



174. Annunciation of the Theotokos, 1975. [Mar. 25/April 7]

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Alexey,

Greetings on the Feast! Here are some notes on one or two points:

Fr. Panteleimon on birth control: He's off! And the reason for this is precisely what we are trying to get: he does not have that Orthodox philosophy that Kireyevsky strove for. "It isn't in the Scriptures or Fathers or canons" — therefore we are free to "rationalize" about it — which means, give way to worldly influences. He rationalizes a "middle path" between Augustinism and license; but why start ones reasoning from these false poles? Not having read Augustine, I can only say that from this summary of his position (that sexual union is permitted in marriage only when the partners have the conscious intention to have children therefrom) is, again, a rationalistic extreme which does not in the least invalidate what seems to us to be the quite obvious Orthodox teaching. Is such a conscious intention required of couples when the woman is beyond normal child-bearing age? That could hardly be — and yet many holy children have been born to pious couples beyond the normal child-bearing age! Of course there is something more to sexual union than the producing of children — but Orthodox teaching does not artificially separate different aspects of this question and allow a deliberate interference with the natural process, while preserving (as some Orthodox theologians are now saying) some "higher purpose" in sexual union while using contraceptives.» Even R.C. "rhythm" is a, rationalistic device and not without sin — though obviously of a lesser degree than "artificial" means.

The widespread confusion on this whole issue seems to come from a failure to understand the real Orthodox teaching on sexuality — it is not "holy," but neither is it evil. The Lives of Saints alone, without any Patristic treatises, should teach us the Orthodox position: that sexual union, while blessed by the Church and fulfilling a commandment of the Creator, is still a part of man's animal nature and is, in fallen humanity, inevitably bound up with sin. This should not shock us if we stop to think that such a necessary thing as eating is also almost invariably bound up with sin — who of us is perfectly continent in food and drink, the thorough master of his belly? Sin is not a category of specific acts such that, if we refrain from them, we become "sinless" — but rather a kind of web which ensnares us and from which we can never really get free in this life. The more deeply one lives Orthodoxy, the more sinful he feels himself to be — because he sees more clearly this web with which his life is intertwined; the person, thus, who commits fewer sins feels himself to be more sinful than one who commits more!

The Fathers state specifically, by the way, that Adam and Eve did not have sexual union (nor, of course, eat meat) in Paradise. I believe Thomas Aquinas says that they did — which would accord with the RC doctrine of human nature.



All of this should one day be written out and printed, with abundant illustrations from the Holy Fathers and Lives of Saints — together with the whole question of sexuality — abortion, natural and unnatural sins, pornography, homosexuality, etc. With Scriptural and Patristic sources, this could be done carefully and without offensiveness, but clearly. Frankly, you are the logical candidate to do it — but it should be allowed to ripen in you for a while before coming out.

Enough on this subject; you are correct, by the way, that it is better for such things to be printed by laymen than monks!

About John Kraft: we more or less agreed with him that we would take him for the summer, although we weren't absolutely definite yet, since we fear above all that he will learn to "take us for granted" — in which case he hasn't anywhere else to turn. I told him that if he comes he will have to go to "summer school" — to be held in Valaam. What I have in mind specifically is this: to give him a real "course" this summer in world history, in rather the way I learned it in high school — a notebook with outlines, maps, reports, etc. If he can get interested enough to do this mostly on his own, I think there is hope for him, and we could keep him longer; if not, I don't know what to do. In my time this was a tenth-grade course. Probably today's textbooks are a fright. Could you help look up some standard textbook or books on the high school level? I recall a good one (Bury? Mommsen?) on Greece and Rome, probably no longer used. Also: could you get some blank maps such as we used to use to fill in names of rivers and cities, national boundaries, etc.? — Mediterranean region, perhaps Egypt-Assyria, etc. and any other "aids" you can think of for a serious study especially of ancient history in the traditional sense (Egypt to Rome)? I have hope that he might respond to such a course — but only God knows.

It has been snowing again — just enough today to make a beautiful mantle for the Annunciation. Pray for us.

With love in Christ,
Seraphim, monk

P.s. We've just received Metr. Philaret's final reply to the Metropolia — a superb statement with an incident from the Life of Blessed Xenia (suggested by Vladika Andrew of Novo-Diveyevo) that absolutely flabbergasted Metr. Ireney ("How could you print such a thing!?) — we won't have part with you until you get the dead rat out of the honey barrel! God willing, we will print it in the next issue.