



268. May 12/25, 1979 St. Epiphanius of Cyprus

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

(St. Hermogenes of Moscow)

Dear Father Laurence,

May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

Thank you for the news and the copies of Fr. Lev's letters. We have heard from Fr. Herman from Athens, Thessalonica, and Karyes; but no word yet whether he will be able to stay more than four days. The Metropolitan of Thessalonica gave him the permit with no difficulty.

We too are sick of the “polarization” in the Church; I think a better name for it is “politics” and “party-line”—the rest of us don’t want to be “polarized” and are content to leave the party-line to itself. I once thought that the Party would gradually mellow and come together with the rest of us; but now I’m inclined to think that the silly extremisms are necessary to the Party in the same way that atheism can’t be separated from communism: once you take them away a person might begin to think for himself on other points also, and then the party discipline is ruined. It is so silly (but also so tragic) that even “theologians” and “ThDs” think so much in terms of prepared slogans and cliches and refuse to look at things with an open mind. The Shroud of Turin is indeed a very interesting question to anyone willing to look at the evidence; there are some difficulties and “holes” in the evidence, but also much that is persuasive. There is a new book (by Ian Wilson in England) that explains the “missing links” in the Shroud’s history by hypothesizing that it is actually the same as the Image not Made with Hands, and that it wasn’t until the 11th or 12th century that it became generally known that the folded-over image was actually the whole body and not just the face. This theory seems rather plausible to me, but unfortunately he has no very solid evidence to back it up, just circumstantial evidence. Probably there will never be “certainty” on this question—but the very fact that someone like Fr. Constantine of Jordanville should accept the Shroud so wholeheartedly is already enough to silence any arrogant denials of its authenticity—at least for those who are sensitive and respectful of opinions outside one’s own circle (a rare quality nowadays, which is itself a symptom of the lowness of our church life).

Unfortunately, the many “disciples” and would-be “theologians” who surround Party Headquarters with adulation make it all the more difficult for the party people to break out of the mold. Perhaps the best hope is when individual party members are placed out in the “real world” of non-party members and are forced to become more realistic and less doctrinaire. From what we hear, this has been happening to Fr. Alexis in England, although it remains to be seen how free he will actually become, especially since the rest of the Church seems so passive with regard to the



doings of the Party.

About life after death: Yes, I think that the experiences of the “sectarians and idiots” should be taken seriously, because the experiences are obviously real, and while on the one hand they confirm what Orthodox sources say about the first moments of death (and thus give an opportunity for some people to find out about and accept the whole Orthodox teaching), on the other they most logically point to a non-Orthodox conclusion about life after death. The object of our articles is to place them in the whole context of Orthodox teaching, and incidentally to set forth this teaching in detail. Our model is Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov’s volume III, where he speaks in detail of the Roman Catholic teaching in order to set forth the Orthodox teaching. Many of our Orthodox people, I think, have very vague notions about this teaching—as witness the support some of the parishes are giving to Fr. Lev’s lecture on the subject, which, judging from what I have seen, is far from the Orthodox teaching and falls into several of the Roman Catholic pitfalls which Bp. Ignatius warns against. Even after all the Patristic citations in our article on the toll-houses, and Fr. Michael Pomazansky’s article on the same subject, Fr. Lev continues to repeat his Schmemmannisms about the toll-houses, and people like Fr. Neketas support him. This, by the way, is what I think is Fr. Neketas’ weakest point—not so much that he joins “bandwagons” as that he is a 100% party-man and refuses even to look at evidence that contradicts the party line. (Although from what I hear lately, Fr. Panteleimon himself is not so much against the toll-houses any more; but evidently the party hasn’t heard this.) I’m sorry if we ourselves have given the impression of jumping on a “bandwagon”; but is this really such a sin, if what one says is accurate and relevant?

Fr. Alexey Young is off to a good start in the Medford mission—please pray for him, as it will be difficult. God sends His grace, but the odds against any kind of spiritual life today are so strong. Fortunately, there are quiet workers like him here and there, and the Church is not yet entirely swallowed up by politics.

May God give you strength to bear your cross with courage. For a little struggle, God gives a great reward. Please pray for us.

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim