

Part IV

Chapter 1.6. The Dioceses in South America

Before World War I, there was only one Russian Orthodox parish in South America,¹ the Holy Trinity Church in Buenos Aires. After the severing of relations with the Russian Patriarchal Church, this community was forced to become self-administering. The first Russian immigrants arrived in Brazil in 1921. From the mid-1920s onwards, other groups of emigrés followed suit. Practically all Russian Orthodox parishes in South America today can trace their origins to the Church Abroad, except the aforementioned parish in Buenos Aires. This also applies to the parishes presently belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate. The latter's first parish came into existence in 1941 as the result of a schism in the Holy Trinity Church in Buenos Aires. They were received into the Patriarchal jurisdiction in 1946. Almost twenty years later, in 1968, they were able to consecrate their own Church of the Annunciation. The Moscow Patriarchate's hope that it would annex other emigré parishes was, however, not fulfilled. Only in Argentina did a minority of emigré communities split apart, establishing their own parishes under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the remaining South American countries, the Moscow Patriarchate is practically unrepresented.² A few communities, mostly in Argentina, joined the North American Metropolia after 1947 for a period of time. Among these were the Holy Trinity Church in Buenos Aires, which, however, like other parishes, returned to the Church Abroad in 1961. A part of the Ukrainian-speaking Orthodox joined the so-called "Ukrainian Autocephalous Church," which has over 30 communities in Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, and Paraguay.³

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is represented today in South America by 2 dioceses, 34 parishes, and a small convent with an orphanage in Chile. Fifteen priests and one

deacon care for the parishes. Many parishes which had been founded in the 1930s and 1940s had to be closed in the 1960s because their members had died out. This happened for the most part in diaspora communities located in remote parts of the country.

The parishes that are still in existence today in Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, and Chile are located in the densely populated areas of the main cities or the industrial regions where larger groups of Russian emigrés live. The parishes in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Peru may continue to exist as diaspora communities made up of very small emigré groups, but are only barely able to maintain their existence.

In 1889, the first Russian church in South America was consecrated by decree of Emperor Alexander III, dated 1888. It was a small house chapel at the Russian Embassy, which, aside from the diplomatic envoys of the Russian Empire, counted also Orthodox Greeks, Syrians, and Southern Slavs among its faithful. Its first clergyman, Father Constantine Ivraztsov, was appointed in 1891. Because this small chapel could not meet the needs of an increasingly populous community, Father Izraztsov undertook a journey to Russia in order to collect money to build a new church. Icons, church utensils, and liturgical books were quickly donated by the Holy Synod and the faithful, so that after a three-year building period, the Holy Trinity Church in the center of the city could be consecrated. It has five cupolas and was built in the southern Russian style. The church's iconostasis is of particular artistic value: it was built in the style of a church portal and consists of three ranks of icons painted in a realistic style. Over the royal doors is a bow stretching upwards, which is crowned by four onion-shaped cupolas. As an example of Russian church architecture of the end of the 19th century, the church today is under protection as a landmark. Since its return to the jurisdiction of Church Abroad in 1961, it is directly subject to the Synod in New York.⁴ Until the end of the World War I, the church remained the only

Russian Orthodox Church in South America.

It is not known precisely at what point in time Father Constantine Izraztsov recognized the Church Abroad as the supreme ecclesiastical governing body of the Russian emigration. At the Council of Karlovtsy in 1921, the Argentine community was not represented. The parish continued to exist in those first years as an independent body and Father Izraztsov registered the parish with the Argentine authorities as a “Russian Orthodox Union” with the rights of a legal person. In the principal periodical of the Synod of Bishops there was a reference to the Argentine parish in the summer of 1926. It said that Father Izraztsov maintains good relations with various Greek and Syrian families, who have their children baptized in his church, because he intones litanies and the Gospel in Greek; faithful of various nationalities belong to his parish.⁵

Presumably this report is based on reports and correspondence between the Synod and Father Izraztsov, who must have made contact with the church leadership in Karlovtsy around this time. On 10/23 July 1926, the Synod finally appointed Father Izraztsov “head of all parishes in South America.”⁶ At this point in time, there were no other parishes in South America besides Buenos Aires. The appointment was, therefore, probably more a plan for the future because, from the mid-1920s, large groups of emigrés arrived in South America. These remained under the direction of Father Izraztsov, who in turn was directly subject to Bishop Theodosius.

In 1934 Bishop Theodosius of Detroit was appointed Bishop of São Paulo & Brazil, and was given jurisdiction over the Russian parishes in South America, with the exception of the parishes in Argentina, which remained under Father Izraztsov, who was directly subordinate to Bishop Theodosius. The appointment of Bishop Theodosius as Bishop of São Paulo & Brazil was successful, for in the 1930s Brazil gained many parishes.

This arrangement remained in effect until 1946/47. After the North American

Metropolia's schism, Archpriest Izraztsov, with a part of his parish and the Holy Trinity Church, joined the North American Metropolia. The Synod then created its own diocese of Buenos Aires & Argentina, whose rule was given to Archbishop Panteleimon (Rudyk). A third diocese existed in Paraguay: the Diocese of Ascuncion & Paraguay, governed by Bishop Leontius (Philippovich). There were also bishops appointed for Venezuela and Columbia: Bishop Eulogius (Markovsky) received the title of Bishop of Caracas & Venezuela, though he was unable to assume office due to poor health. He remained, until his death in 1951, a member of the Synod, and reposed in Mahopac, NY. Bishop Nathaniel (Lvov) was appointed Bishop of Columbia in 1952. However, he took over the administration of the Russian parishes in North Africa instead.

The Diocese of Paraguay existed only between the years 1947-53. In Paraguay there was a small parish, its membership consisted mostly of Russian officers and engineers belonged, who had come there as advisors to the government. With financial support from Argentina they were able to consecrate a small church dedicated to the Holy Protection. Other parishes, all with less than fifty faithful, existed in Encarnacion, Miranda, and Fram. When, after the World War II, larger groups of emigrés from Europe were brought into Paraguay, the Synod decided to create a separate diocese for Paraguay. This arrangement was also supposed to prevent the parishes from falling away from the Church Abroad after Archpriest Izraztsov had joined the Metropolia. He had had a close relationship with the parishes in Paraguay. With the appointment of Bishop Leontius, there were also hopes that a monastery would be founded, because together with him five monks from the Saint Job Brotherhood in Munich arrived in Paraguay. The brothers wanted to found a monastery in Miranda, because there was a six-hectare plot of land attached to the church there. After the parish refused to put their church at the disposal of the Brotherhood as a

monastery church, these plans had to be dropped. The Diocese of Paraguay was not occupied again and was joined to that of Argentina.⁷ Today there are only two parishes of the Church Abroad in Paraguay; the aged Archpriest I. Petrov was entrusted with the pastoral care of the families in the country. A few thousand faithful were alleged to be present in the country.⁸ After the effort in Paraguay failed, Bishop Leontius was finally appointed ruling bishop of the new Diocese of Santiago & Chile. The monks from Paraguay left for Argentina and Chile.

The Chilean Diocese is the smallest diocese of the Church Abroad. There is one parish in Peru and one in Chile, with a convent near Santiago, which is the only Orthodox convent in South America. The community in Peru has existed since 1949. Besides Russians, Orthodox Arabs, who have been living in the country for decades, also belong to the community. Because they have partially forgotten their mother tongue, divine services are conducted in Church Slavonic for the Russians and in Spanish for the Arabs.⁹ In 1963 the parish was able to consecrate its own church. However, a few weeks after the consecration, the parish joined the North American Metropolia.¹⁰ Those who remained loyal to the Church Abroad are cared for by the clergy from Chile.

The first Russian emigrés who came to Chile were from the Far East and belonged to those refugees who, after the communist seizure of power, had to leave China. They arrived in Chile in the early 1950s. The majority of them remained there for only a short time, because they were unable to find work and travelled on to other South American countries. Only in Santiago was a small parish established, which was able to consecrate the Holy Trinity Cathedral at the end of that decade.¹¹ Besides the cathedral, there were also Russian Orthodox chapels in Vina del Mar and Concepcion. The latter was destroyed in an earthquake in 1960. Near Puento Alo (in Santiago Province) there is a Russian cemetery. Until Allende seized power, there were another

six parishes, which, however, had no place to hold divine services. After the leftist government seized power, most Russians left the country.

The focal point of church life was the Convent of the Dormition, founded in 1958 near Santiago.¹² The first occupants took up an invitation from Bishop Leontius. They came from the Holy Land and were joined by nuns from Brazil, who were living in Villa Alpina, where a small community of nuns existed. The goal of this group was the foundation of an orphanage and a school on the model of the Bethany Convent near Jerusalem. In 1969, the orphanage and school were opened. In the orphanage, there were over 40 Chilean children between 2 and 10 years of age, who were all baptized into the Orthodox Faith. At the school 100 children received instruction at first, though this number rose. In 1977, 186 students attended the school. The curriculum corresponds to that in the Chilean schools, with the additional subjects of Russian language, history, and literature, and Orthodox catechism. Children of Russian emigrés as well as Chilean children attend school.¹³

After the death of Archbishop Theodosius of Brazil in 1968, Bishop Leontius was appointed Archbishop of São Paulo & Brazil. From 1969 until his death in 1971, he headed both the Diocese of São Paulo & Brazil and that of Santiago & Chile. After his repose, the administration of the Chilean diocese was transferred to Archimandrite Benjamin (Vosniuk). The youngest ecclesiastical region in South America is that of Caracas & Venezuela. As already mentioned, the Synod named Bishop Eulogius to the see of Caracas & Venezuela, though he did not assume this office. Only in 1957 was Archimandrite Seraphim (Svezhevsky) consecrated Bishop of Caracas & Venezuela. He headed the diocese until his retirement in 1984. (He reposed in 1996). From 1968-1976, he was simultaneously also the ruling bishop of São Paulo & Brazil. In 1976 he relinquished the latter to Bishop Nicander. Orthodox faithful, mostly Greeks and

Arabs, had been living in Venezuela since the 1920s. There were no Orthodox priests. Only in 1947 did a Russian priest arrive, together with a group of Russian emigrés. Other priests followed in 1948 and 1949, to care for the Russian faithful. The first parishes were in Caracas, Valencis, Atavisa, Barkismento, and other cities. The direction of the parishes was given to Archpriest John Baumanis, who was formerly a clergyman attached to the cathedral in Riga, Latvia. Archbishop Theodosius of Brazil oversaw the spiritual life there. Within a few years, six parishes came into existence; each had its own priest. The first stone church, the Church of the Mother of God of the Sign, a flat structure with a large cupola, was consecrated in 1950 in Valencia.¹⁴ Around the same time the parishes in Barkismento, Maracay, and Caracas started building their own churches. In Maracay, a church dedicated to Saint Nicholas was consecrated in 1953, likewise a stone church. Finally in 1955, Saint Nicholas Church in Caracas was consecrated; it was built in Pskov style. The inside of the church was frescoed in its entirety; the icon screen was painted in the traditional Russian style. After Archimandrite Seraphim's consecration as Bishop of Caracas, the church became the episcopal cathedral. In 1960 a small home for the elderly was opened in Valencia. The first plans for this dated back to 1950. The financial resources, however, only covered the cost of the parish church. With the support of other parishes, the necessary money was finally collected for the purchase of a plot of land, and the building of the small home for the elderly was begun.¹⁵ In Caracas, where the most emigrés lived and there are three communities, a cemetery was established in 1965.

From 1958, its own journal, *Eparkhialny Vestnik (Diocesan Herald)*, was published, which, however, has more recently been suspended. Today, six parishes remain in Venezuela; all have their own churches. The parishes are cared for by an archbishop, three archpriests and two hieromonks. From their very beginnings, the parishes had their own priests because among the

refugees there were priests accompanying them. Each of the churches had parish sisterhoods that conducted work with the parish youth and elderly, church maintenance, and charitable work. The parishes supported community centers with libraries and church schools.¹⁶

The largest numbers of faithful in South America live in Argentina and Brazil. The Holy Trinity Cathedral in Buenos Aires formed the ecclesiastical center for the Russian Orthodox communities in South America in the 1920s and 1930s. After the appointment of Archbishop Theodosius in 1934, the center of church life shifted to Brazil, because most of the emigrés went there.

In his parish, Archpriest Constantine Izraztsov cared for not only Russian emigrés, but also for numerous Orthodox Greeks and Arabs. In 1936 he opened a parish school, which was attended by forty children of various nationalities. Instruction took place on Saturdays. Simultaneously, Father Izraztsov began to build a parish library.¹⁷ In 1941, Father Izraztsov had already been serving at Holy Trinity Church in Buenos Aires for fifty years. His faithful held him in high esteem. When, in 1947, he decided to break with the Synod and join the North American Metropolia, most of the faithful joined him in this step in order to remain with the priest who had faithfully served them for so many years. The canonical question may have played only a minor role, because upon Father Izraztsov's repose in 1961, the parish returned to the jurisdiction of the Church Abroad.¹⁸ The confusion that ensued within the Argentine diocese on account of this schism was exploited by the Moscow Patriarchate, which consecrated its own bishop for South America; Hegumen Theodore (Tekuchev) was appointed Bishop of Buenos Aires & South America. Thereupon, a portion of the faithful joined the jurisdiction of the Patriarchal Church. The faithful who remained true to the Church Abroad in Argentina were in the minority. This changed suddenly, starting in 1948, with the influx of Russian refugees into

Argentina. Today the Church Abroad in Argentina has the largest number of faithful, while the Patriarchal Church has no parishes beyond Buenos Aires, as Sister Angelina, who is herself a member of the Patriarchate, writes.¹⁹

In 1947 Bishop Nathaniel visited Eva Peron in Switzerland in order to negotiate the reception of Russian refugees into Argentina.²⁰ The result of this visit was the opening of the Argentine borders to several thousand Russian refugees from Europe. Priests were dispatched to accompany the emigrés and organize their future parish life. Archimandrite Michael (Diky) became the administrator of the Church Abroad's parishes. He had been priest at the church in Bratislava and had been educated for the priesthood at the Saint Job of Pochaev Monastery in Ladomirova.²¹ He organized a new parish, which was consecrated as the Holy Resurrection Church, for the faithful who had been forced to leave Holy Trinity Church. A parish school was opened for children of the refugees arriving from Europe, which 30 children attended.²² In 1957 the community laid the cornerstone for a new church, which at the same time was to serve as the bishop's cathedral. In 1960 Holy Resurrection Church was consecrated.²³ A year later, Holy Trinity Church returned to the jurisdiction of the Synod of Bishops.

The wave of emigration that started in 1948 led to the establishment of numerous new parishes in the country. In 1948 alone, the following parishes were constituted: the parish of Saint Sergius of Radonezh in Ballester, which built its own church in the Pskov style during the years 1956-59,²⁴ the parish of Saint Hermogenes in Quilmes, which in 1952 was able to consecrate a spacious stone church,²⁵ and the parish of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God in Temperley, where there was also a home for invalids.²⁶ Finally, the parish of Saint John the Forerunner was founded in Villa Diamante, which just one year later was able to consecrate a makeshift church in a barrack.²⁷ These parishes, like most of the other communities founded by

1950, were all located in the Province of Buenos Aires.

Archbishop Panteleimon (Rudyk), who was appointed Archbishop of Buenos Aires & Argentina, was to administer the parishes and build up church life. He remained in his diocese only until 1950, and then had to leave the country by order of the authorities. Archbishop Joasaph took over the rule of the diocese from 1951-55. Under his rule, church life in Argentina blossomed. The authorities officially acknowledged him as head of the Russian parishes there. In 1958 the parishes joined together in a “Russian Orthodox Congregation in Argentina,” which received recognition as a legal person, and since then has been the legal possessor of all churches and church property of the Church Abroad in Argentina. The bishop, who must be appointed by the Synod, is the head of the “congregation,” thereby preventing a change in the ownership of church property should individual priests or faithful change jurisdictions.²⁸

The publication of their own diocesan journals and parish newsletters began. The parish in Buenos Aires published *Pravoslavnoe Slovo (Orthodox Word)*; the community in Temperley published *Blagovestnik (Good News)*. The former appeared monthly in printed form with approximately sixteen pages. It was replaced in 1969 by the *Tserkovny Vestnik Argentinskoi Eparkhy Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi Zagranitsii (Church Herald of the Diocese of Argentina of the Russian Church Abroad)*, which, however, only appeared in mimeographed form.

Archbishop Joasaph, who worked all his life to establish monastic communities, also undertook an attempt to establish a monastery in Argentina. In 1951 Mother Gabriela (Plitenko) was tonsured a nun; she was the first to be tonsured there.²⁹ Mother Gabriela had belonged to the community in Ballester and was to direct a community of nuns, because individual nuns had also come to Argentina among the refugees.³⁰ The attempt to establish a convent failed, however, due to a lack of financial means. The nuns were then active in various parishes and later joined the

convent in Santiago.

The rule of the diocese lay in the hands of Archbishop Joasaph until 1955. In 1952, in recognition of his service he was awarded the jeweled cross for his klobuk. After his death, Bishop Athanasius (Martos) took over rule of the diocese. He was elevated to the rank of archbishop in 1956, and in the following year, he was awarded the jeweled cross for his klobuk. In the same year the parish in Montevideo (Uruguay) was placed under his rule, and in 1976 also the parishes in Paraguay. Until his death in 1983, he bore the title of Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, & Paraguay. In 1982, the hierarch celebrated his fortieth anniversary as a bishop. He is the most senior hierarch of the Church Abroad.

Eleven parishes in Argentina, two in Paraguay, and one in Uruguay were subject to him. Besides these, five parishes in the diocese were directly subject to the Synod in New York, including Holy Trinity in Buenos Aires, a Romanian Orthodox exile parish, and three parishes in the Province of Misiones. These parishes formerly belonged to the Metropolia; they returned to the jurisdiction of the Church Abroad in the 1960s.

In 1934, the first Russian diocese in South America was created in Brazil. Bishop Theodosius took over the rule of the diocese with the title of Bishop of São Paulo & Brazil. All South American parishes except the ones in Argentina were subject to him. The appointment of a bishop for the Russian community was sensible inasmuch as the country had received thousands of Russian refugees in the 1920s. The first group of Russian immigrants came to Brazil in the summer of 1921. These were the members of the White Russian Army and former government officials, who had been evacuated from the Crimea by the French on the ships “Aquitaine” and “Provence” to Brazil, where they were given work on the coffee plantations.³¹ The second group of immigrants came in 1925/26. This time there were 15,000 people, mostly from the Baltics and

Bessarabia.³² At the end of the 1920s, there must have been up to 20,000 Orthodox faithful living in Brazil. Other, smaller groups joined them in the 1930s, from the Far East and Eastern Europe. A third wave of immigrants came later, after World War II. These were refugees from the Far East, who fled Communist China. A total of 20-30,000 emigrés from the Far East are reported to have come to Brazil.³³ In 1964, the total of Russian Orthodox living there was estimated at about 30,000.³⁴ Most refugees lived in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Goiana.

The first parish established in Brazil was the Church of Saint Nicholas in São Paulo. From 1927, it had been located in the parish hall of the Syrian Orthodox parish, and was first entrusted to the guidance of the Syrian priest. Among the emigrés from the Baltic, there was a Russian priest named Father Michael Klyarovsky, who arrived in Brazil in January of 1927 and assumed the direction of the Russian community.

The Holy Trinity parish in Villa Alpina, a suburb of São Paulo, started building the first Russian church in 1932. They planned to build the church in Northern Russian style, as well as to build a community center in adjacent buildings. The building project was realized within a short time.³⁵ When Bishop Theodosius was named head of the Brazilian communities, he wished to make the church in Villa Alpina his residence. Because the church was not large enough, however, Saint Nicholas Church in São Paulo undertook to construct its own cathedral. The parish purchased its own land in 1937, and two years later the new cathedral was ready for consecration.³⁶ The church, built in northern Russian style, could hold around 700 faithful. Also a church dedicated to Saint Seraphim of Sarov, with an attached residence, was built in Carabucuiba, a suburb of São Paulo. This became Bishop Theodosius's summer residence.

Other parishes, including the ones in Porto Alegre, Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, and other cities, were likewise founded in the 1930s. The majority of them consisted of 20 to 50 families.

Yet there were many faithful widely dispersed throughout the country, who on account of the distances were only able to attend services on feast days. Bishop Theodosius was concerned with just these faithful during his pastoral visits. Thus, he baptized thirty children during a single trip in 1935.³⁷ To strengthen the Faith among the people, their own journal appeared, *Golos pastyra* (*Voice of the Pastor*), which the contents of which were predominantly of a missionary and catechetical nature.

After 1948, when other refugees arrived, Archimandrite Vitalis (Ustinov) was appointed vicar bishop for Brazil with the title of Bishop of Montevideo. He arrived in Brazil in 1949 with his Brotherhood of Saint Job of Pochaev. The group settled in Villa Alpina and founded Holy Trinity Monastery there. Twelve people belonged to the Brotherhood, including Father George Moissevsky (in monasticism Gregory) and the 20-year-old Tikhon Kalinin.³⁸ The Brotherhood had its own printing press, which published the diocesan newsletter, *Svet Khrista* (*The Light of Christ*). The Brotherhood also printed various journals, books, and brochures. After Bishop Vitalis was transferred to Canada, the press and the monastery remained in existence for yet a while longer. In the end, a few older nuns lived in the house, but publication had to be suspended, because there was no one to continue the work. In 1954, the diocesan administration established a school committee, because many children were to be found amongst the refugees from the Far East. The first school was dedicated in the same year in Indianopolis, a suburb of São Paulo, which in 1957 already had 50 pupils.³⁹ Other schools existed in Itu and Santos. In Villa Alpina, a boys' boarding school was opened; it housed ten orphans from Harbin. For the elderly in need of care, a nursing home was opened in São Paulo.⁴⁰

After Bishop Vitalis was transferred, Archimandrite Agapitus was appointed Vicar Bishop with the title of Bishop of Goiana. His successor as Vicar Bishop was Bishop Nicander

with the title of Bishop of Rio de Janeiro. In 1968, Archbishop Theodosius died; he had led the diocese for 30 years. The leadership next fell to Archbishop Seraphim of Caracas & Venezuela, and then, in 1976, to Bishop Nicander. Today the diocese has 11 parishes, which are cared for by one bishop, four priests, one archimandrite, and a deacon.

The largest and most active parishes of the Church Abroad in South America are located on the Brazilian and Argentine coasts, in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, and in the north, on the Venezuelan coast, in Caracas and Barquisimeto. In Chile, the convent in Santiago forms the spiritual center on the west coast of South America. The remaining parishes in the interior locations of Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Peru and (in part) Chile have grown continually smaller or have been abandoned because of assimilation and further migration. Today, those parishes that remain are located in the center of the Russian immigrant communities, where numerous Orthodox believers of other nationalities also live. Therefore, they might have a robust chance of survival.

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