



138. Oct. 25/Nov. 7, 1973. Martyrs Marcian and Martyrius

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ, Daniel [Olson],
Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are glad to hear you are safe.

Your letter states again your “position,” which is exactly as we understood it to be when you left. My words now, on the other hand, are intended once again, quite deliberately, to “avoid the question” and “to talk about something else.” Why? Because you wish to talk logically, to discuss a “problem,” whereas we can only speak from the heart, where this “problem” does not exist. Dear Daniel, because we love you dearly, I am going to bawl you out and tell you once again that the real “problem” does not exist. Dear Daniel, because we love you early, I am going to bawl you out and tell you once again that the real “problem” is something quite different from what your “wisdom” tells you; I beg you to read what I will say with your heart, and then act with your heart.

In your letter you have lectured us, accused us, judged us, and from your “position” it must indeed seem ridiculous and amazing that we cannot understand the Church’s teaching and practice as well as you can. The main point of your accusation is that we have “felt ourselves competent to decide a matter which according to Church practice can be decided only by a bishop,” and that therefore we are saying that we “know better than the Church.” Child Daniel, how stupid do you think we are?! And how proud and unfeeling you must be to accuse us of such stupidity! Do you really think we are acting with the same soulless calculation which set off your fit? Your letter in effect offers us to work out some kind of “compromise” with you and your Church “principles.” Father Herman was quite correct in telling you that you are setting yourself against the central idea which we follow — because we will not involve ourselves on that level of soulless calculation, where everything in the Church which inspires and guides us becomes “correct” or “incorrect,” “proper” or “improper.”

However, to answer your question: did we “canonize a Saint”? We did not! That is the work of bishops. We rather nourished our own piety, which is constantly in danger of being extinguished in present conditions, and we did so in a way which is by no means foreign to the history of the Church and is approved by present-day Fathers whom we trust, such as Vladika Nektary and Father Panteleimon. Must we call a council of bishops to nourish our piety, six forest-dwellers in a remote cabin, whom any sensible worldly person already regards as crazy? How spoiled rotten you must be, by thinking you know so much about Church history and the “rights” of bishops, in order to think like that!

If you wish to understand under what “category” our actions fall and may be understood, I will tell you by giving an example from the act of a bishop whom you have respected up to now. You know



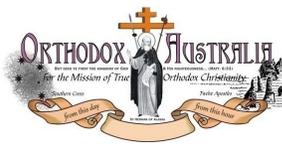
the “secret” which we share with Bishop Nektary, precisely because he did here just what you accuse us of doing. He did not do it in his capacity of bishop, because he does not have episcopal jurisdiction over this piece of land. He did it solely out of love for a Saint, and out of grief over the realization that political and other worldly considerations have made cold the hearts of those, including bishops, who should already be glorifying this Saint; and in doing it he likewise followed the apparently “uncanonical” act of Father Panteleimon, which he applauded. (You must realize, by the way, that by your present behavior you have fallen out of oneness of mind not only with us, but also with Fr. Panteleimon and Vladika Nektary, because you know better what the Church teaches than any of us, and you have judged us all.

And now I must shock your “principles” even more, in order that you will finally understand what is at stake: Vladika Nektary’s act (or rather, acts, for he has repeated it) was done with full knowledge that his own ruling bishop would certainly not approve if he knew of it, but on the contrary would give him great trouble if he heard of it. What?! Does Vladika Nektary, whom you have regarded as “holy,” know so much less of Church “principles” than Daniel Olson, that he would dare to usurp the “competence” of his own ruling bishop? Or does he place himself “above” Church principles?! ? you fool, if you dare to think like this! He acted “secretly” — precisely because those who should be shouting the praises of a newly-revealed Saint are silent due to the political considerations and cold hearts that reign in our midst; and if it were not for such loving hearts which beat with holy Orthodoxy, the fire of true Orthodoxy would be completely absent from our midst today. In future, we trust in God, the loving zealous acts of such men (which of course are not at all “uncanonical” because they have nothing to do with any canons whatever) whether they be hierarchs or priests or monks or simple laymen, will be praised and lauded by the whole Church, because throughout the Church’s history these are the stuff of which Orthodoxy is made in practice.

If you wish to know the “principle” on which Vladika Nektary (and others who practice living Orthodoxy) have acted, and that which inspires even us poor ones just to go on under an extremely difficult and unfavorable spiritual climate (which you cold heart does not even see) — it is the principle of catacombness, of nourishing in secret those sprouts of true Orthodoxy which are not being encouraged in official Orthodox circles.

(Even if you do not understand all this, nonetheless I must strictly forbid you to speak to anyone of anything I have said in connection with Vladika Nektary, which is a strict secret among those who think as he; if you speak of it to anyone, you are his and our betrayer.)

Our dear brother: yes, we fervently desire the return to us of you, our lost sheep, because we really do believe that this place was given to you to work out your salvation, and that your salvation in the world, especially with your cold heart and calculating mind, and with ?? one to humble you in love, is dubious. But you yourself must make the effort to return to the oneness of soul with us which you left with your calculating “principles.” But you must have trust in us, with entire resolution and commitment — not with your mind, as you seem to think, but with your heart. The trust of the mind is



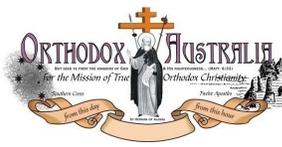
merely calculation (“do they really know better than I do, or not?”); but the trust of the heart is self-sacrificing devotion, that path of commitment upon which you entered some months ago, and which you now wish so easily to abandon, without having offered yourself as a sacrifice to God.

You say that you wish to “work out your differences” with us. I will give you an example of how that is done — with the heart and not with the mind. Four years ago Fr. Panteleimon visited us, before the canonization of St. Herman. We asked him to serve a panikhida for him, and he replied that he simply couldn’t serve a panikhida for someone to whom his community prays as a Saint. Behold, a “difference” between us and Fr. Panteleimon — and we rejoiced! And how did we work out our “difference,” even as we were rejoicing over it? Fr. Panteleimon served a panikhida for “Monk Herman” — but he prayed for the newly-reposed Jordanville Monk Herman, while we prayed for Fr. Herman of Alaska — to whom for a long time we had already sung the troparion, magnification, and akathist. (How inconsistent” of us!) And how “inconsistent” for Vladika John to end his panikhidas for Fr. Herman with the magnification to him! And how “inconsistent” that we both glorify Elder Nazarius and pray for his Repose! What kind of “canonization” is that?!

Come to your senses, child Daniel! You have trapped yourself in a satanic net of “principles” which you are too cold and stupid to know how to apply; and yet you think yourself smart and worthy enough to do so.

If your heart responds to this that I have said, then return to us with tears and repentance that you fell away from unity with us through your accursed calculating logic, which is not at all based on “principles” but on pride, and which does not at all join you to the mind of the Church, but on the contrary separates you from it. However, we must tell you straight: we can give you no “answer” to the “problem” you imagine you have with us; you will simply have to trust us and wholeheartedly accept our judgment — or else there is no hope that you will ever attain humility, or even desire it. There can be no “compromise” on the petty point you raised, because we simply refuse to think in those terms, and we will continue to follow our heart right up to the time we are persecuted and banished for it; and if we ever did agree to begin thinking in those terms and “calculating” together with you, we would precisely then lose just what attracted you to us in the first place, about which you are evidently not very much aware.

If you return to us, it must not be a “gentlemen's agreement” or “concordat” whereby each of us jealously guards his opinions, but rather by a wholehearted commitment to travel the path of humbleness and oneness of soul with us. Out of love for Christ we must continue to try to humble you, according to your strength, which so far has been very little. You are very proud, and up to now you have set a limit and condition to your humility: you will accept being humbled only if it can be proved to you that you are “wrong” or have done something “improper.” Now you must strive harder to enter into true humility and not think you “know better” about the conditions of collecting firewood or transporting ladders, or whether you should be bawled out for your transgressions immediately or later: in fact, it is because you would not give up your own will and understanding on such petty points that you were caught in the devils nets on the “principles” which caused you



to grow cold, judge us, and walk away from us. It is this pride also which allowed the devil to get into your heart when the Kursk Icon came and reduce you to a state of total unfeelingness.

Daniel, God gave us to you to help fight your pride; come to us in repentance and let us help you. By yourself you will only spend your whole life trying to preserve your soul, under the pretext of your understanding of Church “principles” and the like; and he who would preserve his soul will lose it. Only if you try to lose your soul for Christ, by really committing yourself, will you finally gain it.

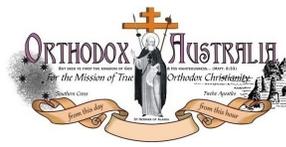
I pray that these words will get through your stupid cold mind and speak to your heart, for despite their seemingly harsh tone, I assure you they are written from the heart. You have fallen into an extremely elementary trap of the devil, which has been repeated a million times in the history of Orthodoxy and monasticism. And the only way you can get out of this trap is humbly to recognize your own stupidity and trust in God and your brothers.

I close with a quote from St. Barsanuphius, in answer to a question of Abba Dorotheus (when he was a novice), which I copied out this morning:

Q: The thoughts which arise in me say: Go to a different place and there you will be saved.

A: Brother! May he be cursed who has sowed in your heart such thought of leaving this place because of the transgression of commandments here. This is the devil. He presents this to you under an appearance of truth, so that, having mocked you, he might make you an object of scandal for many, so that you might bear condemnation for them also.

You are being subjected to this for your negligence and vainglory. You say: “If I go away to a different place, there I will endure dishonor.” But why is it that now, just as soon as you hear that your brother has said something against you, your heart is disturbed, and you do not wish that anyone should know of your transgression? To negligence and vainglory the demons also join their nets so as to cause your soul to perish. Be assured in the Lord, that if it were not for the help of God and the prayers of the true slaves of God who are in this place, you could remain even a year in the monastery. But just as a blind man sees nothing, so also you do not see the benefactions which God has shown you and continues to show by the prayers and the Saints. Beorhwe! Pay careful heed to yourself; labor against thoughts so as not to fall into negligence and vainglory, not to do anything according to your own will, and not to accept the thoughts and self-justification which arise in you: otherwise you will be subjected to a powerful fall. Know for sure, that wherever you might go, though you might go over the whole earth from end to end, nowhere will you receive such benefit as in this place. What an anchor is for a boat, such will be for you the prayers of the Fathers here. Acquire firmness, and it will remove from you familiarity in your relation with your near ones, which is the cause of all evils in a man. Leave off all outward care, and then you will freely serve God.



With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk

P.s. This reply has been delayed by a week of rain, and a little snow.