



120. April 5/18, 1973. St. Mark the Anchorite of Athens

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Father Nektas,

Evlogeite! We hasten to reply to your letter regarding Alexey Young and Nikodemos, which frankly caused us some astonishment. Concerning some of the points you raise we can set your mind at rest, for Alexey is quite innocent with regard to some to your fears, but I'm afraid regarding some other points there are some basic disagreements which your letter points to and which we simply did not know existed up to now. As always we will state frankly our opinions and trust that bringing such things into the open will serve good purpose.

1. Concerning Alexey's "teaching" like a "convert" and retaining his "Roman perspective": We know Alexey rather well and can testify that he is by no means an "unstable convert" who rushes to put his own fancies into print. Perhaps you will be shocked to learn that from the beginning of Nikodemos, Alexey has submitted all the material in it to us for prior approval and criticism, and every one of our suggestions he has taken with extreme seriousness, to the extent of changing, omitting or adding whole passages, and also of not printing some things altogether. With regard to himself as a "teacher" of Orthodoxy we have found him to be most humble, reasonable, and anxious to learn and not to project any Latin or other non-Orthodox attitudes into his printed material. To say that we have "approved" the content of Nikodemos is not to say that we would have printed such articles ourselves, or if we did, in the way or with the tone of Nikodemor, it is only to say that we did not find them objectionable, but, in most cases, useful. But I will say frankly that our "censorship" never took the form of a command, but always of advice, even though sometimes expressed in no uncertain terms. Vladika John taught us that laborers in the missionary field are to be guided and inspired, but not pushed or forced; therefore we have never tried to force on Alexey our own points of view in matters of opinion, encouraging him rather to mature his own points of view in full accord with Church tradition and with a constant awareness of how much he has to learn about this. We believe he is maturing in this way soundly and normally, and that his particular outlook is reaching and benefiting people who do not find that the present Orthodox publications exhaust all one has to know about Orthodoxy or the present situation of Orthodox believers.

2. With regard to Father Ephraim's letter and the advice of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in general: We have advised Alexey to accept with utmost seriousness any advice the Fathers may offer, not as "infallible" of course, but as well-meant and in all likelihood sound counsel. He was most anxious, in particular, to avoid legitimate criticism from the Monastery on the subject of evolution, and therefore he made a real effort to avoid even the appearance of the pitfalls that Fr. Ephraim brought out in his letter. As I recall, we told him that we think he did indeed avoid those pitfalls — specifically, the possible charge of "fundamentalism" (which I seriously doubt that he ever



held). And indeed, rereading the evolution article, we do not find that it can seriously be criticized on the grounds of “fundamentalism” by any but a biased or uninformed reader. It is true that he gets into the realm of science — but evolution precisely claims to be “scientific” (which it certainly is not, it is religious philosophy masquerading as science), and it is quite impossible to discuss it at all without examining its scientific evidence (which simply does not exist — and why should we be afraid to say so, just to avoid being called obscurantists who think the earth is flat?). But more on evolution below.

I must say, as I think I already wrote you, that we found Fr. Ephraim’s letter not very satisfactory on several points, and in particular because it did not really answer Alexey’s real concerns, but instead projected on to him some fundamentalist viewpoints which he doesn’t hold. I think this must be because Fr. Ephraim doesn’t know Alexey and somehow didn’t get what was bothering him; but in any case what I say in no way diminishes our respect for Fr. Ephraim, it only convinces us that no one is perfect, least of all we ourselves, and if we in the battle for true Orthodoxy do not have tolerance for each other’s weaknesses and mistakes (even those expressed in print!), there is no hope for any of us or for the Orthodox mission today. As I recall, Kalomiros made this same point in *Against False Union*, and we have impressed it on Alexey and others many times. From this point of view, it is certainly very unfortunate that *The Old Calendarist* printed Fr. Ephraim’s letter in full and with names given — for what? to call to a debate among laborers in the mission field? There must be more caution and tact here!

3. Regarding Alexey and “lay saints” etc.: I must say frankly that your idea that he has a “soft-sell” approach to Orthodoxy is unjust to him. We have discussed often with him the tone, content, orientation, etc., of *Nikodemos*, and he and we are quite agreed that *Nikodemos* is in full harmony with other Synod publications as complementing them, and not as repeating their stands. You have probably noticed that our *Orthodox Word*, also has had of late much less concerning contemporary subjects, anti-ecumenism, etc. — not at all because we’ve changed our mind about these things of have changed our orientation, but solely because your publications (and a few others) are now doing this work for us. We have no reason to doubt Alexey’s Orthodoxy or his awareness of the dangers of Latin-type thinking, etc. — it’s just that he doesn’t feel it’s his mission to go into that. And on another point: he’s certainly not weak on monasticism, and in fact the reason he was so interested in printing the *Life of St. Juliana* is because it shows the monastic spirit in a lay person, hence points out that lay life too must be penetrated by monastic ideals. We agree with him that such lives can be very inspiring in just the right way — more directly so than the lives of monk saints (of which, by the way, *The Orthodox Word* has had nothing but for a long time now!).

4. The most important point, regarding evolution:

a. First of all, let us shock you right off by saying that we read the article before publication, made many suggestions (which were all incorporated into the article), and fully approved it; and now rereading it after receiving your letter we find nothing seriously wrong with it — except that it is much too short and concise. Of course, now with your letter it becomes obvious also that the approach



was perhaps too abrupt and direct for many Orthodox readers today, and more preparation of them should perhaps be made.

b. Therefore, there is obviously some deep disagreement between your views and ours on this subject. I have always regarded evolution, in all its ramifications, as an important part of the “American modern” intellectual baggage which I left behind when I became Orthodox, and it never before occurred to me that any aware Orthodox Christian would regard it as an unimportant, especially now when many scientists have abandoned it (purely on scientific grounds), when the pseudo-religious presuppositions of its supporters are so evident, and when it is so much bound up with masonry-ecumenism and the whole pseudo-religious modern outlook.

We were frankly astonished at your objection to the article, and have been thinking long and hard to try to find your thinking on this subject. Then it occurred to us: apparently you regard “modern” ideas as being of two types: those that directly attack the Church, which must be confronted and uprooted mercilessly (masonry, ecumenism); and those which do not directly attack the Church and are not directly theological (evolution).

Is this true? Nonetheless, I don’t see how it can be denied that “modern” ideas are after all one whole: they are formed first outside the Church, develop in atheist-agnostic minds, and then move through the whole of society until they reach the Church, changing form in the meantime to fit in with each current of ideas. “Evolution” is one such idea (but it’s not really an “idea” — see below) that has not yet directly attacked Orthodoxy. But look what it has already done to papism: is it not true that the whole dissolution of papism in the past decade is directly bound up with the “unleashing” of Teilhardism (whose books were more or less banned up to then) in that same period, a process which was presented for popular consumption 10 years ago in a rather cheap but symptomatic novel, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*? By this I do not mean that a certain number of Teilhardian theses were opposed to so many papist theses and conquered them: for his evolution is not really a “heresy” (we will agree that this term applied to him, especially from the Orthodox side, is imprecise!), but rather a whole rival thought-pattern offering a whole different approach to life (and, consequently, religion); and being already so much a part of the “spirit of the age,” its approach was persuasive not by argument but by fitting in with unconscious attitudes of people who were outwardly papist.

We were rather surprised when you (and Fr. Ephraim too, as I recall) mentioned that you haven’t read Teilhard and weren’t familiar with his ideas; i.e., you are waiting for the wave to hit Orthodoxy before you start thinking of the subject. But really, Teilhardism is the “Christianity” (and “Orthodoxy”) of the future, or rather its metaphysical foundation (it fits very nicely in with “charismatic” phenomena), and it is by no means too early to find out what is hitting us! Here it may well be that Alexeys position (as a layman in the midst of the world, and coming from outside of Orthodoxy which has already been completely captured by “evolutionary” spirituality and philosophy) has enabled him to be aware of something that the more “sheltered” Orthodox (clergy, monks, life-long Orthodox) simply don’t see yet. How overjoyed I myself was to find this

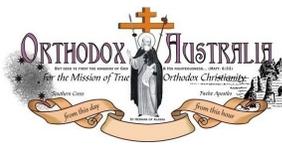


“shelteredness” when I became Orthodox, because I saw that in this “world-to-itself” I would be able to change completely my mental orientation (not to mention spiritual) and no longer think at all in terms of the reigning despotism of ideas (in which evolution has a key place). I did notice, however, that other converts didn’t seem to grasp this point, and some of them began to discuss how this or that modern current can be understood or accepted or criticized in terms of Orthodoxy — a false outlook, because there are two quite separate mental worlds involved, and the difference is rather greater than that between two totally unrelated languages. But the Russian Church Abroad, of course, is the only place I found where this separate mental approach was kept intact; in the other “jurisdictions” one would have to keep all this intellectual baggage. But all this is becoming too philosophical. This, by the way, explains why some Synod priests are blissfully unaware of those issues which bother the rest of us!

We fully agree with Alexey that “evolution is one of the most dangerous concepts that faces the Orthodox Christian today” — perhaps it is the very key (intellectual) to the assault upon the Church, to the very “philosophy” (and there is such a thing!) of the coming Antichrist. If we understand you and Father Ephraim aright, you regard it as merely an “idea” which one can take or leave, and which can involve one in endless modernist-fundamentalist discussions which are totally pointless (how many “hours” in the first “seven days”? etc.) We certainly agree on the pointlessness of such discussions, but now the issue is much deeper than that; “evolution” is a whole mind-set that is quite incompatible with Orthodoxy. But that is a treatise in itself. Alexey’s article, as I said, is much too brief, but perhaps it will have the good effect of inspiring a thorough treatment of the subject (not a “modernist-fundamentalist” fight, but also not what Fr. Ephraim apparently wants to do, to stand so far above the issue that one can’t even discern that evolution is a crucial question, and destructive of Orthodoxy not so much because of its theses as because of its intellectual-spiritual orientation.).

Significantly, the same mail that brought your letter brought also Concern, with the article of Theodosius Dobzhansky (who just received a Doctorate honoris causae from St. Vladimir s Seminary) on “Evolution: God’s Method of Creation.” Well, here are the arguments of an “Orthodox evolutionist,” and they are the same as all other evolutionary arguments, emotional faith with not one shred of genuine evidence to support it (although he presents material that looks very formidable and “scientific”). But more important: read between the lines and answer: does this man believe in God as a true Orthodox Christian believes in Him? He does not! He believes in Him as “modern” man believes; he is a deist. And very revealing is his conclusion: “One of the great thinkers of our age, Teilhard de Chardin, wrote the following: ‘Is evolution a theory, a system, or a hypothesis? It is much more — it is a general postulate to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must henceforward bow and which they must satisfy in order to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light which illuminates all facts, a trajectory which all lines of thought must follow — this is what evolution is.’”

This indeed is Teilhardism, and by “all theories and systems” he means in particular theology and spirituality, as being part of the highest evolutionary layer, the “noosphere,” which is just now



converging in the evolutionary apex called the “Omega Point” or “Super Christ.” I hate to appear “fundamentalist,” but his mammoth structure rests on just a few little “fundamental” facts (or fabrications), which most people seem afraid to get near because they seem so “scientific,” beginning with the transition of one species into another and so up the ladder.

To sum up: Whatever weaknesses Alexey’s article on evolution may have, it is an attempt to answer a real problem which we cannot avoid: that ideological orientation and value-system which is taught in all public schools as fact and which poisons and stupefies Orthodox minds without ever attacking Orthodoxy as such. Alexey’s response is sound, even if it is not (of course) perfect. We Orthodox are not afraid to be “narrow” on the question of ecumenism; why should we be afraid to be “narrow” on the question of evolution? The two issues, after all, are very closely bound up with each other.

Regarding Alexey and “lay thinking” in general, we continue to regard him and it as very positive and healthy — provided, of course, that it does not try to proceed on its own opinion alone but always looks for and receives counsel from within the more “official” part of the Church. Under this condition, we are not even afraid of his possible “mistakes” on matters open to personal opinion (i.e., not involving heresy, attacks against bishops, etc.) — for he is not an “authority” who must always come out with some “official” or impeccable statement of Church teaching but rather a struggler in an intellectual jungle whose dangers and real problems are not always too apparent to us formal “ecclesiastical” people — but this is precisely the world in which our Orthodox Christians live today.

Enough for this for now. Please forgive my longwordiness. Regarding our printing projects in Russian: We will not think about the periodical until after we’ve caught up with OW and gotten the 1974 Calendar out, but maybe by the first of the year we will be ready to start, depending also on Vladika Nektary. Please keep it quiet, however. The book of Vladika Savva is also not too easy because we will have to add quite a few pages ourselves that were not in Orthodox Russia. I doubt if we can do it before July 2. We have also just gotten the address of a place in Taiwan that offers to print offset books and hardbind them for hardly more than the cost of the paper in the US., and we are of course looking into this also.

Please pray for us, and be assured of our love and respect for you and the Fathers. However, I think there are some issues we should all be thinking seriously about!

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk