

St Nicholas' seal



Year 1107

# St Nicholas News

A paper sent free to the St Nicholas' friends  
all around the world, by Fr Gerardo Cioffari, o.p., director of  
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# 57

100 YEARS AGO THE FOUNDATION STONE  
OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH IN BARI

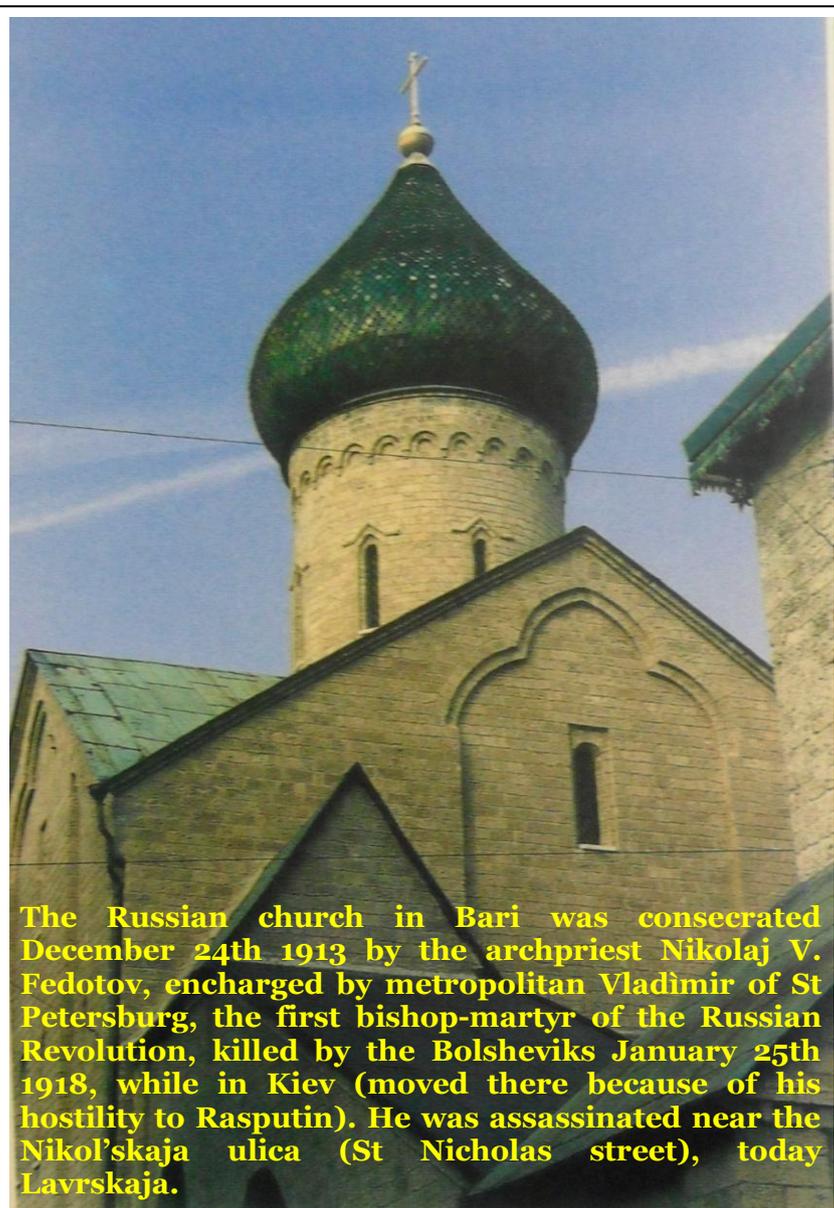
15  
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2013

*A HISTORY SHAKED BY THE  
BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION AND BY THE  
SPLITS IN THE RUSSIAN CHURCH*

In the morning of May the 9th 1913 the foundation stone for the building of St Nicholas Russian Church in Bari was laid. As soon as it was ready for liturgy (24 December of that same year) it was consecrated.

Its history is very gripping, but very complicated too. In it are interwoven every kind of prejudices, religious, political, legal and so on. To understand the events is also necessary to be acquainted with the splits in the Russian church, due to the consequences of the atheistic character of the Revolution.

The metropolitan Vladimir of Saint Petersburg.



The Russian church in Bari was consecrated December 24th 1913 by the archpriest Nikolaj V. Fedotov, encharged by metropolitan Vladimir of St Petersburg, the first bishop-martyr of the Russian Revolution, killed by the Bolsheviks January 25th 1918, while in Kiev (moved there because of his hostility to Rasputin). He was assassinated near the Nikol'skaja ulica (St Nicholas street), today Lavrskaja.

## 1. Prehistory

Everybody knows that Russia is the nation where the devotion to St Nicholas is more intensely felt. It is not surprising therefore if pilgrims, after Jerusalem, look at Bari as to their most loved destination. Certainly they go to Mount Athos and Rome too, but the experience of arriving close to the body of St Nicholas is unparalleled.

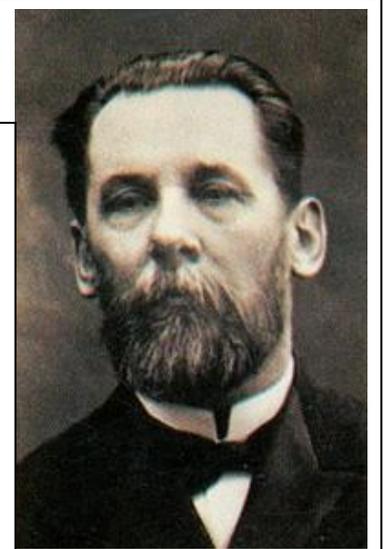


**Andrej Nikolaevič Murav'ev** (1806-1874), who in 1830 caused a sensation with his writing *Putešestvie k sv. Mestam* (travel to the holy places), in a second trip (1849) stopped in Myra. He suggested the purchase of the area of St Nicholas church in Myra.

The fear that this Barian attraction would push pilgrims toward Catholicism brought several writers (A. Murav'ev, E. Golubinskij, A. Dmitrievskij) to false historical statements in order to throw bad light on Catholic traditions, going so far as to say that pilgrims were badly received, while documents show the contrary. St Nicholas' canons were glad to let Russian pilgrims to pray near the tomb. The well known Barian writer Francesco Saverio Abbrescia died in 1852 because a pneumonia contracted for not refusing to accompany some Orthodox pilgrims (although he wasn't in a good health). It is true that metropolitan Evlogij from Paris could'nt celebrate on the tomb of St Nicholas, but this was probably due to

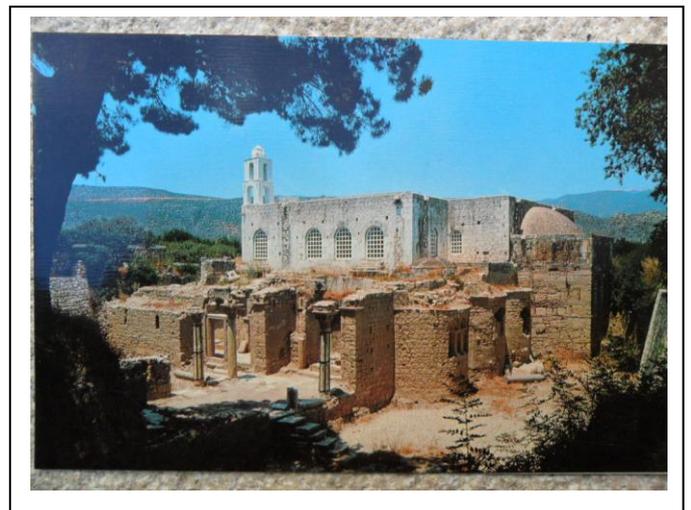
Ževachov's hand in it (he considered Evlogij the head of a church influenced by Hebrew-Masonic ideas). Anyway, official permission was difficult, because at that time "ecumenism" for the Catholic Church meant *return* to the mother Church of Rome.

**Aleksej Afanas'evič Dmitrievskij** (1856-1929), leading Russian liturgist, wrote that the Barians exploited the simple Russian pilgrims, hence in the *Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine* he showed the necessity of a Russian hospice in Bari.



In any case, Bari was a second best after Myra failure. Sixty years before the Bari choice Murav'ev's travels in the East inspired in Russia the project of purchasing the area of the ancient St Nicholas church in Myra.

The collection of alms was so rapid and successful that the Russians non only purchased from the Turks the St Nicholas church and the surrounding area, but could build (about 1870) that superior structure that we can see even today.



But, in the following two decades relationships between Russia and Turkey worsened and ended in a war (1876-78). It was the time when Fiodor Dostoevskij strongly proclaimed: **Constantinople must be ours** (Dnevnik Pisatel'ja, 1877, pp. 96-97).

Consequently, Russians were expelled from Turkey, with great satisfaction of the Orthodox Greeks, who thought illegal Russian intrusion in their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. That's why the metropolitan of Pisidia, whenever Russians were absent, sent his Greek priests to take possess of the church in Myra (till Turkish Government in 1879 assigned it to the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate).

Love for St Nicholas caused the Russians wait still thirty years in the hope that Turkish Government would change mind. But to no purpose. Someone in the *Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine* suggested to stop with Myra and think about Bari. But the president, prince Sergej Aleksandrovič, thought only about Myra.

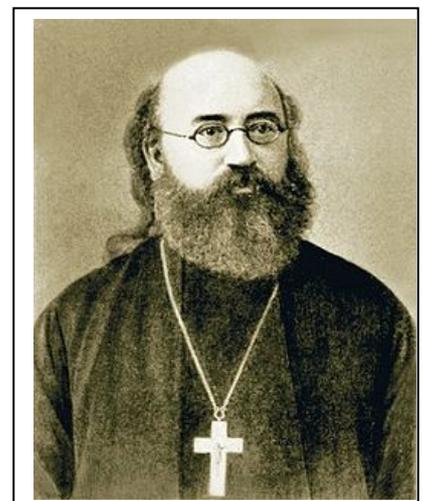
In **1905 Sergej Aleksandrovič** was killed by terrorists, and his place was taken by the wife Elisabeth Fëdorovna, who in 1910 abandoned the idea of Myra and took seriously the possibility of using for Bari all the money set aside for Myra. Czar Nicholas II (who had visited the Barian Basilica in 1892) gave his ok, and so the sum of 246.562 rubles were destined to the construction of the church in Bari.

To this turning point contributed several writers, like Ževachov and especially the leading liturgist **Aleksej Dmitrievskij**, who considered a pilgrim house in Bari a salvation for many Russian pilgrims who in their simplicity were exploited by unscrupulous people.



**Elizaveta Fiodorovna**, after the death of her husband Sergej Aleksandrovič (1905) took the presidency of the *Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine*, moving the interest of the Society from Myra to Bari. Killed by the Bolsheviks (april 1918), has been inserted in the Catalogue of the New-Russian martyrs (Council of Moscow 1992).

Elisabeth Fiodorovna sent to Bari the priest Ivan Vostorgov and prince N. D. Ževachov (able to speak Italian) to chek the situation. From Bari Vostorgov wrote that St Nicholas canons were not hostile to the project.



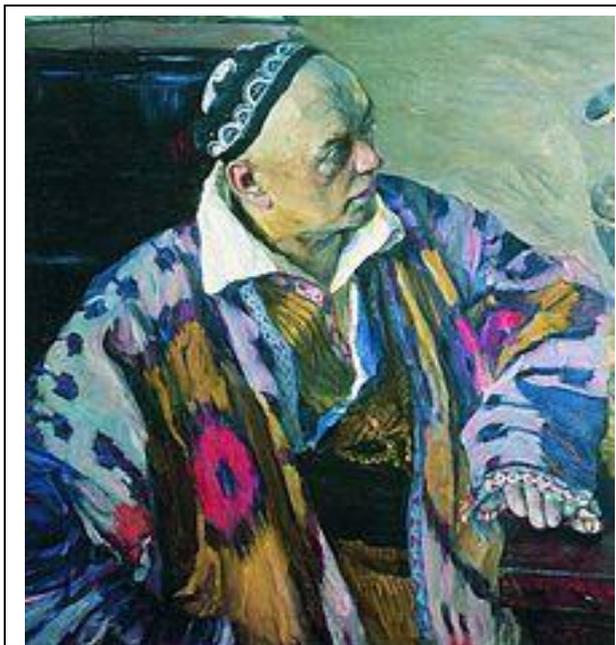
**Ioann Ivanovič Vostorgov** (1864-1918), Russian activist both in missionary field and in the political one (royalist party). He wrote to Elizaveta Fiodorovna about the favorable atmosphere in Bari for the construction of a Russian Church. Arrested by the Bolsheviks, he faced courageously martyrdom (May 30, 1918). At the *Council of the New Martyrs* (Mosca, 2000) his name was inserted in the Catalogue of Saints.

Having obtained the assent by the Czar (May 12, 2011) and by the Holy Synod, she then founded the **Barian Committee**, whose members were: A. A. Širinskij Šichmàtov (senator) as president, P. I. Ostroumov, A. A. Neratov, archpriests P. I. Sokolov and I. Vostorgov, architect M. T. Preobraženskij and prince N. D. Ževachov.

Events moved quickly. The Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine bought a ground in Bari on the way to Carbonara, belonging to the Scorcias' heirs (notarial deed by Pietro Albenzio, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1911). The Royal Italian decree allowing the building of the church is dated January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

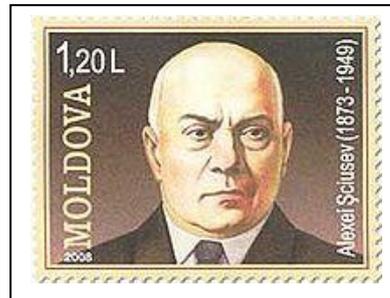
## 2. History

An Imperial decree entrusted the project to the young Moldavian architect **A. V. Ščusev** (May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1912), who conceived a superior and an underground church.



**Aleksej Viktorovič Ščusev** (1873-1949), here in a painting by M. V. Nesterov, obtained the degree exactly with his project about the church of Bari (**Barskaja Usad'ba**). He made many of the great works in Russia, among them the **Lenin's Mausoleum** on the Red Square.

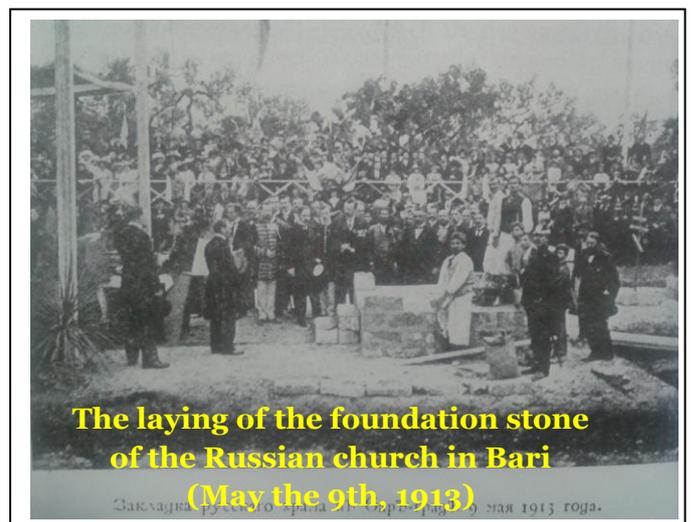
Members of the **Building committee** were: architect V. A. Subbotin, N.V. Fedotov (first rector of the church), I. O. Nikol'skij (custodian), K. N. Faminskij (Psalmist). Representative of the Barian Committee was prince Ževachov.



Moldova issued a stamp (2003) in honour of architect Ščusev. 2003

In the evening of May the 8<sup>th</sup> 1913 all of them participated at the **moleben** in the **Basilica near the relics of St Nicholas**. The morning 9 of May took place the official ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone. Were present Mr Balenzano (Italian senator), Sabino Fiorese (mayor of Bari), Vito Manzari (president of the Region), a lawyer (mr Schirone), an engineer (mr Amoruso) and some consuls of foreign states.

The **first stone** was laied by **Christopher Flerov**, chaplain of Russian Embassy in Rome. After him came Nikolaj Fedotov, the first rector of the church, then prince Ževachov for the Barian Committee, followed by the mayor Sabino Fiorese and by the member of the Embassy Alexander Mjasoedov, and finally by Vladimír Jur'ev.

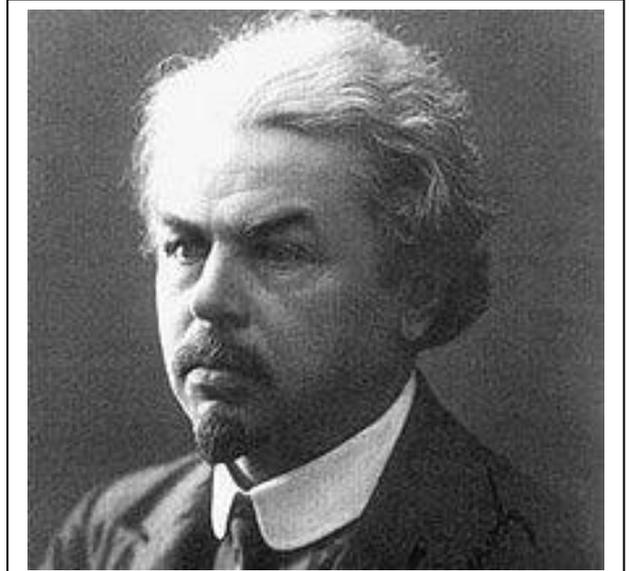


Prince Ževachov went personally to invite the archbishop of Bari and the rector of St Nicholas Basilica, but with no success. The official relationships between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches would not permit such cooperation. Things would have changed only 50 years later with the Vatican II Council. However, at the dinner party was present the St Nicholas' canon Sigismondo Favia.

Within six months the structure was ready to allow liturgical celebrations. Therefore, in December 24th of that same year the church was consecrated.

In the spring of 1914 Nikolaj Fedotov was replaced as rector by **Vasilij N. Kulakov** who was in charge till his death (1920). The first groups of pilgrims started to come, but soon had to stop. In 1914 Russia declared war to Germany, and when Italy went to its side in 1915, the Russian Government allowed to use the Pilgrims Hospice as center of the Italian Red Cross.

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of the great **Russian tragedy**, caused by the war, and even more by the **Bolshevik Atheistic Revolution**. Many leading figures of the early history of the Russian church in Bari were ruthlessly killed, among them Czar Nicholas II, princess: Elisaveta Fiodorovna, metropolitan Vladimir Bogojavlenskij, and Ioann Vostorgov.



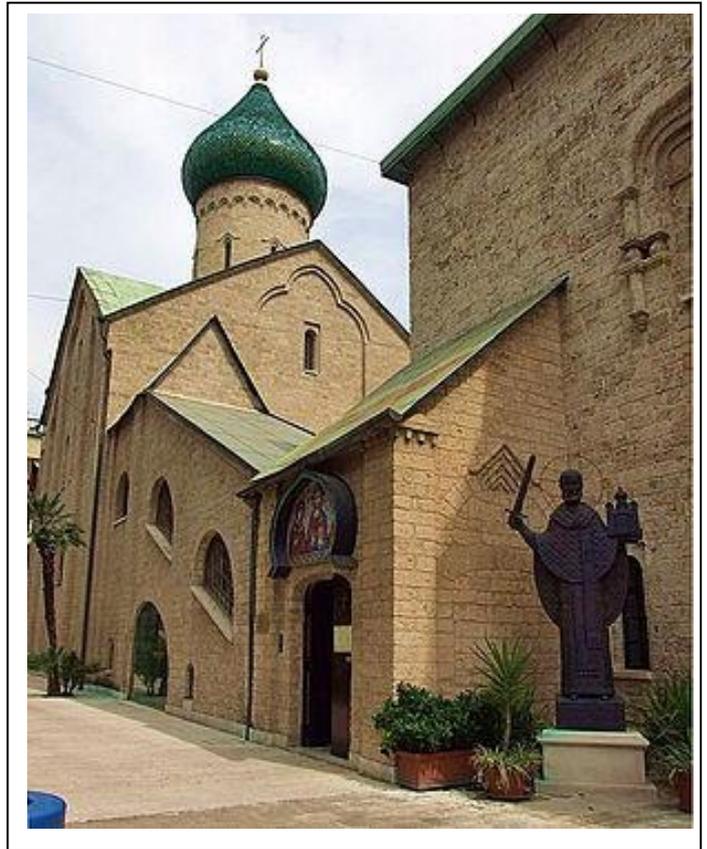
**Nikolaj Davidovič Ževàchov** (Džavachišvili, 1875-1946) was a real protagonist of the first times of the Russian church in Bari. His **interpretation of the Revolution** in terms of Sionist masonic plot was biased not less than the communist one. In 1920 he was entrusted with the administration of the church of Bari by prince Širinskij-Šichmàtov, president since 1918 (!?) of the *Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine*. Therefore he felt himself practically the owner of the church, as if the Revolution had changed nothing from the juridical point of view.



While the Bolshevik killing of Royalists and churchmen was going on, president of the *Imperial Orthodox Society of Palestine* in 1918 became Aleksej Aleksandrovič Širinskij-Šichmàtov (+ December 22, 1930). September 1920 he entrusted Nikolaj Davidovič Ževàchov (Džavachišvili, 1875-1946) with the administration of the Russian church in Bari.

**Ževachov** had previously cooperated with the general procurors of the Holy Synod and had been close to Imperial family, included Rasputin. At the outburst of the Revolution he tried to organize some resistance, but later decided to save his life by fleeing from a city to another: Charkov', Rostov on the Don, Pjatigorsk, Novorossijsk. In this latter city he joined a group of bishops directed to Serbia. Here, in **Karlovecy** assisted to the birth of the **Emigration Russian church** (Zarubežnaja Cerkov'), that with metropolitan Antonij Chrapovickij incarnated the monarchical anti-communist ideals.

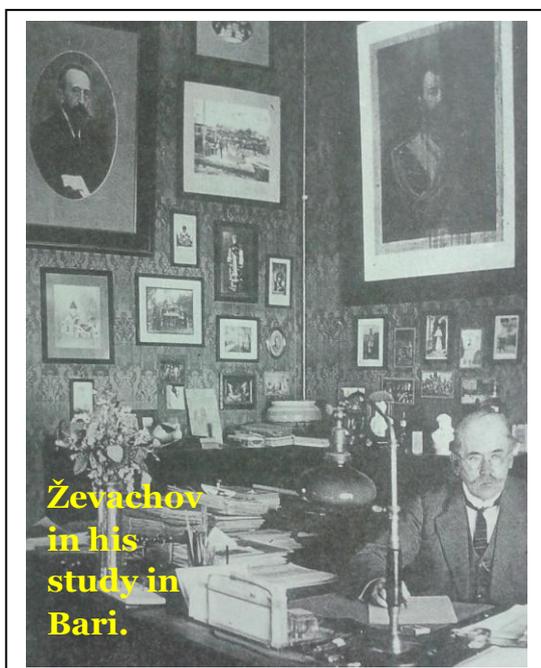
September 13 1920 he arrived to Bari to take possession of the church. He thought it would be easy, because the past February 15 the rector Kulakov had died. But he found oppositions in the two clerks, the Psalmist Vladimir Kamenskij and the economist Aleksandr Alekseev, who refused to give him both documents and account.



At first he let things slide, because engaged especially in Germany to reorganize the Czarist party abroad, but at the beginning of 1922 started proceedings against them.

When the Barian Court decided in his favor (April 11 1922) he practically became the “owner” of the church. In 1924 came to Bari the metropolitan Evlogij Geòrgievskij, head of the non-czarist church abroad. Ževachov received him coldly, because thought him to be influenced by Masonic Sionist ideas. A prejudice that probably he communicated to the St Nicholas canons, if we have to believe that the canons were not very friendly with him.

In 1931 took place the official ecclesiastical split between **Evlogij** and **Antonij**. The first one, although did not sign the loyalty declaration to Soviet Government (1927), did not brake relationships with the Church of Moscow. To be free from communist interferences and from Czarist nostalgic party, he put himself under Constantinopolitan jurisdiction. According to his ideals (and private interests too) Ževachov sided with Antonij.



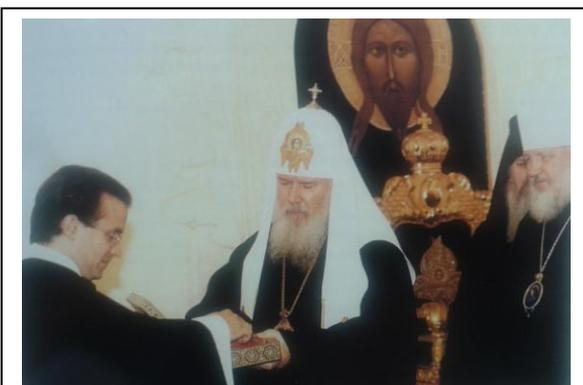
**Ževachov**  
in his  
study in  
Bari.



In 1998 the mayor of Bari **Simeone di Cagno Abbrescia** started a dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate on the restitution of the Russian church of Bari

In the clash between the Russian Church in Paris and the Russian church in Karlovcy in 1926 got in the **Soviet Government**. In the Soviet Russia was resurrected the **Russian Society of Palestine** in order to recover the goods abroad. October the 7<sup>th</sup> 1926 the official Nikolaj Chlenov, representative of the Society, asked the account of their administration both to the clerks and to Ževachov. This latter answered sharply that he was the true representative of the ancient Society, while the Soviet one was illegal and with no acknowledgement by the Italian State.

At first the Barian Court decided in Ževachov's favor (March 27, 1928), but later decided in favor of the Soviet Government, on the basis that Italian acknowledgement was not a necessary condition.



The Dominican Fathers cooperated with the municipality to ease the return of the church to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Now the problem was: to whom belongs the Russian church in Bari? *to the Russian church of Karlovcy (faithful to the Imperial family)? To the Russian church of Paris (with its great Russian theologians)? Or to the regency of the Moscow Patriarchate (under the Soviet atheist control)?*

The Lieutenant of the Moscow Patriarchate (obviously following a Soviet command) invited metropolitan Evlogij of Paris to send a rector to the church of Bari, sharpening this way the already very tense relationship between the two Russian Churches abroad.

The great advantage of Ževachov was the ignorance on the part of Bari authorities about the **three Russian Church Jurisdictions**. For them he represented the unique Russian Church. But he knew that this confusion couldn't last much longer. February 11 1931 he had to defend himself in Foggia against a charge of indecent behavior with a young man 16 years old. For all these reasons, forgetting the pilgrims, he rent out the Hospice for 9 years at monthly 5500 lire.

The turning point came with the decision of the Court of Rome to acknowledge as owner of the church the Soviet *Russian Society of Palestine* (March 26, 1936). Conscious of the new risky situation, Ževachov renounced to appeal to the Supreme Court (April 15, 1936) and declared himself ready to sell the church to the municipality of Bari.

For different reasons the Soviet Government was equally ready to sell "its church" to the municipality of Bari. For some years, in fact, it was insistently requested to pay debts to Italo-Belgian Mining Society for important works in Georgia. Finally, the Soviets and the mining Society reached the agreement on the ground that the Society would receive the money from the municipality of Bari, renouncing to any further request, while the Soviets would stake no further claims to the Russian church of Bari.

**June 12 1937** the municipality of Bari **purchased the Russian church** by

satisfying the financial requests both of Ževachov and of Francesco Rodriguez, representative of the mining Society.

Now that all the ownership and financial problems were resolved, it remained the ecclesiastical question:

**Which one, out of the three Russian Churches, had the right to send to Bari the priest-rector ?**

The Moscow Patriarchate regency was out of the game, because now the Soviet Government had no interest in the Bari question. The most decided and fighting was the Karlovcy Russian Church (that exactly in those years excommunicated the leading Russian theologian Sergij Bulgakov, who belonged to the Parisian jurisdiction).

In 1939 this Russian Church Abroad sent as rector **Andrej Kopeckij**, who five years later changed jurisdiction, joining the Parisian Church. An important pilgrimage from Paris reached Bari in 1955, and in that occasion the Church was again consecrated.

At the death of Andrej Kopeckij (1963), to Bari as rector was sent **Igor Značkovskij**, ex official of the White Army and therefore Czarist doc. Joining the Karlovcy Church he

was automatically not in communion with Constantinople. That's why, when the Greek metropolitan of Filadelfia (today patriarch Bartholomew Archondonis) visited the Basilica in 1980, I had to stop Igor from a verbal aggression against him.

In recent times, even the powerful **Russian Emigration Church** (centers: Karlovcy in Serbia, Jordanville in USA, Geneva in Europe) found difficulties in sending priests of real Russian origin. Consequently the situation of the Russian church in Bari was very precarious.

At the same time (1985) a great turning point took place in Russia: the **fall of communism** and the beginning of a new era for its Church too.

It belongs to our time the engagement of Simeone di Cagno Abbrescia, mayor of Bari.

I was present in 1999 when he obtained by the Judge Lalla that half of the Russian church in Bari had to be assigned to the Moscow Patriarchate. Because I explained to the Judge that the Russian Church of the Emigration (Zarubežnaja) did not represent the entire Russian Church, bishop Amvrosij of Geneva made a gesture with his stick as if would have liked to hit me.



**“My thoughts are not your thoughts”, says the Lord. What seemed impossible, has happened.**

**NB. The canonical reunification envisages that the Emigration Church continues to have its autonomy in the economic and administrative field.**

**May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Moscow. Patriarch Aleksij II of Moscow and metropolitan Lavr sign the reunification act between the Russian Emigration Church (the most concerned with the Russian church in Bari) and the Moscow Patriarchate.**



**Vladimir Putin** came to Bari in the year 2007 (here on the tomb of St Nicholas). But he had been already “present” by donating the statue in front of the Basilica (2003) and helping the Dominican Fathers to recover a lost ancient Evangeliary of the XIII century .

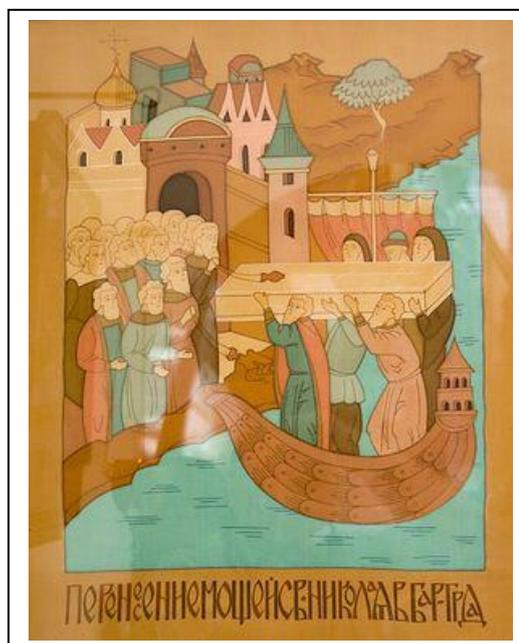
In the year 2007 came to Bari Vladimir Putin, president of the Russian Federation, and the dialogue about the return of the Russian church of Bari to the Moscow Patriarchate became more consistent.



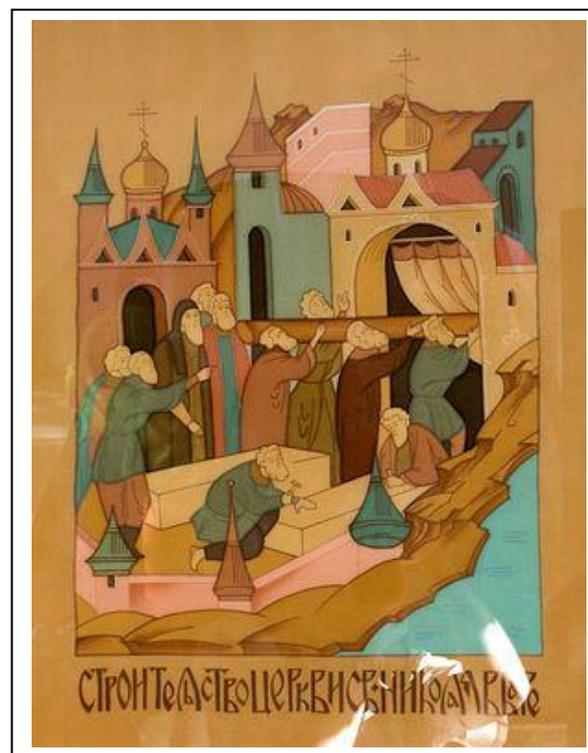
Dmitrij Medvedev and Giorgio Napolitano in the Russian church of Bari (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2009).

But, the year 2007 is very important for another reason too, concerning two of the three Russian Churches. It happened something that before 2000 no one would believe it could happen. In the Cathedral church of the Saviour in Moscow the heads of the Moscow Patriarchate (Patriarch Aleksij II) and of the Emigration Church (Metropolitan Lavr) signed the canonical

reunification, putting an end to the split caused by the Bolshevik Revolution. This act is important for the history of the Russian church of Bari too, because has settled the mess out related to the sending of the Rector of the church, previously cause of clashes between the two Churches.



Recent frescoes in a hall adjoining to the church, showing (above) the arrival of the relics to Bari, and (below) the construction of St Nicholas' Basilica.



In March 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 a solemn ceremony took place in which Giorgio Napolitano, president of the Italian Republic, handed over to Dmitrij Medvedev, then president of the Russian Federation, the keys of the Russian church of Bari.

There is still tension between the Paris Russian Church and Moscow Patriarchate. The first one, in spite of the fall of communism, did not return to the Moscow Patriarchate, but remained under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, thus sharpening the already tense relationship between Moscow and Constantinople on the thorny diaspora question. But this is another history (that we have shortly dealt with in the issue about the Russian church of Nice)

**January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012 the mayor** of Bari presided the official final presentation of the Russian church of Bari to the Moscow Patriarchate giving the property documents to bishop Mark Golovkov, representative of Patriarch Kirill. Present to the ceremony were A. Iu. Meškov (from the Russian Embassy) and Andrej Bojcov, Rector of the church.

The Russian church of Bari is today very active, because the Orthodox pilgrimage to Bari has grown at a daily rate. Relationship with the Dominican Fathers of the Basilica (where are preserved St Nicholas' bones) are very good.

Both Catholics and Orthodox pray at the tomb of St Nicholas in their own way and according to their own traditions. There is no fusion and no confusion. The only thing in common is the awareness of belonging to the same Christian root and the same love for Saint Nicholas

There is no question about "who is right and who is wrong". Who was born in the Orthodox tradition the best he can do is to go on in his tradition. Who was born in the Catholic tradition the best he can do is to go on in the Catholic tradition. This way the adherence to the Gospel is more authentic and a personal living experience.

Love for St Nicholas in both traditions (and I would like to include the Protestants too) shows that our Saint is the most active on the difficult walk toward Christian unity.



**Bari. January 23rd 2012.**

**The mayor of Bari Michele Emiliano gives the final property documents to bishop Mark, of the Moscow Patriarchate**

**THE BEST GREETINGS  
FROM BARI  
TO ALL ST NICHOLAS'  
FRIENDS**

