



217. May 22/June 4, 1976 Martyr Basiliscus

Categories : [Letters](#)

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Dear Brother in Christ, Andrew,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was just preparing to answer your last letter, intending to venture the guess that you will soon be receiving a “friendly open letter” from Boston—when lo and behold, with yesterday’s mail we received a copy of this very letter from Boston! Actually, it seems to be an open letter to the recipients of copies of your letter to Archbishop Nikodim, and it is there indicated that you are to receive also a private letter from them.

The content, style and tone of the letter are what we had expected, having already had several experiences of this “Boston approach” to church problems—and in particular of “getting rid” of someone like you who dares to disagree with the “Boston party line.” I will tell you immediately our response to this letter.

The purpose of the letter is:

(1) To show how correct, sophisticated, sensitive, etc., are the fathers of Holy Transfiguration Monastery—they have all the answers for you, and in addition they are tremendously humble and spiritual. They are prepared to answer any church problem anywhere—and only they are so prepared.

(2) Thoroughly to discredit you, show how you are stupid and/or emotional, and totally incapable of discussing church questions. The only solution for you is to bow to the superior wisdom of the writers of the letter and then to get out of their way, perhaps by falling into a hole in the ground. About your spiritual welfare they couldn’t care less.

The letter itself does not need an answer. They are experts in this tactic and would tear any reply of yours into shreds, knowing how to make it appear that whatever you say is wrong.

Of course, they are “correct” in much,—but not all—of what they say. I think they have established sufficiently a case that one may baptize in such circumstances, if the bishop approves; but that is not the most important question raised by the baptisms—and this they do not see at all, because they themselves are part of the problem.

If I am not mistaken, what most upset you about the Guildford baptisms was the “fanatical” tone it



introduced into Orthodoxy in England: if this manner of reception from other jurisdictions is to become the norm, then our Church is in danger of falling into a Mathewite sectarianism. Our young converts of today are very prone to this kind of sectarian mentality, and Fr. Panteleimon has an absolutely magnetic pull on them—they are afraid of being “incorrect” and hence “un-Orthodox” if they don’t agree with his logic. In this respect you are correct, even if you can’t establish a case for it from Fathers and canons; and they, for all their “proofs” on the purely technical question, are incorrect. But you can’t argue this with them—it’s like discussing the infallibility of the Pope with a diehard Catholic. And in fact there is much that is papalist and Jesuitical in the “Boston mentality.”

On several points the Boston epistle is wrong, most notably when they try to interpret our bishops’ attitude to Moscow and Constantinople. In this our bishops refuse to be “legalistic”: to declare that these jurisdictions are “schismatic” and therefore devoid of grace. That is the Mathewite approach, which Fr. Panteleimon would apparently like to see prevail in our Church. Even today our bishops refuse to “define” in this manner and make everything “black and white”; and I am sure that, perhaps without exception, our bishops not only refuse to declare them without grace, but positively believe (at least by giving the benefit of any doubt) that they do have grace. Fr. P. would like to be their spokesman and tell the world what our bishops should be believing—but here he is going out on a limb which one day is going to break beneath him.

But now to the important question. The attitude revealed by the Boston epistle is far more dangerous than anything you have been experiencing in English, which is only aftershocks of the “Boston mentality.” If there are those so uncertain about their status in Orthodoxy that they just have to be baptized, whether when coming to us from another jurisdiction or even after being in our Church for some time—well, let them do it if the bishop permits, as long as this is not seen to be the rule or standard for all, not a model of Pharisaic “correctness” but rather a concession to weak consciences. If the issue is thus localized, there can still be peace in the Church, and neither side need pride itself that it is “correct” and the other “incorrect” or somehow inferior.

But the “Boston mentality” which wants to legislate the standard of “correctness” for the Church—is wrong, but with a wrongness that can’t be proved by Fathers and canons as much as it must be seen spiritually. The “Boston epistle” is a good example: an Orthodox response to your letter, if they believed that you were wrong, would have been to write a warm and heartfelt letter to you (all the more in that the author is your fellow-countryman), no longer than 2 or 3 pages (how much time and leisure they have!), perhaps quoting a few of the canons to show that such baptisms may be performed, and begging your indulgence for weak consciences so that there may be peace in the Church and no one will be lording it over others with the superiority of their “correctness.” Instead, their open letter (and I dread to think of what they wrote to you privately) was a cold and calculating vehicle for their self-esteem, behind a mask of absolutely fake humility and “spirituality” (the Russians would call it “oily”), with the purpose of discrediting and squashing you thoroughly and establishing a “party line” of “correctness.” This approach is Jesuitical, not Orthodox. Father Herman, who has a thoroughly Russian approach to such things, said after reading the letter: “the man who wrote this does not believe in God,” which is to say: everything



holy, spiritual, and canonical in it is used for some ulterior motive, and the letter is devoid of Orthodox heart and feeling. I do not know Fr. Alexis, but I suspect that he is better than the letter—in fulfilling the “party line” of Fr. Panteleimon, he and other monks there put aside their own selves and become blind implements for the “cause.”

We know from much bitter experience already that this “party spirit” is entirely the work of Fr. Panteleimon—he allows others to do the “dirty work” for him, but he supervises it all. The “dirty work” is sometimes so repulsive—discrediting and discouraging people like you, taking over Synod publications (you aren’t the first one!), undermining the authority of our bishops and theologians (their oily talk of how they act only with the approval of bishops is a totally false front)—that we sometimes wonder if Fr. P. is even sincere, if all this “spirituality” and kindness and generosity aren’t just an act. But we would prefer to believe as Dr. Kalomiros does (or did), that Fr. P. is a talented and sincere man who has been deceived by his own success and fallen into the fanatical mistake of believing he is always “right.” However that may be, he is one of the big problems in our Church today, and his Jesuitical web is so sticky that there is almost’ no chance that he can become unentangled from it. He seems to be heading toward the formation of his own “jurisdiction.” Several of our bishops already openly speak of him as ready to follow the example of the Dutch Church—even though it is obviously to his advantage to remain in our Russian Church as long as he can set the “tone” for everyone else.

This whole episode has probably discouraged you immensely, perhaps even inspired thoughts of “what’s the use of laboring in the Church if this is the outcome?” We have observed this response in others, and have even felt it a little ourselves, even though they haven’t attacked us openly yet (they are still gathering their materials for the “open letter” to us and waiting to see if we might still remain “obedient” to them), and therefore we can tell you an antidote based on some experience: have as little contact with the Boston “party” as possible. Do not accept them as an authority, but also do not waste time arguing against them (in the eyes of their audience they will always defeat the “enemy,” as always happens in party politics). Continue your labors as much as possible as if they did not exist. In other words, stay out of their web, don’t be infected by their way of thinking, even to oppose. Think and labor independently from them.

They have built a church career for themselves on a false but attractive premise: that the chief danger to the Church today is lack of strictness. No—the chief danger is something much deeper—the loss of the savor of Orthodoxy, a movement in which they themselves are participating, even in their “strictness,” To keep alive spiritually, we must be constantly striving to keep this savor—something which Dr. Kalomiros also talks about, although sometimes he seems to relapse into the “correctness” syndrome himself. It is he, by the way, who told us that the Synod of Auxentios has now declared the new-calendarist Sacraments invalid, although he emphasizes that this is for a different reason than the Mathewites have—the latter legalistically declaring them invalid because of “schism,” but the former because the heresy of the N.C.’s has now become absolutely clear and open. I will look up his letter and quote what he says in a later letter—he wrote us this last fall, I believe, but I know that several bishops opposed it (including Bp. Petros in N.Y.), and



perhaps they have now split up into two or more jurisdictions over this point. May God preserve our Synod from this path! This “rightness” which divides is probably largely responsible for the turn back to the “left” which Archbp. Anthony of Geneva seems to be making. The path of true moderation is therefore in danger.

Please tell us something of Archimandrite Cyprian of Phyle and his attitude to these matters. We have few contacts in Greece, and have not found there the balance which we see in the best representatives of our Russian tradition. Dr. Kalomiros writes us that Fr. P. went off the track when he saw that he knew better than the “simple Greeks” of the Old Calendar (and we see that he has the same attitude toward our “simple Russians”), but that thereby he lost contact with the living tradition of Orthodoxy, not receiving the tradition from those he loved and respected, but rather logically thinking it out himself. I think there is much truth in this—but let the rest of us struggle the harder to love those who hand down the tradition to us and don’t let what they give us be taken away by “logic” and “correctness.”

We ask your prayers for us.

With love in Christ our Saviour,