

Pastoral Visit to the Anti-Ecumenist Orthodox Communities of South Ossetia and Georgia

With the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, and following an invitation by the President of the small state of South Ossetia, Edward Kokoity, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni made a pastoral visit to the Orthodox Communities in Eurasia under the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod in Resistance.

South Ossetia

In the early morning hours of Saturday, 4 September 2005 (Old Style), Bishop Ambrose arrived by air in Tbilisi, Georgia, via Constantinople. On the same day, he went by ground transport to Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia and headquarters of the anti-ecumenist Orthodox Eparchy of Alania, where he was given a warm reception by our Priests in the region, Archimandrite George Pukhaev and Fr. Alexey Aristinov, with whom he surveyed the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, which is undergoing repairs.



Late Saturday afternoon, Great Vespers and Orthros were served at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the *Theotokos*.

On Sunday, 5 September 2005 (Old Style), a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the same Church. Bishop Ambrose served Liturgy with Archimandrite George, while Fr. Alexey had to serve in another Church. Despite the high temperatures, at least

three hundred of the Faithful were in pious attendance. The entire Liturgy was celebrated in the local Ossetian (Russian) dialect.



On Monday morning, 6 September 2005 (Old Style), gunshots could be heard coming from a nearby suburb of Tskhinvali—just one of the many grievous war-time incidents between Ossetians and Georgians, since the latter

refuse to accept the already autonomous status of Ossetia, already in effect for fifteen years. Injuries were reported, but—Glory to God—there were no casualties.

In spite of this, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the small Church of the *Panagia Portaitissa* in a suburb of Tskhinvali, where Fr. Alexey is temporarily serving as rector. Several dozen pious believers were in attendance.

A meeting then took place with the President of the small state, Edward Kokoity, in the government palace. Also present were the President of the small Republic of Abkhazia, Russian members of Parliament, and representatives from other small states in this sensitive and troubled region of Caucasia, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdnestria, *et al.* Bishop Ambrose was among those who spoke at the official gathering which followed.



Afterwards, a visit was made to the Church of the Nativity of the *Theotokos* in the city of Khetagurov, to make preparations for its forthcoming Consecration.

On Tuesday, 7 September (Old Style), the day of the national anniversary of the newly-established Republic of South Ossetia, Bishop Ambrose and Fathers George and Alexey were given a place of honor on the dais for dignitaries, following the official parade through the capital city of Tskhinvali. Also in attendance was Bishop Theophan of Stavropol' and Vladikavkaz (under the Moscow Patriarchate), who treated His Grace with a certain



degree of coolness, indeed wrongly and irrationally claiming that the region was under his Eparchy's jurisdiction and that its Churches—upon which he never even laid eyes—were his own!

That afternoon, during the Feast Day Vespers and Orthros service at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the *Theotokos*, Bishop Ambrose tonsured Alexander Grigorievitch—a widower of many years—a Rasophore Monk with the name Christopher. His sponsor was his spiritual Father and son according to the flesh, Archimandrite George!

In the evening, on learning of the deplorable bombing of Tskhinvali's Children's Hospital, during which event seven young children were injured, Bishop Ambrose and the clergymen immediately hastened to the scene of the tragedy.



On Wednesday, 8 September 2005 (Old Style), Feast Day of the Nativity of the *Theotokos*, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Ambrose and our three Priests in the region, in which Fr. Iakov Kheta-

gourov, who had just recently arrived from Moscow, also took part. Many of the faithful were in attendance, including President Kokoiy, who happens to be a spiritual child of Archimandrite George Pukhaev. Fr. George took the opportunity to read a written protest concerning the invitation that had been made to the Moscow Patriarchate Bishop and his presence in Tskhinvali. His Excellency, the President recognized his error and promised, in his reply, that the mistake would not be repeated.

After the festal procession around the Church, Bishop Ambrose and the clergy placed a wreath on the memorial to the dead at the nearby square in the capital.

On Thursday, 9 September 2005 (Old Style), Feast Day of the ancestors of God, Sts. Joachim and Anna, the Church of the Nativity of the *Theotokos* in Khetagurov (the place of birth and Parish of Fr. Iakov) was Consecrated in good order and with solemnity. An arduous pastoral activity awaits Fr. Iakov in the instruction of the region's inhabitants, since they remain in great spiritual ignorance owing to their difficult conditions and circumstances.

Georgia

After a touching farewell by the clergy and people of South Ossetia, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose headed by ground transport for Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia.

On the afternoon of Friday, 10 September 2005 (Old Style),



a very brief meeting took place at the Tbilisi judicial jail with the imprisoned Protopresbyter Basili Mkalavishvili. His trial has once again been postponed on account of the nonappearance of his accusers. We might remind readers that Fr. Basili is serving a pris-

on sentence for inciting protests and actions against Chiliasts and other Protestant groups, which have had corrosive effects on Georgia in recent years.

Visits were also made to historical and religious monuments in Tbilisi.



On Sunday, 12 September 2005 (Old Style), a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Cathedral of the *Panagia Portaitissa*, headquarters of the Orthodox Eparchy of Gldani, Tbilisi. His Grace served Liturgy with the rector, Fr. Archil, with several hundred believers in attendance.

Late Sunday night, Bishop Ambrose departed by plane for Greece, arriving in Athens the following morning, once again via Constantinople.

One more significant, fruitful, and dangerous mission was completed, with God's help, in a sorely-tried region in which many people desire to remain in anti-innovationist Orthodoxy for their safe sea journey, through sorrows and solace, towards the harbor of the Jerusalem on High, our true homeland!

