéchisme et école paroissiale



It was therefore necessary to concentrate all efforts into the young generations, in order to prepare them for their eventual return to their homeland, ensuring the preservation of their mother tongue and religion.

Countless appeals for help testified to the misery in which the most of Russians lived, many of whom having belonged previously to Russia's elite society. Former ministers, senators and important functionaries of the state offered their services to administer, rather than affairs of the Russian Empire, those of the parish. Endless, sterile discussions about responsibilities in front of the disaster that had befallen them poisoned the life of the community that would soon be forced to confront the international economic crisis and the rise of National Socialism and Fascism.

At the declaration of the War, numerous Russians enlisted in the French army to defend the values of their adopted country. Some collaborated with the authorities at Vichy while others joined the Resistance, the majority hoping to be overlooked. The treaty of non-aggression between the USSR and Nazi Germany had marked Russians as untrustworthy in the eyes of the French authorities. The entrance of the USSR into the War meant potential enemies to the Germany authorities of the French occupation. More suspicion was heaped upon them considering the material difficulties that had hit the Russian community. It became mandatory to inform the authorities, by official letter, of the smallest of meetings, parish councils and general assemblies. The rector, in order to fully exercise his mission, was forced to cultivate good relationships with authorities placed under German tutelage.

The war years left the community bruised and weak. Many Russians had preferred to leave to the United States, Canada or elsewhere. The following period was deeply troubled by calls to return to the "motherland" launched by Soviet authorities, offering passports to returning candidates (while the majority of Russians possessed only a Nansen passport); and by the hunt for "displaced persons", such as citizens of the USSR exploited by the German armies for labour or who were unsuccessful in Eastern Europe, the majority of whom did not wish to be repatriated- the community had aged. A certain withdrawal from Russia had occurred, accompanied by a tension regarding national values glorified by the propaganda, presenting the Red Army as Europe's saving grace. During the thirties, parishioners began to pool their money together in order to commission two great icons representing the patron saints of the families of Emperors Alexander II and Nicholas II. In 1950, they were completed by the painter Léonide Pianovsky, to whom had been entrusted the interior decoration of the cathedral, and a cross, commemorating the 1918 assassination of the last emperor in his family.

The desire to maintain cohesion and community based on the Russian language and culture was manifested in the organization of cultural performances and poetic events. A literary society continued to organise public lectures and

amateur concerts here and there. However, over the years these activities would dwindle. Only life pertaining to worship remained as it did in the past.

To celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the parish, the restoration of the church of Saint's Nicholas and Alexandra on Rue Lonchamp was taken under hand, and I.V. Doubrovo published a history of the Russia Orthodox Parish of Nice (1859-1959). An era of balance had arrived. In 1964, General Maslovsky, the parish librarian, accomplished a very complete work on the community's history. Already for several years, outside of services alone, the Saint Nicholas Cathedral had been open for tourists to visit.

A generous woman, E.S. Fisher, opened two houses on the outskirts of Nice ("Villa Nicette") that welcomed former combatants of the imperial army. In the early 70s, the Baron Falz-Fein put great energy into collecting the funds necessary to restore the commemorative chapel to Tsarevich Nicholas from Russians dispersed all over the world.

Hopes that the USSR would one day open or evolve, especially strong after the death of Stalin and a "thawing" period, were presently dead. In the USSR, rare dissident voices from the Orthodox Church were muzzled. Within Russian Orthodox circles, the concept of a local church established on French soil had taken root. The church on Rue Longchamp thus began to organise services in French.

In Nice, the parish was perceived, and perceived itself, as a "reserve" of conservative liturgical Church traditions. An attempt to create a museum of the White Army in the church basement, using Madame Fisher's collected objects, ultimately failed due to want of means. In 1988, the community gathered its living forces to hold conferences, expositions, concerts and the millennium anniversary of Russia's baptism.

And suddenly the unexpected occurred: the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the USSR. Timidly at first, Russians progressively came back to visit the Côte d'Azur, and the church was able to return to its first vocation: to welcome all Orthodox, no matter what their origin. Today the majority of the parish members are originally from the emigration, the faithful, regular or occasional, remains largely Russian, or Russian-speaking originally from the former Republic of the Soviet Union, Georgia, Moldova, the Baltic Republics or Central Asia and the Ukraine. There is often a lack of ecclesial accord, yet they define themselves as Orthodox.

It is our responsibility today to share with them the fruits of our naturalisation, all the riches accumulated by our grandparents and parents and to introduce them to their new life in this country which they chose, and to welcome them in our churches that house an Orthodoxy than did not disown its origins, but had the privilege to be liberated from all attachment with the power of the state.

Alexis Obolenski