



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

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Alexey,

Just a note. We received Monday a rather shocking letter from Father Nektas expressing extreme displeasure with your “evolution” article. He apparently sent you a letter too, a copy of which he said he was enclosing in his letter to us (but he didn’t).

After reading his letter, we read your article together once again — and neither of us find anything wrong with it, except that it is much too short and concise. After looking in vain for any other source of Fr. Nektas’ displeasure, we can only conclude that Fr. Nektas and Fr. Ephraim apparently are just not aware of the whole issue of evolution, whether in its scientific side or in its religious-theological implications. Obviously your article has touched something very deep (frankly we are astonished that people so keen on ecclesiastical matters, ecumenism, etc., should seem never to have given much thought to such an important thing as evolution; apparently it is because it seems to be outside the Church sphere).

However, now it is very important for all of us to approach this “disagreement” very carefully. We are sending Fr. Nektas (hopefully with today’s mail also) a long letter expressing our surprise at his letter and giving something of our own views, also, incidentally, removing the illusions he seems to have formed about you as a self-willed convert who takes no one’s advice and has never thrown off his Latinism. We have frankly no idea what his response will be when he reads that we approved the article before publication and continue to approve it. Maybe we will get thrown in the “fundamentalist” boat too, I don’t know. We certainly hope not, but rather that he and the Fathers in Boston will start to do some thinking about their own “American-modern” baggage which they seem to have dragged with them this far.

We must be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves” in what we do and say now, and by no means must we allow ourselves to be dragged into an argument on “modernist-fundamentalist” lines. Maybe they are “modernists,” I don’t know; but we certainly are not fundamentalists. The truth lies much deeper than either of these merely rational positions, and it will not be easy to present it so that it will be properly understood, judging from Fr. Nektas’ first response. I don’t think either you or we should “argue” at all, but prepare for a more thorough presentation of the whole subject. Frankly, we want to really persuade them, and the way to do that is to go into the subject deeply, especially the spiritual implications.

What we must keep in mind and get across, I think, is not really evolution as a heresy or wrong idea, on the same level with other ideas, and therefore go out fighting with the ordinary weapons of



polemics. Evolution is not that kind of idea — but rather a kind of deep-seated primordial force which seems to capture people quite apart from their conscious attitudes and reasoning. (There's a good reason for that: it's been drilled into everyone from the cradle, and therefore is very hard to bring out and look at rationally.) It's a rival thought-pattern to Orthodoxy, not just another idea.

Your article, beyond any doubt, is going to make you “unpopular” in places. Do not let this discourage you, or force you into a “defensive” posture. Your article is probably going to do something very painful at first but ultimately positive: bring out into the open some attitudes which have long been hiding in the shadows.

Do you get concern? In the same mail with Fr. Nektas' letter (surely more than coincidence!) we also received the latest issue with an article by Theodosius Dobzhansky (who just was given an honorary Doctor's Degree by St. Vladimir's Seminary) called “Evolution: Gods Method of Creation” — a rather supercilious ridiculing of anti-evolutionism concluding with a fantastic quote (which we are sending to Fr. Nektas) from the “great thinker” Teilhard de Chardin. We'll make a copy of it for you if you didn't get it.

May God guide us all aright so that we may speak the truth in love — not to be “right,” but to enlighten and save souls.

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk

P.s. Have you thought about the icon for the chapel?