



## 259. Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1979 Sts. Ephraim and Isaac of Syria

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Fr. Donald,

Please forgive my long delay in answering your letters. I wanted to hear first from Bishop Laurus, and I wrote to him only after Christmas in order not to burden him at a busy time. I received his reply on the same day as your new letter this week, but now it has been nearly a week more before I am writing this, what with our printing, missionary trips, etc.

What Vladika Laurus writes will be difficult for you to accept, and I only ask you to receive it with prayer for God's guidance. Here I will simply quote his words, translated from Russian (parentheses added by me for clarity). I had mentioned to him your Bishops Christopher and Trevor, but had not mentioned you by name.

"Inasmuch as the one who called himself Bishop Christopher did not have a correct ordination, all (of this jurisdiction) are unordained. Consequently, their uniting people to their jurisdiction, whether through baptism or however they receive them, is also without effect, for what they celebrate are not sacraments. Therefore, there can be no question of the reception (into our jurisdiction) of such (clergy) in their existing rank. (In the past) it has been allowed among us to receive Catholics and Uniates in their existing rank, on the ground that they have apostolic succession in their ordination. But in this (jurisdiction) there is no succession. If their "bishops" had been in schism (after being properly ordained and in communion with the Orthodox), this would have been a different question.

"With the person you mention there is another difficulty in that he is married to a widow. This is an impediment to ordination.

"I understand your feelings and, of course, it is sad that there are good people who are beginning to understand Orthodoxy correctly but by their previous actions have closed the way to priesthood. Of course, if he will sincerely approach and understand Orthodoxy, he should leave his priesthood' and become a good Orthodox layman, perhaps, with God's help, to raise up children who might themselves serve the Holy Church in priestly rank."

I have also spoken to Bishop Nektary of Seattle about you, and while he knew nothing of your jurisdiction, he did say that the canon forbidding marriage to a widow is one that is strictly kept and cannot be put aside.

What to say? These words are from bishops who are loving and understanding as well as strict, and I accept them as from God Himself. I believe Archbishop John would not have given a different



opinion. It is not for me to advise you to abandon what you have thought was the priesthood; I will only tell you my thoughts on your alternative.

To join yourself to our church as a layman would be an act of courage and suffering, but would open up to you the possibility of spiritual fruitfulness in genuine Orthodoxy, which comes only with suffering. (To remain in our Church alone will require suffering.) To deny the grace of Christ's Church on your previous ministry would be difficult, but would not mean denying God's guidance of you during this time. The character of your present mission, of course, would be different: there is no reason why you could not continue the mission of the printed word (avoiding the pitfall of trusting oneself too much, and listening to the advice of others), but it would be a "priestless" community, with daily common prayers and hopefully occasional visits for Liturgy by a priest like Fr. Theodore in Cleveland.

To remain as you are, on the other hand, would mean to remain outside of communion and deeper contact with us in the Church Outside of Russia, and probably stuck in the rut of "non-canonical" Orthodoxy. In the latter case there will not be much we can do to help you, though of course we would remain in contact with you.

May God guide you in His path, by the prayers of Archbishop John. Please pray for us also.

With love in Christ,  
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim

P.s. We will continue to send you our publications as they come out—if we overlook you, please remind us. Please send us your publications also.

As for the title Living Orthodoxy, the idea is good, but Fr. Herman fears the word "living" is already "polluted" for us because of the "Living Church" in Russia and now has an overtone of "renovated."