



# St Nicholas News

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From Fr Gerardo Cioffari, o.p.,  
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December 18th, 2011

## THE SILVER ROSE OF ST NICHOLAS TO MONS. ANTONIO MENNINI

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**The Point of view of the Moscow Patriarchate  
POPE BENEDICT XVI AND THE DIALOGUE  
OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH THE  
ORTHODOX CHURCHES**

During the solemn pontifical celebration of St Nicholas day in the Basilica of Bari, the 6<sup>th</sup> of December by the card. Francesco Monterisi has been blessed the *Silver Rose of St Nicholas*. In the year 2012 with the Silver Rose shall be awarded mons. Antonio Mennini, Papal nuncio in London (previously in Moscow).

### THE SILVER ROSE OF SAINT NICHOLAS

The first bearer of the Silver Rose of St Nicholas has been the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. Being at that time (2005) metropolitan of St Petersburg, the Rose was given to him in the Russian Embassy in Rome). The second one has been assigned to Josephina, abbess of the great female monastery of Varatec in Romania (given in Sibiu during the Second Ecumenical European Assembly); the third one to Mons. Eleuterio Fortino from the Pontifical Council



**The blessing of the "Silver Rose of St Nicholas" in the Basilica of Bari by card. Francesco Monterisi, archpriest of "St Paul outside the Walls" in Rome.**

**Photo by James Rondinone**

for the Promotion of Christian Unity (given in Bari at the Basilica of St. Nicholas); the fourth one to the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Mesrob (given in the Patriarchal Armenian Church in Istanbul); the fifth to Frau Prof. Dr. Fairy von Lilienfeld of the chair of Oriental Theology in the University of Erlangen (Germany). \*

The Silver Rose of St. Nikolaus is a creation of the Ecumenical Institute of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland together with the Institute of Eastern Churches in Regensburg (Germany). The Rose gets in the tradition of the "Golden Rose", which since the Year 1000 was

blessed by the bishop of Rome in the third Sunday before Easter (*Laetare*) and given to persons or places with merits for the good of the Catholic Church. Today the Silver Rose of St. Nikolaus is given to persons who imitate in their

life the works of St. Nicholas, who made visible God's love for Man (*Menschenfreundlichkeit Gottes*), persons rooted in the life of their churches and communities, testifying the universal (catholic) mission of the Church in the whole world, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way they promote the reconciliation and a deeper *Communio* in the Church, in the mankind, in all creation.

The Silver Rose St. Nikolaus is given after common decision of the three founders: Prof. Dr. Barbara Hallensleben and Prof. Dr. Guido Vergauwen OP of the University of

Fribourg, and Mons. Nikolaus Wyrwoll in Regensburg, priest of the diocese of Hildesheim, after hearing the advice of the canons of St Nicholas Cathedral in Fribourg. The flower of the Rose is filled with drops of balsam, a sign for the smell of the knowledge of Christ everywhere (2 Kor 2,14). Nikolaus Wyrwoll brings it to Bari for the benediction near the tomb of St. Nicholas.

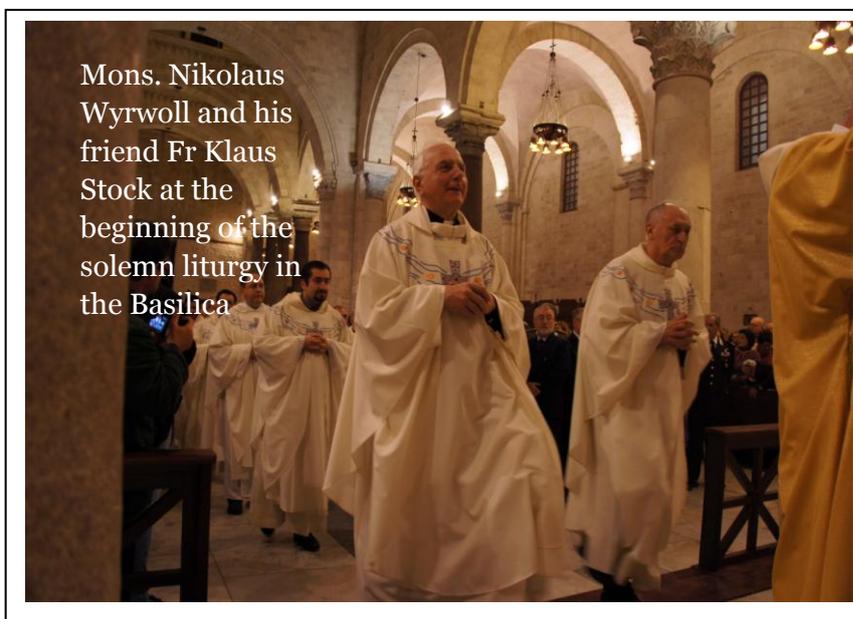
The Rose is ideally linked to the 1.000 years old plant of Roses near the apse of the Hildesheim Cathedral, a suggestion for the emperor Ludwig the Pious, son of Charles

the Great in the year to build a chapel in honor of the Mother of God, that later became the Cathedral. The city of Hildesheim with the Cathedral and the plant of Roses were annihilated by the bombs of the Second World War, but

from the rubble almost miraculously in the month of May 1945 a rose sprung up.

The name of the awarded is made public on the feast of St. Nicholas (December the sixth). In the year 2012, the Rose will be given to Mons. Mennini in Fribourg Cathedral on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, in the context of a symposium organized by the Ecumenical Institute of the University of Fribourg. Mons. Mennini will give lectures of his experiences in promoting unity between the Eastern and the Western churches.

Pope Benedict XVI, on 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2005 in his sermon in Bari, presented St. Nicholas as



Mons. Nikolaus Wyrwoll and his friend Fr Klaus Stock at the beginning of the solemn liturgy in the Basilica

patron Saint of all spiritual Ecumenism. In that occasion the Pope said:

*"Gerade hier, in Bari, in der Stadt, die die Gebeine des hl. Nikolaus hütet, ist ein Boden der Begegnung und des Dialogs mit den christlichen Brüdern und Schwestern des Ostens.*

*Hier möchte ich meinen Willen bekräftigen, die grundlegende Aufgabe zu übernehmen, mit aller Kraft für die Wiederherstellung der vollen und sichtbaren Einheit all derer zu arbeiten, die Christus nachfolgen. Ich bin mir bewusst, dass Zeichen des guten Willens dazu nicht ausreichen. Es braucht konkrete Zeichen, die in die Seele dringen und die Gewissen bewegen, die uns alle zur inneren Bekehrung herausfordern, die Voraussetzung ist für jeglichen Fortschritt auf dem Weg des Ökumenismus. Ich bitte euch alle, mit Entschiedenheit den Weg des geistlichen Ökumenismus zu beschreiten, der im Gebet die Türen für den Heiligen Geist öffnet - für den Geist, der allein die Einheit erschaffen kann."*

The Silver Rose wants to be such a sign.

NB. Let me here express my gratitude to mons. Wyrwoll for his convinced activity in



the ecumenical field and for this beautiful initiative of the Silver Rose of St Nicholas. An initiative that recognizes to our Saint the leading role in narrowing the gap between Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant positions.

Furthermore I have been extremely glad for the choice to give the 2012 Silver Rose to a man like mons. Antonio Mennini, because I had personally the occasion to see how he is one of the catholic bishops ecumenically minded, with a sincere respect toward Orthodoxy. I have known him and accompanied when he came to visit our Basilica and again when I went to visit him in Moscow. Therefore, great was my joy when I read that the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev gave him a Friendship Award, and even more when I read that his work in Russia had been officially much appreciated by Ilarion Alfeev speaking in the name of Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow. Meekness and spirituality are his strong points. On the path of John XXIII, his ecumenism is sincere, seeking not submission but communion.

### **Igumen Philipp Rjabych**

Vicar of the President of the Church External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate

## **POPE BENEDICT XVI AND THE DIALOGUE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES**

In the year 2006, while leaving for Istanbul, to the participants in the plenary session of the Pontifical Council for the cooperation to the Christian unity, Pope Benedict XVI underlined the necessity of *speeding up toward the full communion* with the Orthodox.

It is well known that in the Document on *The Basic Principles of the relationships with the non-Orthodox*, approved in the year 2000 by the Synod of the Bishops of the Russian Church, the efforts toward the Christian reunion is considered *of primary importance for the Orthodox Church on all the levels of its existence* (p. 2.1).

However the contacts in order to speed up the times for the reunion of the two Churches arise inevitably in the Orthodox field a series of problems, especially about the cost of such a reunion.

In the history there are many examples of how the road towards Church reunion could be understood as a victory of some over the others. Furthermore, today among the Orthodox many criticisms are addressed against ecumenism. Often in the ear of the Orthodox the word "ecumenism" does mean a whole of false theories and methods in order to reach ecclesiastical unity on the ground of compromises and indifference for the truths of faith.

It would be however unfair to give hasty judgements on the approach of the Pope to the question of unity and connect his proposals with some historical painful memories for the Orthodox.

In the west, on the contrary the term ecumenism presents itself like a technical word. Therefore, it is necessary in the single cases to explain its meaning. It is important in this regard to examine the ideas expressed by the Pope Benedict XVI on the dialogue with the Orthodox and to establish an organic picture.

## **1. The theological foundation of the dialogue with the Orthodox**

First of all, in many of his speeches and letters the Pope brings valid theological arguments in favor of the active efforts of all Christians toward Church unity. In one of his speeches he says that this activity comes from the obedience to the Gospel<sup>1</sup>, in which is clearly stated the Lord's will that those who believe in Him be united (John 17, 21). The same reference to the Gospel is made by the Russian Church in its Document, giving this way a basis to the necessity of the efforts toward the search of Christian unity<sup>2</sup>.

Another serious reason for a more intense activity in this field is the weakening of the Christian preaching and influence in the society, caused by the divisions and dissensions among those who believe in Christ. In many sermons and speeches the Pope shows his preoccupation because of this losing ground on the part of Christianity while the fight against it grows, even in those countries that before were the strongholds of this religion. In the joint declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Bartholomew is said: *We cannot ignore the growth of secularization, of relativism and even of nihilism, especially in the western world.* That is why the Pope explains the necessity of the movement toward unity by recalling the second part of Christ's prayer to the Father: *In order that the world would believe* (John 17,21).

It is to be noted that this way of reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel is the same employed by the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Cyril. In the year 2010 in his sermon for the solemnity of Saint Philipp, metropolitan of Moscow in the XVI century, he underscored: *Only if united the Church is able to influence the surrounding world,*

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<sup>1</sup> *The saint cause of the Christian reunion. Still much has to be done.* Speech at the audience to the Pilgrims before the Week of the prayer for the Christian unity, January 18th 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Basic Principles of the Russian Orthodox Church on the relationships to the non-Orthodox*, 2.1.

*spreading on it its moral influence. That is why from the very origin of Christianity the enemy of mankind tried to divide the Church. Already in the apostolic times arose heresies and various types of schisms. Practically, the entire history of the Church is a history of fight to preserve its unity. What's the use of this unity? Its purpose is to make its witness clear, strong and convincing, so that nobody could say : "Why you say all this ? Look at yourselves. You are divided". The enemy of mankind succeeded to divide Christianity in the world. It is difficult to guess how would have developed the history if hadn't taken place the division between Western and Eastern Christians. It is probable that the course of history would have been completely different. We hope that, for the prayers of the Church, the Lord shall show mercy toward all those who invoke His name and again the unity of the universal Church will shine forth to mankind "*

Evidently today Orthodox-Catholic dialogue on unity does not mean for the Pope to accept a theological relativism. In one of his speeches he gave this interpretation of the dialogue: *In general, the ecumenism that is to be cultivated first is the ecumenism of love, linked directly to the first new commandment given by Jesus to His disciples. Love, accompanied by its characteristic acts of charity, generates the trust, opens the hearts and the eyes. The dialogue of love helps naturally the dialogue of truth and throws light on it. Only in the full truth can be realized the decisive encounter to which Christ's Spirit guides us. Obviously, it is not through relativism or in a simple and false irenics that the ecumenical problems can be resolved. They could only confuse and push far from the right way*<sup>3</sup>. This same thesis has been often affirmed by representatives of the Russian Church.

## **2. Toward a systematic dialogue with the Orthodox**

It is clear that in the understanding of the Pope the speeding toward unity does mean real and systematic efforts to overcome the questions that divide us, and not a determination of concrete deadlines for the realization of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. This is clear if we take into account a sentence of his letter addressed to the Patriarch Bartholomew in the year 2009 in the occasion of the feast of St Andrew: *The subject of the plenary session "The role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church communion in the first*

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<sup>3</sup> To speed up toward unity. Analysis of the situation, a *Speech at the audience of the participants in the plenary session of the pontifical Council for the cooperation for the Christian unity*, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2006.

*Millennium” is certainly complex and needs long researches and a patient dialogue if we want to reach the purpose of an overall integration of the Eastern and Western traditions.*

We have to recognize that during these five years Pope Benedict XVI made decisive steps to foster the development of the relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. These efforts reached the important result by returning to work on the part of the Orthodox-Catholic Commission, as well as with the visit of the Pope to Constantinople, with the exchange of letters between the Pope and the ecumenical Patriarch, with the encounters with Orthodox representatives and hierarchs, included the encounter with the today Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Cyril (before his being elected to the Patriarchal throne), with the adoption of important scientific and cultural initiatives. All these initiatives made easier to fix important coordinates of a systematic dialogue as well as of a cooperation with the Orthodox.

### **3. The theological dialogue**

The first important coordinate is the mechanism of a regular bilateral communication through the International mixed Commission for the theological dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. This mechanics was created in the year 1979 and newly elaborated in 2006, the second year of pontificate of Benedict XVI. After a five years break, in the year 2006 took place the Belgrad meeting, in 2007 the Ravenna, in 2009 the Cyprus. Although the works of the Commission sometimes advance with difficulties, as it has been noticed with the incident in Ravenna, the fact itself of the existence of a common working table for the theological dialogue is a positive datum. It guarantees the going on of an important theological work without which it would be impossible to find out an harmony in the faith and it makes easier the walk toward eucharistic communion.

Pope Benedict XVI stressed the importance of such a table for bilateral dialogue, especially accepting that the participants could discuss the crucial question of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the root of the division between the Catholics and the Orthodox. This way the Pope continued the line of his predecessor, as he himself noticed speaking at the Phanar in 2006: *Pope John Paul II invited to enter the ecumenical dialogue with the purpose to find the ways to realize in our times the Petrine service. He showed in this way respect to its nature and essence, in order that even today could be realized the service of love recognized from both sides. Today I*

*wish to remember and to renew this invitation*<sup>4</sup>. The Roman Church has demonstrated this way a brotherly opening by proposing to put under examination the most burning and painful issue in the dialogue with the Orthodox.

Three years later (2009), in an official letter to Patriarch Bartholomew in the occasion of the feast of the Apostle St Andrew, the Pope made clearer the basis on which the Catholic Church is ready to examine the ministry of the Bishop of Rome in today world: *The point is about the way, by taking inspiration from the model of the first millennium, of picking out the forms in which the ministry of the Bishop of Rome could become a ministry of love recognized by everyone (Ut unum sint, 95). To this purpose let us pray God who would bless us and the Holy Spirit would guide us through this path that is very difficult, but full of good promises.*

Without any doubt this is truly an important step for the progress of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. The Catholic Church in fact has accepted as a criterion to evaluate today Christian life the reciprocal acknowledgement with the Orthodox in the matters of faith and ecclesiastical organization of the first millennium. Furthermore, the Pope considers of great importance the going back to the patristic thought as a guide for today ecclesiastic life. This opens a real possibility both to Orthodox and to Catholics to find out common paths for the examination of debated questions. In this connection very useful can result the research on the primacy in the Church from the point of view of the Communion Ecclesiology proposed by the Pope in the letter to the Patriarch Bartholomew in the year 2009: *The Catholic Church considers the Petrine ministry like a Lord's gift to His Church. This service has not to be understood in the categories of power but in the context of a Communion Ecclesiology, like a service to the unity in the truth and love. The Bishop of the Church of Rome, that presides in the charity (Ignatius of Antioch) considers himself Servus servorum Dei (Gregory the Great).*

The consequences deriving from such a theological perspective from the point of view of the structure of the Church shall be examined this summer in Wien. But now we can already say that the answers to today questions, if inspired to the experience of the undivided Church, could result very fruitful. Exactly this working trend is proposed by the Document of the Russian Church in relationship with other Christians: *Very cheering and promising is the fact*

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<sup>4</sup> The unity and the appeal of two brothers, the Patriarch and the Pope: Andrew and Peter. Speech of the Pope Benedict XVI at the end of the liturgy of the feast of St. Andrew the first called in the year 2006.

that the theological non-Orthodox thought through its best representatives shows a sincere and deep interest in the study of the patristic heritage, in the doctrine and organization of the ancient Church (p. 4.6).

In these favorable situation it is important that the Orthodox world wouldn't remain disappointed and really shall feel the brotherly opening on the part of the Catholic Church. It should be remembered that in the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue it should be taken into account not only history. In the East till today are real the fears that this dialogue could push to unjustifiable slides and compromises on the Orthodox side. In the meeting with the card. Kasper (May 19th 2010) Ilarion, the metropolitan of Volokolamsk, underlined this preoccupation: *Our task is to go on in a serious scientific work and make clear to ourselves how the primacy of the Bishop of Rome was understood in the first millennium. But nobody has to yield to the temptation of artificially applying to the life of the Eastern Church the ecclesiological models that were characteristic of the West.*

The ground for this fear among the Orthodox arose after signing the Document of Ravenna in the year 2007, because of this sentence: *Both Churches went on convoking councils when had to face crises of a certain seriousness. In these councils participated Bishops of local churches who were in communion with Rome, as well as, although understood in a different way, Bishops of local Churches in communion with the see of Constantinople.*

In order to explain this sentence the metropolitan of Pergamos, John Zizioulas, representative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople inside the Commission, declared: *In the eastern Church the primacy belongs to Constantinople, not in the sense of power, but in the sense of the initiative and of the harmony. For the first time in the Document the term primus has been employed in the meaning that had in the tradition of the first millennium*<sup>5</sup>.

There are however serious doubts on the fact that all the Orthodox agree with this understanding of the primacy in the first millennium in the East, and therefore with such an understanding today. In the Episcopal Council of 2008 the Episcopate of the Moscow Patriarchate declared a full dissension with this way of thinking: *Being dear to us the unity of all the local Orthodox Churches and especially with the mother Church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with which the heritage of the holy Rus' is linked with*

*unbroken plurisecular historical links, the Council expresses a deep concern because of the interpretative trends of the canonical tradition as appeared in some declarations and actions of some representatives of the holy Church of Constantinople*<sup>6</sup>. This Conciliar pronouncement touches a serious problem that cannot be solved only by resorting to the majority of votes or with diplomatic accords.

#### **4. Conciliar cooperation of Orthodox and Catholics**

If we want together, both Catholics and Orthodox, reach a common understanding of the primacy in the universal Church, it is necessary to hear the voice of each single local Church. The eastern Church tradition doesn't recognize special faculties to any See for the preservation of Orthodoxy. This ministry concerns all the Churches without any distinction. That's why some Orthodox learned with regret the suppression of the pope's title "Patriarch of the West". In spite of all the explanations given on this regard by the Pontifical Council for the cooperation toward Christian unity, the Orthodox are not at all brightened, because they used to associate that title with the cooperation among Patriarchates of equal dignity. In the Orthodox world still alive is the memory of St Marc of Ephesus, who alone did not subscribe the definitions of the Ferrara-Florence Council. Notwithstanding, it was exactly his position that was recognized by the Orthodox world as a whole.

The situation that emerged in Ravenna teaches that it is not only necessary to think about the sobornost' (conciliarity) of the Church, but also to apply this principle in the Church practice in order to solve specific problems. In the above quoted sermon of the Patriarch Cyril the necessity of applying the sobornost' principle in the Church, in order to keep its unity, is expressed in these terms: *It is very important to develop the consultation among the bishops, that is to practice the conciliar principle in the Church. Only through this unity of intents the Church becomes strong and able to stop any division. Only if there is this unity, that becomes real in the conciliar wisdom, the Church is able to speak a language that can convince the surrounding world.* In this light for the Orthodox it is very important the fact that pope Benedict XVI has spoken about developing the Conciliar dimension of Church government.

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<sup>5</sup> The Patriarchate of Constantinople blames the Russian Church for being authoritarian and for its tendency to isolation.

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=20961>

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<sup>6</sup> Declaration of the holy Russian Council of Bishops (Moscow 24-29 June 2008): *On the unity of the Church.*

Taking into account the growing reception of the Conciliar principle in the life of the Church on the part of the Catholic Church, it should be important to introduce the criterion of approving all the documents only when they meet with the acceptance of all the Orthodox Churches. If we ignore this principle we put at risk every stage of the dialogue and therefore its final success. The consequence of the swinging away from this principle in Ravenna is that now we have a document that has been subscribed not by all the Churches. In other words, in the long run there shall be problems for its reception. The Document of the Russian Church about the non Orthodox says: *No Document or matter about dialogues and theological conversations has obliging force for the Orthodox Churches till their final approval on the part of the Orthodoxy as a whole* (p. 4.3). The solution is in inserting into the Ravenna Document a formula acceptable for all the Orthodox.

### 5. Lack of dialogue with the Greek-Catholics [Résumé]

A serious deficiency of the bilateral dialogue is the fact that it has been not yet examined the role and position of the Greek Catholic communities in the relationships between Catholics and Orthodox.

[Here Philipp Rjabych recalls the heated atmosphere of the Nineties, adding that the Greek Catholics have extended their proselytism into regions where they did not exist before. While the Moscow Patriarchate invited them to dialogue, no answer has come from them up to this moment].

**DA BARI  
UN CARISSIMO  
SALUTO  
A TUTTI GLI AMICI  
DI S. NICOLA**

### 6. Spiritual life of the Church [Résumé]

According to the pope the movement toward unity is conditioned by our being really Christians: *Stronger will be the relationship of the Christians with the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, more they will be able to intensify the brotherly communion* (ibidem 7)<sup>7</sup>. In the East there is a widespread conviction about the spiritual crisis of the West. Therefore many Orthodox have appreciated the popes appeals to a more authentic liturgical life, to theological meditation and social engagement. In spite of his age, he *celebrates regularly the Mass and preaches. He offers this way a model of life for the faithful, according to which the communion with God is the source of all his earthly life*. And he invites all the faithful to

<sup>7</sup> *The saint cause of the Christian reunion. Still much has to be done.* Speech at the audience to the Pilgrims before the Week of the prayer for the Christian unity, January 18th 2006.

participate to the Week of the Prayer for the unity of the Christians.

This way of thinking invites the Orthodox as well to pray under given conditions with the non-Orthodox, although with them there is no Eucharistic communion. Unfortunately, on this subject there is no accord among the Orthodox and many have even criticized the common prayer made by the pope and the ecumenical patriarch.

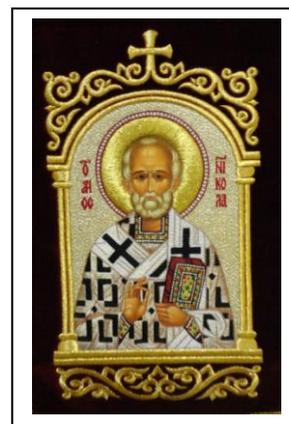
### 7. The missionary witness of the Church [Résumé]

Many Orthodox faithful believe that the Catholic Church compromised itself with the world. But this is not true. Certainly pope Benedict XVI shows great respect for the ideas of non Christians. His ideas about a responsible economy and about the ethics of human work (expressed in the “Caritas in veritate”) coincide with the positions expressed in the *Basic principles of the doctrine of the Russian Church on the dignity, freedom and rights of man*. It is not possible to ignore his courageous ministry. And the charges against him formulated by the SMI are based on extrapolated sentences or on false informations. Pope Benedict XVI action is directed to the development of systematic relations between Orthodox and Catholics.

According to me, only a real and intense work to examine sincerely all the theological questions that still divide us, together with a contemporary strengthening of the common witness of the Christian truths in this secularized society could,

if God shall want, give us the opportunity of real steps toward an authentic unity.

The igumen Philipp Rjabych, representing the Moscow Patriarchate in the Council of Europe, held this lecture the 8th of June 2010 at the Catholic Academy of München (Germany) on account of the Institute “Pope Benedict XVI”, founded by the bishop of Regensburg Gerhard Ludwig Müller.



St. Nicholas  
Embroidered by  
Natalia of Kiev  
and given to me  
in the morning  
of December  
the first.



