



093. Aug. 16/29, 1971. The Icon of the Lord Not Made with Hands

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear brother in Christ, Alexey,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. After I resolved finally to put off no longer writing to you, but to do it unflinching today — I realized that the feast celebrated today is that of the Icon for which you have such devotion. And so I congratulate you on the feast, which according to the Russians is the “Third Saviour” — i.e., the third feast of the Saviour in the summer, the others being the feast of the Cross on Aug. 1, and the Transfiguration.

Please forgive my long silence, but in addition to our printing labors (which include a Russian Orthodox Word devoted to the Life of Archbishop John, which we finished the day before the 5th anniversary of his repose), we have had quite a bit of company — comparatively speaking. Seven people in a week is quite a crowd by our wilderness standards!

We read the article you sent with great interest; in fact, I read it several times, the last time just now. I find nothing wrong with it, and could think of only one possible change in the English, which I noted. The point is a good one, aptly illustrated by Holy Scriptures and ancient and recent Fathers, and it is written with feeling, not as an idle academic exercise. It is not at all “vain and presumptuous” for you to write such an article, for if nothing else it helps you to clarify and develop your own ideas and feelings and check them against the “sources” — both Scripture and those who have lived the Faith which we profess and try to live ourselves. I can even think of a place where it might suitably be published: in a newspaper called Orthodox America, which, besides giving Orthodox news, enlightenment, and the proper Orthodox viewpoint on contemporary issues, has a section where Orthodox converts and all the dispersed children of “Orthodox America” in general share some of their ideas, insights, hopes, etc. Unfortunately, such a newspaper doesn’t exist! Maybe it will one day. Nonetheless, even without a newspaper, it doesn’t hurt for converts to share ideas with each other. Dr. Johnstone, for example, would probably be interested in seeing it.

Some years ago I wrote brief articles somewhat in the same vein, at the insistence of Archbishop John, who wanted at least a page or two of English material in the San Francisco diocesan bulletin (now defunct). I don’t know who if anyone read them, and looking back on them now I find them, despite the “feeling” I put into them, somewhat “abstract,” the product of thinking that hadn’t had too much experience as yet either of Orthodox literature or Orthodox life. Still, for me, they served an important function in my understanding and expression of various Orthodox questions, and even in my Orthodox “development,” and Vladika John “pushed” that.



Therefore, if you feel moved to write similar articles, by all means do so. You mention an important point: the great usefulness of citing the works of the Fathers. To this I would add: the great usefulness also of citing incidents from their lives, when appropriate. Especially in our days, clever “theologians” are able to quote the Fathers and twist them far enough to confuse the faithful. But what the Fathers did is often so clear and unequivocal that it can’t be twisted. As an example” There is much talk now of the approaching “Eighth Ecumenical Council,” how binding it will be on all Orthodox Christians as the ultimate authority in the Church, etc. — and then one remembers that the Orthodox already had such an “Eighth Ecumenical Council” — for the representatives of all the Patriarchates signed the decree of the Council of Florence. Nonetheless, because one bishop, St. Mark of Ephesus, stood up for the truth against the whole council, rejecting its decree (the Unia) because it contradicted Orthodox tradition — the whole Orthodox Church eventually likewise rejected it. Even so today the proponents of reform and unia will have many and subtle arguments, and we will oppose them not only with arguments and citations from the Fathers, but even more with the example of St. Mark of Ephesus.

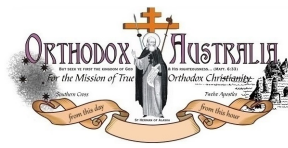
If I have any suggestion for your future articles, then, it would simply be to keep in mind the lives of the saints. In this very article, in fact, there are at least two points that would be made more forceful by references to the lives of the authors of citations (one saint and one modern-day confessor). On p. 3, you quote St. John of Kronstadt on “love” — but he is not merely a great Orthodox saint of this century, he is a very incarnation of the love he talks about, and there is scarcely to be found a parallel in the lives of other saints to his absolute self-crucifying love and service to others, blessed by God in the manifestation of an abundance of miracles that can only be compared to those of St. Nicholas.

Again, or p. 2 where to quote I. M. Andreyev on Christianity as an “all-embracing new principle of life,” this becomes yet more forceful when you know that this statement comes out of his experience of the horror of Soviet reality, and was born in prisons and catacombs and the awareness that was forced upon him there, that now one can't be a half-hearted Christian, but only entirely, or not at all; Christianity is either everything for one, or it simply will not stand the test of Soviet reality.

In this same line of thinking, by the way, you will probably find the enclosed little book of interest, a contemporary witness of Orthodoxy in the face of the same unbending Soviet reality. You can keep the book, as we were sent several.

Now that I've begun in this vein, I can think of other examples. On grace, for example, the Egyptian Father St. Paisius the Great failed to recognize his own disciple after he returned from a brief trip to Alexandria. It turned out that the disciple had met a heretic and had agreed with him that “perhaps” some Orthodox dogma was not true after all — and grace left him, and this was literally seen by his elder — so real is grace, and so carefully must it be kept.

I've said enough for a while. Give our regards to Susan and Ian. Tell Ian we have two baby deer



with spots. Perhaps we will see you again before winter? Rumor has it the winter will be early and harsh, and it's true that our summer, except for a short period, was abnormally cool, and today is actually cold. We had three spectacular thunderstorms too.

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk