

# St Nicholas News



A communication channel to keep in touch with St Nicholas' Friends around the world

From Fr. Gerardo Cioffari, o.p. Director of the Centro Studi Nicolaiani

21

October 8, 2011

**BASILICA PONTIFICIA DI S. NICOLA / BARI**

## ST NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL IN NICE: APPLE OF DISCORD

A recent “for fun” contest (launched by a Hotel Chain) has decided that among 51 French cathedrals the number two resulted the Russian cathedral in Nice, following Notre Dame in Paris but before Notre Dame de Reims and Notre Dame de Strasbourg. It could appear strange that a country like France, so rich of medieval churches and cathedrals, would chose a Russian church among the most beautiful. But if you look at it, you cannot deny that it is really fascinating.

The Church was built in the Fifties of XIX century, when Russia was making a great effort in expanding its influence in the Holy Land, Asia Minor (at that time bought the St Nicholas Church in Myra, Turkey) and other Lands. It seems that the first Russian Church in the West was exactly the Nice St Nicholas and Alexandra church. At the end of XIX century the church was not enough capable for its growing community, and in 1903 a new church was built at Bermond parc, and consecrated December 17, 1912.

I avoid describing this art jewel because photos are more eloquent than words.

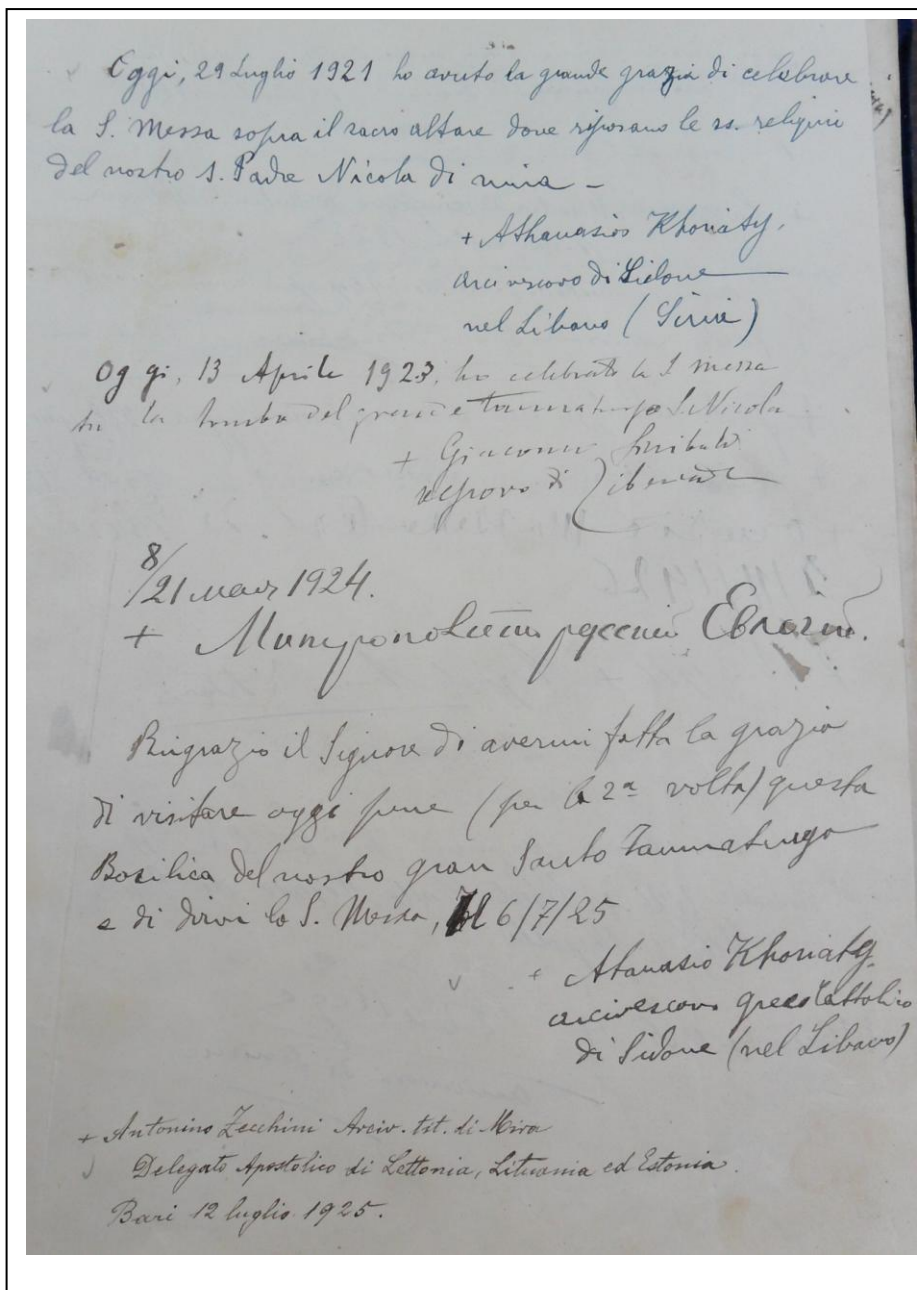


A few words are on the contrary necessary to understand the strange juridical status of the St Nicholas Cathedral. It is well known that the Russian Revolution opposed strongly Religion, and that a great number of priests and bishops were killed. In 1920 many of them fled abroad trying to organize a Church outside Russia. Leader of this Church was metropolitan Antonij Chrapovitskij.

While this theologian would not accept any compromise with the Soviet power, and (nostalgic of Tsarist government) was favorable to the return of Monarchy, other two metropolitan (Evlogij in Paris, and Platon in America), more concerned with the destiny of so many Christians in Russia, were less involved in political struggle.

While this **Parisian Russian Church** (from 1931 formerly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople) was in

acceptable good relationship with Moscow (except for the Church involvement in Politics), the **Church Abroad** (Zarubežnaja Cerkov') used always a violent language against Moscow Patriarchate, arriving sometimes to deny the validity of priests consecrations. Therefore, one would have expected that, after the fall of communism, the Parisian Russian Church would have easily left Constantinopolitan jurisdiction and returned to the mother Church of Moscow, while the Church abroad would continue his struggle.

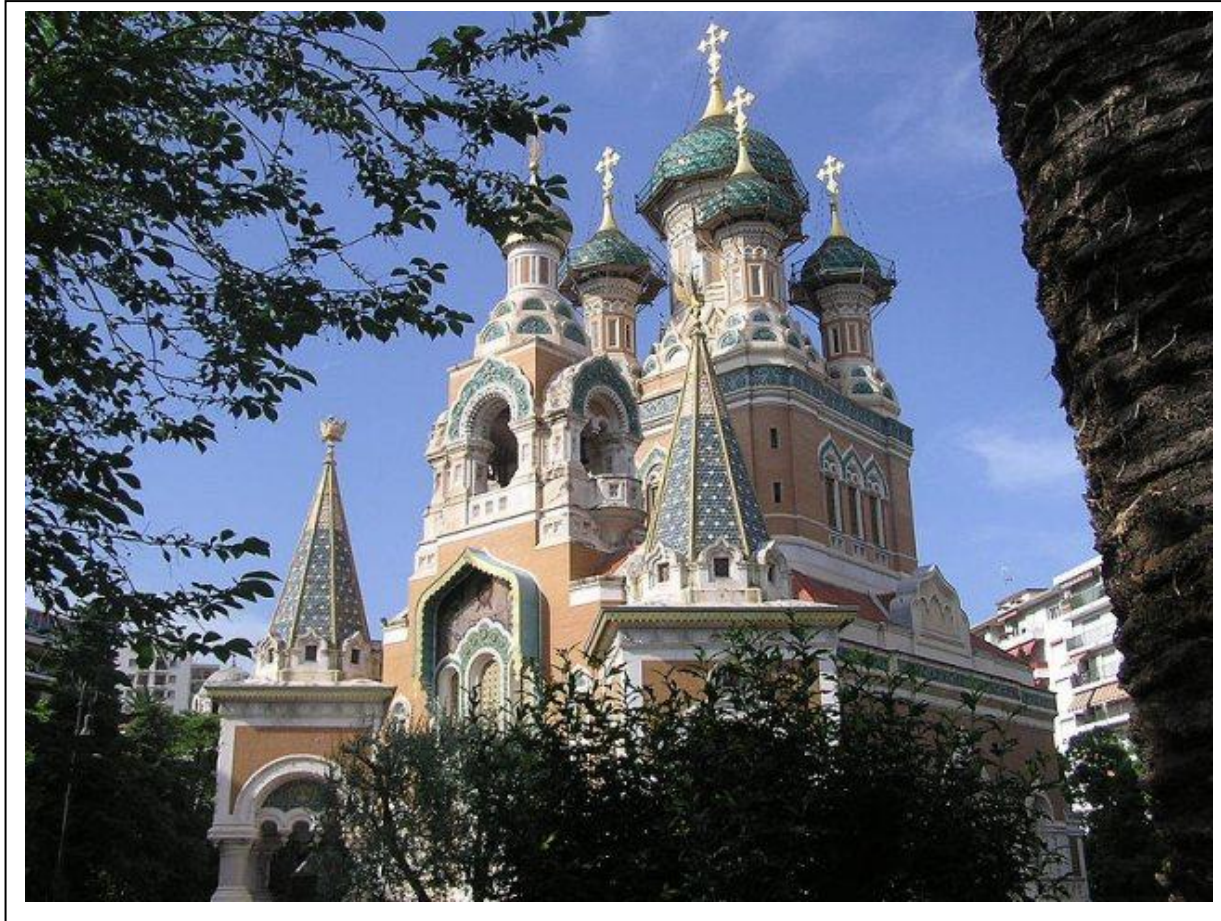


Page of the  
**St Nicholas Book  
 of pilgrims** and  
 visitors with the  
 signature of  
**metropolitan  
 Evlogij**

21 may 1924.

In this same page  
 signature of  
 Athanasios,  
 greek-catholic  
**archbishop of  
 Sidone (Liban)**  
 and Antonino,  
 titular archbishop  
 of Mira.

**Bari,**  
**St Nicholas  
 Archives**



It happened exactly the contrary.

In the year 2007 the **Church Abroad united itself with Moscow**, the **French-Constantinople Russian Church decided for no reunion**.

One of the most interesting episodes of this fight is about St Nicholas Nice Cathedral. Having declared its faithfulness to French civil laws, the Exarchate of the Ecumenical

Patriarch (in the person of Archbishop Gabriel of Comana) did not reject the decision of the “Tribunal de Grande Instance de Nice” (January 2010), and the “Court d’Appel d’Aix” (mai 2011), who recognized the St Nicholas Cathedral as **property of the Russian State**. But entered in strong conflict with the Diocese of Chersonese (= Patriarchate of Moscow), distinguishing the



**Innokentij  
Archbishop  
of  
Chersonèse,**  
exarch of the  
Moscow  
Patrarchate

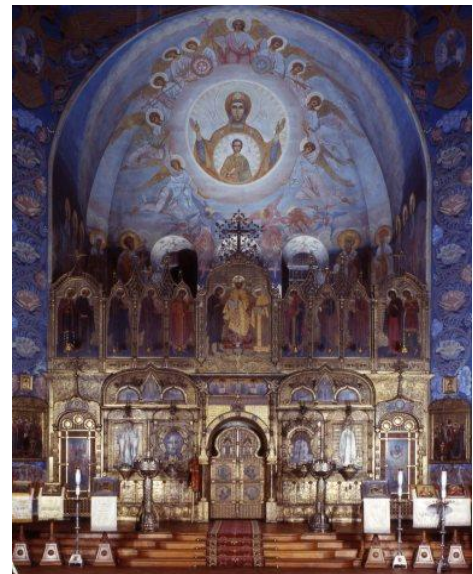
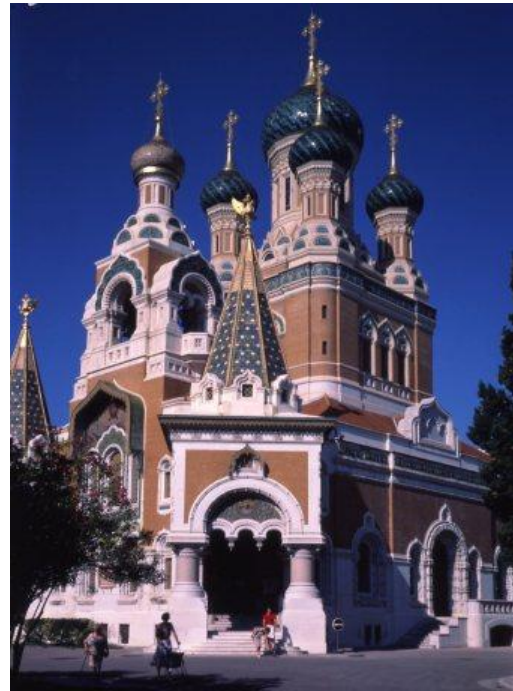
**Gabriel  
Archbishop  
of Comane,**  
exarch of the  
Ecumenical  
Patriarchate of  
Constantinople



**property of the soil** and of the walls from the **orthodox parochial community**.

Therefore the Exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarch (Archbishop Gabriel of Comana) protested against the “occupation” of the Church on the part of Moscow priests, warning Moscow Patriarchate not exploiting Russian State help, because it is against orthodox canons.

So, in the beautiful St Nicholas Cathedral in Nice is going on a struggle on the base of orthodox canon law. The problem is that in Orthodoxy there is no universally recognized ultimate authority in interpreting canon law.



Our hope is that Saint Nicholas, the patron Saint of Christian unity, will find a peaceful solution to this mission impossible.



**Greetings from Bari to all Orthodox**  
Protestant, Roman-Catholic,  
Monophysite and Nestorian Christians