



## 061. August 30/Sept. 12, 1970. St. Alexander Nevsky

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 3, 2016

Dear Father Michael,  
Bless us Father!

Thanks be to God, our linotype is running and your article is nearly set, and hopefully in two weeks the whole issue will be out. Most of the rest of the issue is devoted to two very moving accounts of the Catacomb Church in the USSR, by someone who spent five years in the Solovki concentration camp. I believe the whole question of the Catacomb Church is extremely hazy in the minds of most Orthodox, and with God's help we will try to correct that with a whole series of articles — for the basic issues are, after all, quite clear and can even be named: “Sergianism” vs. Orthodoxy. The statements of the non-Sergianist hierarchs in 1927 were quite explicit and should serve as a foundation for further discussion of the question. An interesting revelation of the ignorance touching this subject: Fr. J. Meyendorff in a recent note in *The Orthodox Church*, trying to explain how the Metropolia was really not under the Synod in 1935-46, notes that in the agreement of 1935 both the Metropolia and the Synod commemorated first of all “Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsky” — i.e., the leader of the opposition to Metr. Sergius, the head of the Catacomb Church! The Metropolia from top to bottom is simply absolutely ignorant of the facts and principles of the Russian Church situation in the 20th century. The only change in the situation since 1935 is that we no longer know the name of the head of the Catacomb Church, or even if there is one; but the existence of the Catacomb Church is attested in Soviet sources themselves.

Concerning the autocephaly and WCC: the point is quite important and will doubtless not be mentioned anywhere else, so we will go ahead and print it. When you have time, we hope you will look up the detailed information, which we would like to have whether or not we are challenged on it.

Your move to St. Louis should be a comfort to Dr. Johnstone, about whom we had been somewhat worried. He had written us that the nearest Synod parish was in Chicago, and definitely Russian-oriented, and that certainly would have meant great hardship for him and his family. May God grant you strength in your pastoral labors!

On the Iakovos' article: Please don't think we're trying to press you to supply an article; in fact, it will be a while before we have the space to print it, so there's no rush at all. However, re your remarks, I think it is indeed important to point out that the present crisis within Orthodoxy is not at all superficial but profound and doctrinal. What Constantinople is coming up with is simply unbelievable (and Fr. Meyendorff in the June-July Orth. Church puts the Metropolia fully with Athenagoras & Co. by stating that those not in communion with him are “outside the communion of



world Orthodoxy”), and the only other question is — not whether heresy is involved — but where to start describing such an all-embracing apostasy. By the way, Fr. Constantine Dombalis has recently appealed in the Hellenic Chronicle for the canonization of Athenagoras while alive! In the face of such Orthodox disorientation, the burden of proof would rather lie with the Athenagorists to show that their teaching has anything in common with Orthodoxy. But the times being what they are, most Orthodox will have to be shown why and how Athenagoras and Iakovos are not Orthodox.

Therefore, the question is: how to make the situation dear? The most obvious doctrinal issue is the heresy concerning the nature of the Church; both Ath. and Iak. can be quoted on this. But that does not say too much yet, because this heresy seems to be an only incidental part of their teaching. But what is it, then, that actually motivates them? I have always found, in trying to understand and criticize systems of thought, that the most effective criticism must first understand the basic motivation of the thinker and then strike at the heart of the whole system, letting incidental heresies and errors fall into proper perspective.

Now, of course, the frustrating thing about Athenagoras and Iakovos is precisely that they seem to have no system, no real ideological motivation, at all, but are simply at the mercy of every wind of doctrine that falls in with their own ambition. But I think one should take as an axiom that ideas, after all, are primary, and even those who themselves are not motivated by ideas are nonetheless at the mercy (in that case) of someone else’s ideas. And certainly, the present crisis of Greek Orthodoxy cannot be traced to Iakovos’ ambition or any other personal motive — these existed in past times and did not cause the crisis in ideas, in theology, which exists today.

Several years ago I myself began an investigation into what might be called the “basic philosophy of the 20th century.” This exists now partly in unfinished manuscript, partly in my mind; but I pursued the question far enough, I think, to discover that there is, after all, such a basic philosophy in spite of all the anarchy of modern thought. And once I had grasped the essence of this philosophy (which, I believe, was expressed most dearly by Nietzsche and by a character of Dostoyevsky in the phrase: “God is dead, therefore man becomes God and everything is possible” — the heart of modern nihilism, anarchism, and anti-Christianity) everything else fell into place, and modern philosophers, writers, artists, etc., become understandable as more or less clearly, more or less directly, expressing this “philosophy.”

And so it was (getting back to Iakovos) that the other day, as I was reading Iakovos’ article in the July-Aug. Orthodox Observer. “A New Epoch?” that I suddenly felt that I had found an insight into the “essence of Iakovism.” Is not, indeed, the basic heresy chiasm! What else, indeed, could justify such immense changes and monstrous perversions in Orthodoxy except the concept that we are entering entirely new historical circumstances, an entirely new kind of time, in which the concepts of the past [are] no longer relevant, but must be guided by the voices of the new time? Does not Fr. Patrinos, in past issues of the Orthodox Observer, justify Athenagoras — not as a theologian, not as traditionalist, but precisely as prophet, as one whose heresies cannot be



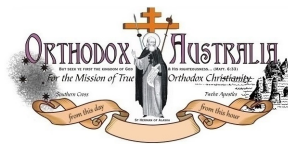
condemned because he already lives in the “new time,” ahead of his own times? Athenagoras himself has been quoted (I can’t find this source now!) as speaking of the coming of the “Third Age of the Holy Spirit” — a clearly chiliastic idea which has its chief recent champion in N. Berdyaev, and can be traced back directly to Joachim of Floris, and indirectly to the Montanists. The whole idea of a “new age,” of course, penetrates every fiber of the last two centuries with their preoccupation with “progress,” is the key idea of the very concept of Revolution (from French to Bolshevik), is a central idea of modern occultism (visible on the popular level in today’s talk of the “age of Aquarius,” the astrological post-Christian age) and has owed its spread probably chiefly to Freemasonry (there’s a Scottish Rite publication in America called New Age). (I regret to say that the whole philosophy is also present in the American dollar bill with its masonic heritage, with its “novus ordo seclorum” and its unfinished pyramid, awaiting the 13th stone on top!” In Christian terms, it is the philosophy of Antichrist, the one who will turn the world upside down and “change times and seasons.” Indeed even the Calendar is involved, for the most thorough Revolutions (the French; and Bolshevik tried and failed and had to be satisfied with the compromise of the Gregorian calendar) introduce new calendars. The Pope and Athenagoras have already expressed themselves as for the new “universal” calendar. And the whole concept of ecumenism is, of course, permeated with this heresy and the “refounding of the Church.”

The recent “thought” of Constantinople (to give it a dignified name!) is full either of outright identification of the Kingdom of Heaven with the “new epoch” (the wolf lying down with the lamb) or of emphasis on an entirely new kind of time and/or Christianity that makes previous Christian standards obsolete: new morality, new religion, springtime of Christianity, refounding the Church, the need no longer to pray for crops or weather because Man controls these now, etc.

How appropriate, too, for the chiliast cause that we live (since 1917) in the “post-Constantinian age”; for it was at the beginning of that age, i.e., at the time of the golden age of the Fathers, that the heresy of chiliasm was crushed — in the West, I believe, chiefly through Augustine and in the East by Origen(?), with their commentary on the thousand years of the Apocalypse not as an earthly “millennium” but as the life of grace in the Church on earth. And indeed, together with the Revolutions that have toppled the Constantinian era we have seen a reform of Christianity that does away with the Church as an instrument of God’s grace for men’s eternal salvation and replaces it with the “social gospel.” Iakovos’ article has not one word about salvation, but is concerned only for the “world.”

I have said enough! I offer these ideas as suggestions, and if you find them useful in organizing thoughts on Athenagoras and Iakovos I’d be glad to help with what references I have. I wouldn’t mind tackling the subject myself, but for the foreseeable future I simply won’t have the time or opportunity, and besides that my research has been primarily in contemporary thinkers, and what is needed now is something more strictly patristic as well as concise.

Let us know your thoughts, and pray for us.



With love in Christ,