



276. August 10/23,1979 Archdeacon and Martyr Laurence

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Dear Andrew,

May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

Thank you for your letter. Yes, it was a little “nagging,” but I must say I agree with most of your points. Yes, the “Grabbe newsletter” is thoroughly uninspiring and has little positive to say about Orthodoxy. Its best forgotten and not spread further. (He puts it out in Russian himself, and unfortunately a great deal of it is reprinted in Orthodox Russia.)

We agree with you also on the forbidding of services to “uncanonized” saints. It’s true enough that the Russian Church in recent centuries has done this—but in our days of total desolation why forbid one of the few positive Orthodox things that is happening? The answer, I think, is that one or two of the politically powerful bishops (Vitaly of Montreal, Seraphim of Chicago) want to assert their “authority” and can find no better way to do it, and the other bishops don’t want to fight over it. It is discouraging—but again, the best thing is to “forget” it and quietly continue the veneration of these saints out of love for them. v

That our bishops don’t assert their authority when there is occasion for it—specifically, in restraining Fr. Panteleimon in some of his acts—is a sign of this weakness and giving way to political considerations.

All of this is a sad background for our present Orthodox labors—here you are right. But please listen to this: WE SIMPLY CANNOT LET OUR ATTITUDES, INSPIRATION, AND MISSIONARY LABORS TAKE THEIR TONE FROM ALL THESE NEGATIVE FACTORS: WE MUST OURSELVES BE GENERATING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK THAT WILL INSPIRE OURSELVES AND OTHERS. How?—on this I’ll say more below.

This is why I think it unwise to print the article of Fr. Akakios. He has sent it to us, and I see now it is less in the form of a personal attack than I had expected—but it is still only a reaction, and the influence of Fr. P. simply cannot be fought on that level: his followers, if need be, will simply fill the air with counter-attacks, more hero-worship, etc., and the air will be even more filled with the poisonous fumes that are choking us today.

When I say that the influence of Fr. P. is “past its peak” (or however I expressed it) I don’t mean to say that it isn’t still quite powerful and, in some respects, increasing; this poisonous influence increases exactly in proportion to the spiritual vacuum so common in new converts, and in others



also—it gives easy and “correct” answers that make one feel important for belonging to the “right party” that has the answers. But this is superficial—the answer is to go deeper and get in contact with true, heartfelt Orthodoxy. And this is beginning to happen, and to such an extent that I think it’s the “wave of the future” in our Church. Almost all of our younger Russian priests, in America at least, are aware of the limitations of Fr. P. and are getting inspiration from elsewhere—chiefly from Russia, and especially from Fr. Dimitry Dudko. This is what you should be doing too—you probably sell Fr. Dimitry’s book, *Our Hope* and haven’t read it—correct?

The Fathers at St. Gregory Palamas monastery have, at least partially, fallen into a trap—they are so dazed by the bad effects of Fr. Pant’s influence that they are placing their reaction to it as the most important thing—that’s what their attention is fixed on, that’s what they write and argue about. I agree with them that this influence is bad and poisonous—but we simply must get above it, start getting inspiration from elsewhere and “forget” Fr. P. as much as we can. We are still on the best terms with the Fathers at St. Gregory’s, by the way, and have written them something similar. There are already enough of us aware of the “Panteleimon problem” (which in essence boils down, I think, to a question of a dead Orthodoxy of the head, of calculation, vs. the true Orthodoxy of the heart) that if we begin now to look to the sources of true Orthodox inspiration, to nourish ourselves on them, to communicate them to others, to speak out when need arises on problems of the day—we can have a substantial influence ourselves on overcoming the poisons already in the air and introducing a fresh air that can inspire and save them from dead legalism and “correctness.”

You suffer from what “Boston” has done, from the inertia of our bishops—well, be aware that THIS SUFFERING IS A PART OF THAT DEEPER ORTHODOXY YOU SHOULD BE SEEKING AND TAKING INSPIRATION FROM. Read Fr. Dimitry Dudko and start to learn; you cannot help but be inspired by him. His constant theme is: there’s hope for us, because we suffer. He is now putting out a weekly newsletter which is tremendously inspiring. Fr. Alexey Young?;??? be printing a few issues of it in English; if you want, I could translate some more for you. (Actually, much of it has been appearing in Orthodox Russia—do you have any translators there?) Fr. Dimitry, by the way, gives us a chance to get around some of our own problems here; here they don’t like us to talk about uncanonized saints—but Fr. Dimitry openly refers to “Holy New Martyr Nicholas” (the Tsar).

The whole Orthodox Church in the free world is in a state of near paralysis; our Russian Church Abroad is better off in that it has at least kept more of the traditions and piety of the past and doesn’t betray Orthodoxy in the Ecumenical movement. But God has given us the talent of freedom, and we who can walk and write and print have an obligation to inspire those we can with the true Orthodoxy of the heart. I’m not against a “polemical” article here and there (your articles in the last issue were good)—but such articles have to be only incidental to something more important that is being said and should have a compassionate tone that rises above mere polemics and anger.

Keep up *The Old Calendarist* and fill it with inspiring things. They are coming from Russia, you can



find them in Greece (something about Bishop Cyprianos, for example), in Uganda, even in your England. (By the way, why don't you write us a letter for publication on the positive opportunities for pilgrimage in Europe?)

We had a very successful pilgrimage and summer courses here this past two weeks, with large doses of positive inspiration, information on the suffering Christians in Russia, together with warnings about the perils to living true Orthodoxy today (including our Greeks, mentioned by name), and ending with the baptisms of two new converts. Here and there, positive things are going on in the Church; it's up to us to help increase them!

Why don't you come visit us again soon? Our missionary territory in Northern California and southern Oregon now has four mission parishes and some fervent Christians who are far away from all church politics.

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim

P.s. The Turin Shroud, of course, is a whole question in itself, but do you really have such evidence that it is a fraud? All the evidence I've seen points to the opposite, although I'm not quite persuaded of Ian Wilson's theory that the Shroud is really identical with the "Image not made with hands." Have you read his book?

P.p.s. Vladika Vitaly has just published Metr. Anthony's Dogma of Redemption in English, and Bishop Grabbe praises it sky-high. Please don't advertise or sell this book—Metr. Anthony's teaching on this subject has been controversial for decades, and our best bishops and theologians have rejected it. Jordanville and other book centers here are deliberately not stocking it, and our Bishop Nektary has asked Fr. Nektas also not to distribute it. Years ago, at the instigation of Bishop Nektary, we warned Fr. Panteleimon about this teaching, but for political reasons he fell for it; now, however, even Fr. Michael Azkoul has written a review against it, and his fashionability will probably come to an end now. His ideas on this subject are sloppy theology, at best.