

143. January 9/22, 1974. St. Philip of Moscow

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ, Alexey,
Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, our mountain was rather drenched with rain also, and all that snow that Nina and Barbara trudged through was washed away in less than two days! For a day or so all the bridges between us and the Sacramento Valley were under water, and I think the road to Redding is still closed, but the Red Bluff road is apparently open, as the mail comes through all right. There are some very deep ruts (2 feet!) in our road, but with caution the road is still usable, and it is now open all the way to us.

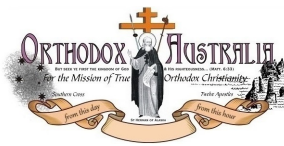
We rejoice at the life of your little Orthodox community — you should give great thanks to God for having such an opportunity to live remotely and independently, where Orthodoxy can readily enter into your daily life. You have just about everything you need — and what you don't have God will provide when the time comes!

The Elder in the photograph is Schema-Archimandrite Gabriel.

Interestingly, just before receiving your letter I was reading and thinking about Khomiakov's close friend Kireyevsky, who thought very similarly and is even better because of his close connection with Optina and the Holy Fathers. We'll be interested to see what you've compiled of Khomiakov. Kireyevsky's thoughts on the difference between the Catholic-Western mentality and Orthodoxy might well serve as an article or pamphlet also, which would be very instructive especially for converts today. The answer to Medieval Scholasticism, he says, is the great Orthodox Fathers who lived at the same time — namely, St. Simeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory the Sinaite, St. Gregory Palamas.

And speaking of this contrast, my research into the Fathers concerning evolution has turned up something remarkable — the Catholic and Orthodox doctrines of Adam and creation are significantly different, and "evolution" can be fitted rather nicely precisely into the Catholic doctrine, but not at all into the Orthodox! This point can be made pretty well by comparing several passages of the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas (I always wondered why I kept that book!) with the passage from St. Simeon which you have, and another from St. Gregory the Sinaite. The whole discussion of "evolution," if it is presented just right, can be very important for giving our genuine Orthodox outlook on contemporary science and "wisdom."

I've also found commentaries on Genesis by St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. John Chrysostom,



and some more isolated statements in other Fathers. There can be no doubt at all how the Fathers understood Genesis — quite “literally”! I was at first a little uncertain about a quote from St. Gregory the Theologian, showing that he regarded the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a symbol; and some Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa, are full of such symbols, leading a scholar like Florovsky to ask: does he understand the account of creation as entirely symbolic or not? And then, to resolve my uncertainty, leafing through a French translation we have of St. Gregory Palamas, I found that, in opposing those who say that the Uncreated Light of Mt. Tabor is only a “symbol,” he cites the very passage from St. Gregory the Theologian about the tree of knowledge, and says that of course he also accepted it as having an existence of its own! All of these quotes put together should do much to give our Orthodox people the sound Orthodox approach to Genesis and creation, which I think many are now afraid of, due to the prestige of “science.”

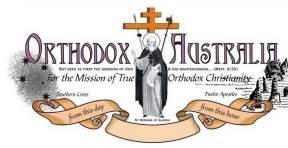
The “Orthodox” disciple of Teilhard de Chardin is a little disappointing — he is so naive and simple-minded! Nonetheless, there are some things there that can be used in the “philosophical” part of your study.

About becoming principal, there’s not much we can advise you. It seems a logical step, and it comes to you without asking on your part — but you alone can measure what it will mean in practical terms for your life. How is the present principal surviving it? Is he under great pressure and tension or not?

Don’t be upset about Nina’s ideas on evolution and the like. As Fr. Herman says, she’s been “Panteleimonized,” which means: in general, the right attitudes, but a little “too-intellectual,” too sophisticated tone, with thinking a little divorced from reality. She’s also “been around” a little too much; it’s really much better to sit quietly in a corner such as God has given you! Hopefully, she will change a little in Vladika John’s diocese!

How was the transcription of the Apocalypse tape? We’ve finished the text in 14 more sides, including the first side or two which has already been transcribed. But we don’t want to overburden you. We would rather like to print a little book of 50-60 pages including this and other apocalyptic passages from the New Testament in Vladika Averky’s commentary — to give the Orthodox view of the last things and refute the heretical views on the millennium, tribulation period, rapture, etc. This would be rather a complement to your study of evolution and the patristic view of the first things, creation. In general, it seems that no one has really thought through the whole question of evolution, and many Russian priests are satisfied just not to think about the “species” and the “six days,” as long as Adam is kept as an historical person who lived about 7500 years ago. But “evolution” will hardly tolerate such a concession to theology in any case! It might be good, by the way, to give a brief resume somewhere in your study on the response of Catholic theology to evolution — how they gave way point by point, ending in the Rahner “theology” we sent you.

The idea has come to us to pay you a visit this Sunday, Jan. 14/27. What do you think of that? Will you be home? About what time do you read the hours in the morning? We would come about mid-



morning, 10 or so. Let us know.

With love in Christ,
Seraphim, monk