



129. May 14/27, 1973. St. Isodore of Chios

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Irina Constantinovna [Vagin],

Christ is risen! Enclosed are two recent articles of Fr. Theodoritos, which we hope you will be able to tell us something about. The printed article is evidently directed against some “uncanonical activities” of Fr. Panteleimon concerning the Old Calendarist situation (Fr. Theodoritos supports one group of Old Calendarists, Fr. Panteleimon the other group). We hear that it is already being translated into English, so perhaps you could give us just a brief summary of what it is all about.

The typed manuscript is an article Fr. Theodoritos has sent for The Orthodox Word. If we do print it, it will not be right away; rather than translate the whole article now, perhaps you could give us also just a brief summary of it together with your comments on its tone and spirit. The two canons which are quoted in English make us a little apprehensive that the article may be too “strong” for us — i.e., that it will try to “prove” that all Christians must receive Holy Communion at every Divine Liturgy, without taking into consideration the questions of local customs, the general spiritual state of today's flocks, church “economy,” etc. We hope we are wrong, and that the article is after all very sober, well-balanced, and truly pastoral in orientation, in which case we could nicely print it with an introduction of our own concerning the Russian situation. This is a rather sensitive question, taking into consideration the differences between the Russian and Greek Churches today on the questions of confession before Communion, preparation before Communion, etc. Of course, we would like to encourage more frequent reception of Holy Communion, but not just as an end in itself, but rather as part of a renewal of the whole of spiritual life, and also in such a way as not to cause unnecessary quarrels over “fanaticism” and the like. Please give us your frank comments on the article in view of all this.

Unfortunately, the harmony between the “Greek” and “Russian” parts of our Russian Church Abroad has been somewhat upset lately, as perhaps you have heard. For some reason Fr. Nektas reacted violently against the articles on “Freud” and “Evolution” in Nikodemos and sent us a letter indicating that he was “withdrawing his support” from Nikodemos because Alexey was a hopeless Roman Catholic, was propagating “lay saints” as opposed to monastic saints, etc. We were rather startled by this and wrote him a reply defending Alexey, telling him we basically agreed with the articles on Freud and Evolution (although, of course there might be different opinions on how these questions should be approached, what emphasis should be given them, etc.) and that we viewed the articles on “lay saints” very positively, inasmuch as they present basically monastic values as applied in a lay situation, which seems to us extremely appropriate and important today. But then, alas, Alexey sent out (just at the wrong time) the article on the “Holy Shroud,” which was originally printed for Roman Catholics, and for Fr. Nektas that was all he needed to prove that



Alexey is really an unrepentant Catholic. We had told Alexey that he should not send out that article without “cleaning it up” of Catholic references, but unfortunately he had already printed it and so sent it out anyway. Of course, the Greeks would be against it in any form, because they think that the Holy Shroud is some kind of “demonic counterfeit” (?!), even though so far they haven’t given any substantial evidence to prove this. Holy Transfiguration Monastery is now apparently working on a long article against the Holy Shroud, which we fear may be a tragic mistake, both because it will introduce an element of “controversy” into a realm where up to now there has been no real problem, and because (as we suspect) they are so full of anti-Catholic emotions that they might not properly distinguish between the Shroud itself and its place in Roman Catholic piety, between which of course there is no necessary connection at all. We ourselves hadn’t read anything on the Shroud until very recently, but from what we have read now we find ourselves very disposed to accept it as authentic, as indeed many of our Russian clergy do; in fact, it seems to explain the very existence of our plaschanitsa with the image of the Saviour on it.

Of course, the tragic thing in all this is not that there are different opinions on such matters, but rather that the “Greeks” seem to have a certain narrow approach to such questions, a certain insistence that their opinions are right and everyone else is wrong, and from such an attitude we really are afraid that there is danger ahead. Also, there seems to be a question of “authority” involved: Fr. Nektas told Alexey some time ago: “Don’t print anything on evolution or the Shroud.” Alexey asked us about this and we told him that there is no reason we could see why these should be “forbidden subjects,” as long as they were handled well. Probably Fr. Nektas was upset, more than anything else, precisely because Alexey seemed to be “defying the authority” of Fr. Panteleimon. The result right now is that Fr. Nektas is telling everyone not to trust Alexey because he is a “Catholic” — but we, knowing Alexey much better than Fr. Nektas does, know that this is not true, that actually he is learning and struggling very diligently to be a true Orthodox Christian, that he is always ready to be corrected when he makes a mistake, and that on some points he is probably more aware of the needs of contemporary laymen than Fr. Nektas is! We ourselves respect Frs. Panteleimon and Nektas very much, but we simply disagree that everyone must accept their “authority” as final, especially as they have been wrong a number of times in the past (8 or 10 years ago they were writing us letters defending the Moscow Patriarchate, saying the Weeping Icons were “demonic,” etc., and since then they’ve changed their minds on these points and probably others.).

Somehow, all of this makes us very sad, and we only pray that it will not mean deeper disagreements later. We would be very glad to hear your own comments on some of these matters.

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk

P.s. Thank you very much for the comments on the Greek books. We really don’t need any more on the Abbess’ book, and some very brief resumes from the book on “Eucharistical Communion” should be sufficient for us, if you have time.