

207. Jan. 21/Feb. 3, 1976 St. Maximus the Confessor

Categories : [Letters](#)

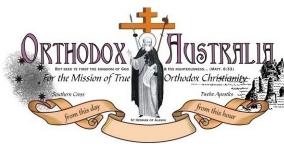
Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Dr. Kalomiros,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. I am sorry to be so late in answering your last letter. We have been working constantly at catching up on printing, and then I was sick with flu for several weeks. In general, our printing work is accomplished with great difficulty, and our helpers (both novices and laborers) often cost us as much labor (especially of soul) than they give in exchange—they are often so immature, so ready to accept and follow the most obvious temptations from the evil one. But we strongly feel that God and His saints are with us, and we go forward in faith. We sent you several weeks ago (by sea mail) a copy of our 1976 Calendar and The Northern Thebaid, which we finally finished very late. Today likewise we are sending you our latest Orthodox Word (July-August!); we hope to have the Sept-Oct. issue out in two weeks, God willing, although even then we will be far from caught up. Our winter weather has been very warm, with almost no snow, which has greatly aided our printing work—although with such a winter there is always danger of a shortage of water by the end of summer. But this is in God's hands.

The Fr. Panteleimon-Archbishop Averky incident has quieted down, after causing some disturbance in our Church. Apparently the incident itself was due to a misunderstanding, since Fr. Panteleimon apparently did not actually mean to break off communion. But the incident, "accidental" or not, is significant of deeper disagreements beneath the surface of our Church life, and as long as Fr. Panteleimon thinks (or at least gives the impression) that he is the Orthodox "expert" in our Church and knows better than all our bishops and theologians, there will be other such incidents in future. We have been told that Fr. Panteleimon has been humbled by this experience, but the one letter from his monastery that we have seen that explains his point of view does not seem at all humble, but rather was full of self-esteem and an "elitist" point of view—i.e., "no one but the bishops and a few of us chosen ones are supposed to know about all these things." This "know-better" outlook is very bad and harmful.

We ourselves cannot pass judgment on the question of Bishop Petros, because we have never received any actual evidence for or against him. You seem to think that our bishops have been against Bp. Petros for many years; but all the bishops whose opinion we know have been, on the contrary, very favorable towards him. The campaign against him in our Church is Fr. Panteleimon's work, and it is solely Fr. Panteleimon's idea that our Russian Church Abroad is the "only canonical American jurisdiction" and that the Greeks therefore have no right to their own jurisdiction here. Our bishops are so much occupied with the cares of their own exiled flocks that they do not have the leisure to indulge in useless disputes over "canonical rights," and being very practical-minded, they are quite willing to live on friendly terms with a Greek jurisdiction of Old Calendarists in

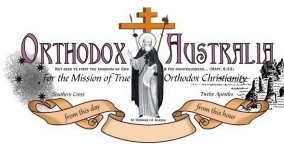


America. When Fr. Panteleimon was preparing to join our Synod in 1965, Archbishop John told me that the logical place for him was under Bishop Petros, whom Archbp. John greatly respected. When Fr. Panteleimon persuaded our bishops to accept him under the Synod, an act which could not help but cause troubles in future, as long as Fr. Panteleimon regarded himself as a rival with Bishop Petros for influence with the Greeks in America—which sadly, is just what he did, instead of remaining quietly in his monastery, as our bishops undoubtedly expected him to do.

But despite Fr. Panteleimon, Bp. Petros has been in communion with our Synod, and I think it is only a few bishops like Archbishop Vitaly who have taken sides with Fr. Panteleimon against Bp. Petros. With this background, I hope that you will be able to understand the position of Archbishop Averky. Archbp. Averky has allowed Bp. Petros to serve at Jordanville for many years, and he has not been informed (to our knowledge) of any accusations against Bp. Petros except that he refuses to deny the validity of New-Calendar Sacraments (which our bishops also refuse to deny). If any serious report of “ecumenical” activity on Bp. Petros’ part had been reported to Archbishop Averky, he would certainly have taken it most seriously and investigated it. All Archbishop Averky can see is the private rivalry of Fr. Panteleimon with Bishop Petros and he quite rightly refuses to take sides in this political battle. Archbishop Averky, therefore, finds the insistence of the “brazen young Archimandrite” Panteleimon that he not let Bp. Petros serve at Jordanville to be an intolerable impudence—as if Russian bishops must be forced to “take sides” in a “Greek quarrel,” which until now has seemed to be of a purely personal nature. Further, whether rightly or wrongly, our bishops do not feel the decisions of the Synod of Auxentios to be binding upon them; why, indeed, should Archbishop Averky not allow Bishop Petros to serve, when several of our bishops have allowed Bishop Callistos to serve—who is also not in communion with the Synod of Auxentios? Very likely our Synods dealings with the Mathewites at the 1971 Sobor were a mistake—but now the situation has become more complicated and it is difficult to see how a normal relation of our Church to yours can be restored. Perhaps all we can hope for is that at least communion will not be broken, despite many “irregularities” on both sides.

The situation with regard to Bishop Petros has been temporarily resolved by the decision of our Synod not to have communion with Bishop Petros until he is restored to communion with the Synod of Archbishop Auxentios. I’m afraid the followers of Fr. Panteleimon have taken this as a “victory” (“we made the Russian bishops back down!”), when actually it is obviously just a means for keeping Fr. Panteleimon quiet. Some of our bishops, in the absence of any concrete evidence against Bp. Petros, regard this decision as a mistake.

But all this, frankly, we find very uninteresting! The most important thing, and the greatest danger to our Orthodoxy, is occurring on another level—in the loss of conscious Orthodox life. Alexey Young let us read your two letters to him on the subject of an Orthodox community, as a means or help to preserving this conscious Orthodox life. We found them most interesting. We ourselves have given much thought to this question, and the new issue of *The Orthodox Word* has a little of our ideas on this (in the article on Archbishop Andrew). But it is not possible to express oneself fully on this subject in print, because the Orthodox people are simply too immature—the idea of an “Orthodox



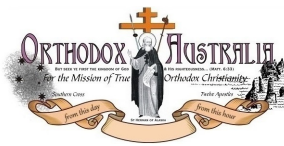
community” is very attractive, but almost no one is aware of or prepared for the difficulties and sacrifice involved in bringing it into reality, and the result is only hopeless experiments and disillusionment.

The monastic community is still possible even in our days, but—as our experience has shown us clearly—it is very difficult and requires constant struggles to maintain. «But a lay community is much more difficult to establish and preserve, because laymen do not have the principle of obedience to an elder, which cuts off arguments and fighting, and also the family is the natural unit for lay people, and a group of families can never be as close as a monastic “family” under an elder.

But still, if one learns to be realistic and does not expect from a lay community as much as one does of a monastic community, this also is a possibility for our days—and actually a very important one. Life in an ordinary Orthodox parish today, in the abnormal big-city atmosphere and surrounded by unheard-of temptations—is not normal for Orthodoxy. We know a very zealous priest in New Jersey, with a very large flock and many young people. But he tells us that he is fighting a losing battle. He has the young people in church school for a few hours on Sunday, and perhaps Saturday night, and for an hour or two of church school on Saturday—and the whole rest of the week they are subject to the contrary influences of the public schools, television, etc. The desire to have an atmosphere where the Church can have more part in life and more influence on children—is a very natural Orthodox desire, and not something “odd” or a sign of “prelest,” as many seem to think.

The basic spiritual principles of such a community we have tried to set forth in our article on Archbishop Andrew. The most apparent outward sign of this community seems to be the Divine services (even if only a minimum of them), whether with a priest or without—but daily, this being the point around which everything else revolves. In our present-day conditions, also, there must be a conscious effort to get away from involvement in the world—thus, small towns in preference to large cities, freedom (as much as possible) from television, newspapers, telephone, etc. And something more: there must be a getting away from the worldly spirit in the Church itself, this means getting away even from ordinary parish life, if possible, for this has become very worldly today.

The Etna community is by no means a highly “idealistic” or “experimental” community; it is rather a natural growth from special conditions which are exceptionally favorable for Orthodox self-preservation—provided, of course, that the basic Orthodox zeal and fervor are present to begin with. The greatest blessing for this community is, paradoxically enough, that they are far from an Orthodox parish—this has forced them to get out of the rut of so many Orthodox people today who take for granted everything about the Church and assume that someone else is “in charge” of the Church and its services, etc. These people have been forced to do the services themselves, and therefore the services are much more dear to them; and the difficulties they must go through to get to a priest and receive Holy Communion are so great that they dearly treasure this privilege and are literally working out their salvation with fear and trembling. Of course, we Americans are also blessed because everything in Orthodoxy is so new to us and therefore precious—every new



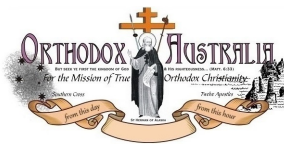
translation of a saint's life or service is a new discovery for us, all the more so if we can participate in it ourselves.

We ourselves have a feeling—based on nothing very definite as yet—that the best hope for preserving true Orthodoxy in the years ahead will lie in such small gatherings of believers, as much as possible “one in mind and soul.” The history of the 20th century has already shown us that we cannot expect too much from the “Church organization”; there, even apart from heresies, the spirit of the world has become very strong. Archbishop Averky, and our own Bishop Nektary also, have warned us to prepare for catacomb times ahead, when the grace of God may even be taken away from the “Church organization” and only isolated groups of believers will remain. Soviet Russia already gives us an example of what we may expect—only worse, for the times do not get better.

But it is very difficult to plan for the difficult times ahead. There is much wilderness in our Northern California. Both Alexey Young and we ourselves live at the edge of wilderness areas where there is no dwelling for 30 or 40 miles. But with airplanes and other modern inventions, of course, there will be no “hiding” unless God covers us. From Russian experience we know that believers have been hidden both in large cities and in wildernesses (several forest monasteries were undiscovered for 20 years or more, as I recall). We trust that God will guide us in what to do when the time comes. Until then, we can only try to do our best in the conditions we have, trying to learn the principles of spiritual life, and cutting ourselves off from the world to the best of our ability. Our own skete is quite ideally situated in this regard, being two miles from the nearest human dwelling and totally without “conveniences” (perhaps our greatest blessing is the absence of a telephone, which has already saved us much grief). But as long as we are involved with printing (we have our own electric generator) and with correspondence, of course, our ties to the world remain very great. On feast days we feel the great blessing of the total absence of city noises, and even of country noises such as barking dogs—we are thus able to give ourselves entirely to the feast, with unhindered processions and singing all over our mountain.

The future, it is evident, is very dark. We ourselves do not know from one year to the next whether we will have another year of printing activity or not. We pray that God will give us at least a few more years, if only to print those patristic materials which will help us and others to survive in the dark days ahead. In America this is the “bicentennial” year—and we feel it as especially dark and ominous. Each nation has its guardian angel—thus also each pagan or masonic festival must have its special demon! We in America are grateful for our freedom, but we know the dark masonic origins of our American ideology and tremble for the future when the meaning of the occult symbols of our government (visible in our currency, for example—the unfinished pyramid, the all-seeing eye, the number 13 everywhere, the “novus ordo seclorum”) will begin to be fulfilled. Even without a Communist coup, our future is dark; “democracy,” after all, only prepared the way for Communism, and spiritually they come from the same source and prepare for the same future.

Concerning the pamphlet by Archimandrite Constantine— “Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy before the Face of Antichrist”—it is expressed in such difficult, Germanic-style language that it is easy to see



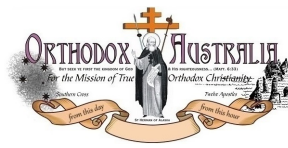
that it might be misunderstood. We know him well (he reposed, by the way, on Nov. 13/26 last, at the age of 88) and therefore are not misled by some phrases which apparently trouble your friend. His thought is not at all “ecumenical,” but is rather abstractly speculative. His basic idea here, I believe, is this: True Orthodox Christians have a natural sympathy for the traditionalist Roman Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants who, even in error, at least stand against the times in their faithfulness to what truth they have; perhaps, in the approaching time of Antichrist, this faithfulness will somehow draw them nearer to the full truth, Orthodoxy; therefore we should increase our missionary labors so that they might become Orthodox. Fr. Constantine, as always, understates his position, assuming the reader knows his basic philosophy, which is uncompromisingly anti-ecumenist.

Our own experience leads us to think that only in a very few cases does the traditionalist papist or fundamentalist Protestant come to Orthodoxy; most remain “faithful” to their denomination—and go down together with the ship! Under Communist rule it seems to be no different, and humanly speaking we see little hope for even in a liberated Russian—but with God all is possible.

We are a little disturbed, however, to hear that your friend regards such a speculative article as cause for such great suspicion. We would much prefer to see among zealous Orthodox Christians tolerance even of outright mistakes, as long as the basic Orthodox attitude and orientation is present. But, as I said, the language of Fr. Constantine is difficult and might give one a wrong impression if one knew nothing of his whole Orthodox outlook.

One last word about Fr. Panteleimon—I believe now that we were mistaken that he was planning to go to the Mathewites; he seems after all sincere in his desire to stay with our Synod, which is really the most advantageous place for him, since he is not subject to the restrictions either of our Russian priests or of Greek priests in a Greek jurisdiction. But I still think he may be driven to the Mathewites in order to remain “consistent,” unless he can be humbled enough not to think he is always “right” and “knows better” than anyone else. His positive qualities are very good, and it would be tragic if he destroyed them just for his “political” position. We notice that Fr. Nektas Palassis in his *Witness*, although he still occasionally mentions *The Orthodox Word*, has not once mentioned our publications of this last year—the *Calendar*, *Northern Thebaid*, and *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. We suspect this is because of politics—we do not always follow their “party line,” and therefore we are no longer to be much recommended, even if we do not say anything to which they object too much. They wish to “lead,” and we are independent. We do not wish to have an opposing “party line,” so we will try to be objective with regard to them and to missionary labors in general. The younger priests in America, both converts and Russians, we trust are mostly able to think for themselves and not just follow what they are “told by the experts.” In general, it seems that Orthodox Christians today must more and more be helped precisely to think for themselves.

We ask your prayers and look forward to your letter—and the evolution article!



With love in Christ,