



078. 25 March/ 7 April 1971.

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 3, 2016

Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God, 1971

Dear Brother in Christ, Daniel,

Rejoice in the Lord! I pray this finds you well and laboring successfully in the fast — or rather, prepared for the Great and Holy Week. With us these last weeks of long services (abbreviated, at that!) have been rather difficult, but at least we are left with few illusions about being “ascetics”! Our peace and quiet have been almost undisturbed.

Your question on the difference between the Turkish and the Communist Yoke is a very important one, but the answer is not entirely simple, and those who think only in terms of “canonical-uncanonical” will probably find it much too complicated. I think it’s important, first of all, to realize that the question of the Moscow Patriarchate is not primarily one of “canonicity” — that question ultimately will be resolved only by a free Russian Church Council (after the Soviet Yoke is overthrown). At that Council doubtless much will be forgiven owing to the unprecedented difficulties of these times, and those who will be justified then are not necessarily those who regarded themselves as “canonically correct,” but rather those who kept alive the spirit of the Church, which is after all above the canons and inspires them. But in the meantime we have to live with the situation that exists, and choose whether to have contact and communion with Moscow or not; and therefore we have to somehow penetrate to the spirit of this question and make our decision on this basis. A very great help in this is the “Documents of the Catacomb Church” which we are now printing, because in them the bishops who were present at the very outbreak of “Sergianism” give their judgements on what was then the central question of the day, and most of those who opposed Sergius did so because they believed he had placed himself outside the Church, and they had to speak out in order to remain within the Church themselves. In our days the atmosphere is not so tense and most people probably regard the question now as academic — although the reaction to the Metropolia’s autocephaly has considerably sharpened the issue.

To answer the question, one can say that first of all, in so far as the political situation is concerned, the situation of Moscow under the Soviets and Constantinople under the Turks is exactly the same. But those who are satisfied with this argument do not realize how Greeks outside of the Turkish boundaries reacted in the 19th century. (I’m paraphrasing now an article on the “Russian Church Abroad” by our Archbishop John, which we hope to print soon). When the Patriarchate of Constantinople obeyed the Turkish political demands and excommunicated the Greek rebels, the latter in their turn, while not doubting the Patriarch’s Orthodoxy and remaining with him in spirit, nonetheless declared his decrees invalid and governed themselves in complete independence from him — and when an independent Greek state was formed, this independence took the form of



the autocephalous Church of Athens. A similar situation prevailed under the Serbian Patriarchs Arsenius III and IV, who went into exile with their flocks and refused to submit to the new Patriarchs elected inside the Turkish boundaries. Thus, from the political point of view, the existence of the Russian Church Abroad is fully justified by Orthodox history, while the Metropolia is chiefly to be criticized for being insensitive to the whole situation of the Russian Church and for helping, even if ever so little, the political schemes of the Soviet State.

But there is a deeper dimension to the question. The Turks persecuted the Church and, when possible, used it for political purposes. But their worst intention did not go beyond making Christians slaves and, in some cases, forcibly converting them to Islam. The Christian thus might be a slave or martyr, but on the spiritual side he was free; the Turkish Yoke was external.

But with the Soviets, the aim is much deeper: ultimately, to destroy the Church entirely, using the Church's hierarchs themselves (when possible) as the agents of this scheme; and, on the way to this end, getting the Church to defend Communism abroad and to preach a "Communist Christianity" that prepares the way ideologically for the coming triumph of world Communism, not only as a universal political regime, but as an ideological and pseudo-religious tyranny as well. In order to appreciate this one has to realize what Communism is: not merely a power-mad political regime, but an ideological-religious system whose aim is to overthrow and supplant all other systems, most of all Christianity. Communism is actually a very powerful heresy whose central thesis, if I'm not mistaken is chiliasm or millennialism: history is to reach its culmination in an indefinite state of earthly blessedness, a perfected mankind living in perfect peace and harmony. Examine the printed sermons of the Moscow hierarchs: again and again one finds the same theme of the coming of the "Kingdom of God on earth" through the spread of Communism. This is outright heresy, or perhaps something even worse: the turning aside of the Church from its very purpose — the saving of souls for eternal life — and giving them over to the devil's kingdom, promising a false blessedness on earth and condemning them to everlasting damnation.

The whole of modern Western Christianity is permeated already with this worldly, basically chiliastic orientation, and the more "liberal," more worldly Orthodox Churches (such as the Metropolia) have been infected from this source; and probably the reason why most people in the Metropolia so easily accepted the autocephaly is because inwardly they do not grasp what is happening, they are themselves already halfway on the same path that the Moscow Patriarchate has taken.

Just the other day I read an astute comment on the iconoclastic crisis of the 7th-8th centuries. Before the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Orthodox Church did not have any explicit "doctrine on icons," and so one could argue that the Iconoclasts were not heretics at all, and the dispute was one over the secondary issue of "rite" or "practice." Nonetheless, the Church (in the person of Her champions, the leading icon-venerators) felt She was fighting a heresy, something destructive of the Church Herself; and after Her champions had suffered and died for this Orthodox sensitivity, and Her theologians had finally managed to put down explicitly the doctrine She already knew in



Her heart — then the cause of Orthodoxy triumphed at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and the Iconoclasts were clearly singled out as heretics.

I suspect that the very same thing, only much vaster and more complicated, is happening today: that those who feel Orthodoxy (through living its life of grace and being exposed to and raised on its basic treasures — lives of saints, patristic writings, etc.) are battling together against an enemy, a heresy, that has not yet been fully defined or manifested. Separate aspects or manifestations of it (chiliasm, social Gospel, renovationism, ecumenism) may be identified and fought, but the battle is largely instinctive as yet, and those who do not feel Orthodoxy in their heart and bones (e.g., those who are brought up on Concern and Young Life instead of lives of saints!) do not really know what you're talking about and they can't understand how you can become so excited over something which no council has ever identified as heresy. In the testimony of the Catacomb bishops of the late 1920's one finds again and again that the GPU agents asked them first of all whether they were for or against Sergius, and if they were against, then these agents demonstrated that Sergius had "violated neither dogmas nor canons"! Thus, either the atheist torturers are "defending the Church" — or else there is something dreadfully wrong, and the Church is up against an extremely formidable enemy. As it turns out, however, there are several dogmatic and canonical grounds on which Sergius was wrong; but first of all the Orthodox soul sensed that he was on the wrong side.

So the first part of the battle comes down to presenting basic Orthodoxy and raising people in the real spirit of Orthodoxy — above all the example of those who have lived Orthodoxy, God's saints and confessors. That's why, for our times, the most important thing is not general and abstract knowledge of Orthodox history, dogmas, canons, etc. (St. Sergius' and St. Vladimir's Seminaries turn out many who know these pretty well, but they do not become defenders of Orthodoxy, WHICH IS WHAT is needed), but rather the examples that have been given for our time — most especially Russia's new martyrs and confessors. And one of the saddest signs in the present controversy over Moscow is that those who defend the Metropolia, instead of setting forth such inspiring examples, quote the most shameful documents and examples of Turkish and Russian history (Fr. David Black quoted several unedifying examples from the Synodal period of the Russian Church to us, and he probably doesn't even know the worst ones!) thinking thereby to defend their own position. That is, the Church has always been bad, and it's no worse now than before! But what a horrible, what a psychologically and spiritually crippling defense! If that's how they have to defend themselves, then wouldn't it be better to avoid doing the things that reduce them to such an extremity? Is "stepping out on the world Orthodox scene" really so important to the Metropolia that it must do it at the expense of the suffering Russian Orthodox faithful? To give one small example: Metr. Nikodim is the Metropolia's great "benefactor," and no one can doubt that his success with the Metropolia has strengthened his position with the Moscow Patriarchate. On the other hand, the layman Boris Talantov in the USSR has openly called Nikodim a betrayer of the Church, a liar, and an agent of world anti-Christianity, for which statements (among others) he was imprisoned by the Soviets; Metr. Nikodim tells the West that he was in prison for "anti-governmental activities". On Jan. 4 of this year Boris Talantov died in prison, undoubtedly the victim of Nikodim (among others). Can the Metropolia feel itself to be on the side of this confessor?



I don't see how it can. By the way, we'll have an article on him in this issue — pray for the repose of his soul.

I think I've said enough for a while! Our "Catacomb Documents" and "New Martyrs" will doubtless give a clearer picture, once we've got more of them translated and presented. Our new issue will have Metr. Joseph — a real champion of the Church! Interestingly, in him as well as in others the statement comes out that Sergius has done something that is "worse than heresy," THAT HE has murdered the Church from within.

About library information: can you Xerox a page or two from each of the two books you mentioned? That way we can get an idea of how detailed the listings are, and maybe we could commission you then to do some Xeroxing from one of them. How many pages in each book?

Our weather has been up and down since you left. It turned cold just after you left, and since then spring weather has alternated with cold and rain. The first days of March were just about the coldest since we came here — 19 to 20 degrees at night, with tremendous hurricane winds and flurries of snow. We've only had 5 inches of snow and about the same of rain since January. Real spring is later this year than last, and only a few of the smaller bushes have fully blossomed out. The leaves are just beginning to break through the buds at the tops of the oaks — beautiful little pink leaves with yellow blossoms that will become acorns. The peak of spring won't be here until early May, most likely. Last year was the first time that I've gone through spring in the country — a really inspiring experience!

This last week we've finally got the refectory erected, for which you gave the foundation. It's not finished, but at least we got it all covered and waterproofed before yesterday's rains. We were expecting Fr. Spyridon to serve Liturgy today, but the bad weather probably kept him away. Most likely he'll come for Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. If it rains then, we can have services in the new refectory-church.

Our life in the wilderness continues to have its trials and temptations, but much more its joys. At one point when our spirits were low Vladika Nektary arrived completely unexpectedly with the Kursk Icon, served a moleben, gave us Holy Communion from the Reserved Gifts (we were in the midst of Vespers when he came and hadn't eaten yet), and let us carry the Icon over our mountain. God's blessings to us just never cease! Only we're continually worried that we don't produce enough; just too much to do.

By the way, thanks for sending the Jeane Dixon book. We were interested to see that her doctrine of Antichrist was basically Orthodox, and who knows, maybe even the details or her predictions about him are correct. However, in one important respect she is off: for his reign is the culmination of human history, after which comes the new heavens and the new earth, whereas she predicts after his reign a new age of peace and harmony and union of world religions, which are themselves the doctrines of devils! Looking at her "ministry" as a whole, one cannot but think that whatever



truth she speaks (whether in doctrine or accurate predictions) is only used by the devils to gain credence for her whole philosophy — which seems to be a combination of “conservative” Catholic prelest and the chiliastic philosophy of the age. She seems entirely too persuaded that her “gift” obliges her to go around being a combination healer-holy woman. But where does her “gift” come from? It seems to be a combination of a rare natural faculty (6th sense) and information given by demons. She hears voices giving the names of winners at horse races — do angels do that?! And often her voices and visions come in pieces and fragments — a few letters of someone’s name, etc. — which is typical of the way devils operate, as for instance at seances, and reveals that she is in contact with the infernal, anarchic world, and not with the heavenly. Doubtless a well-meaning woman, but her “holiness” fits in too nicely with the “spirituality” of this evil age!

Pray for us, and drop us a line or two.

With love in Christ our Savior,
Seraphim, Monk

P.S. I just read in an old Readers Digest Jeane Dixons own account of her two interviews with President Roosevelt in 1943-44. I think they show very well how the devils “use” her “gift”. She predicted a few things such as the Presidents death within 6 months, but the President was most interested in one question and asked it several times of her: “Will we be allies with Russia?” “Am I right in going with Russia?” She — who seems to be quite anti-Communist — told him the results of her visions and voices, that in a generation the U.S. and USSR would fight together against Red China, and FDR was finally reassured: “Then I am right to go with Russia.” In a few weeks he went to Yalta and gave half of Europe to Stalin!

Father Herman sends his greetings and poklon.