



280. Nov. 1/14, 1979 Sts. Cosmas and Damian

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Father Roman,

Christ is in our midst!

Thank you for the letter and the Xeroxes about the "Grabbe affair."

About Fr. Panteleimon: whatever has happened between us is not due to the recent letters that have been exchanged between us; there is something much deeper involved, and the recent letters are only a small sign of it. Fr. Panteleimon is evidently upset because we dared to express a criticism of several of the opinions held by him and his brothers, but we did this trusting that good relations between us do not depend upon our simply accepting whatever he and his brothers say or write; but evidently he does not agree with this.

I will try to explain briefly what the "deeper" thing is (as we see it) that causes Fr. P. to be unhappy with us.

From the very beginning, even before Fr. P. entered our Church, we were extremely open and well disposed to him; later, when first he and then Fr. Nektas and other Greek priests joined our Church, we were among the first to welcome and support them, writing a number of articles about them and defending them before our bishops and others when there were controversies around them.

Quite early, we discovered that there were differences of opinion between us and the "Greeks": they were a little too "fanatical" about other jurisdictions, rather uncharitable towards Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox, rather unfair to some Orthodox people with whom they disagreed; and Fr. P himself expressed some extreme opinions about the Weeping Icons, about Blessed Augustine, etc. None of these differences of opinion caused us to think any less highly of Fr. P. and the "Greeks," or to give them any less support. We accepted these as minor differences which should not lessen the bond of love between us.

In the midst of these sincere good relations which existed between us, we began to hear, from various people in our Church, complaints against Fr. P. and Fr. Nektas. Some thought that the views they expressed in their publications were too "fanatical," others thought they were spreading false teachings, still others said they were "trying to take over the Synod." For about two years (1971 to 1973) we were enthusiastically defending Fr. P. and Fr. N. against all these accusations, denying some of them and covering others with love and understanding. (We were so sympathetic



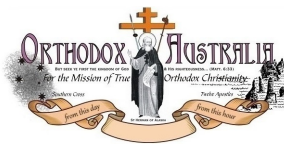
to Fr. P. that even the most extreme thing we knew that he had done—to call Bishop Peter of Astoria a “simoniac” and “sorcerer”—we justified as the weakness of someone who was zealous but who sometimes did make mistakes of judgment.)

But then, in 1973, several of the actions of Fr. P. and Fr. N. began to upset us, and it is definitely true that a “cooling” in the relations between us began at that time—although this was much greater on their side than on ours, as I will describe below.

(1) Fr. Nektas (and back of him Fr. P.) expressed extreme displeasure over two publications of (then layman) Alexey Young—one against the theory of evolution, and one in favor of the Shroud of Turin. The fact itself that they objected to the articles did not upset us (we also had noted the weak spots in the “Shroud” article, which originally had been written for a Roman Catholic readership and had many obvious “Latinisms” in it); it was rather the way in which they objected that upset us: through our extensive correspondence with Fr. Nektas, it became clear that he believed that on such subjects it is not possible to have different opinions or interpretations; the “Orthodox view” must be one in favor of evolution (!) and against the Shroud. We had thought that Orthodox Christians could at least discuss these subjects together in a friendly way; but according to Fr. N. one cannot discuss these questions, but must accept the opinion of the “Orthodox experts” on them—and the first “expert” for him was Fr. P. After this, Fr. Nektas began to tell people to “stay away from Etna” because Alexey Young was “just a Roman Catholic,” and we know people who followed this advice. Later this uncharitable attitude was extended to include our Brotherhood also, and in general everyone in the “Russian” side of our Church who did not agree with the opinions of Fr. P. Fr. Nektas made a kind of “public demonstration” of this attitude when he dropped the name of our Brotherhood from the list of “important places in the Synod” in his 1978 Calendar; in 1979 our name again did not appear in this list. Obviously, his attitude is that since we do not agree with his opinions (and those of Fr. P.) we do not “exist.”

Thus, our first cause to be upset with Fr. N. and Fr. P. was our discovery that they had formed a political party within our Church, and those who do not agree with the “party line” are dismissed and regarded as non-existent, and people are even warned about the “dangers” of having contact with such ones. The more we found out about this “party spirit,” the more grieved we became; but in the Russian tradition of “longsuffering,” we said little about this to anyone for a long time and did not have a similar feeling towards Frs. N. and P., hoping that this was somehow a “misunderstanding” that would improve with time.

(2) At this same time (1973) we began to discover that our “Greeks” not only had a “political party,” but also used political techniques to achieve their aims. For example, in 1972 Fr. Nektas suggested to Alexey Young that he “merge” his Nikodemos with Fr. Nektas’ Orthodox Christian Witness, and that Fr. N. would be happy to print the combined periodical to make it “easier” for Alexey. We thought this a very strange thing at the time, and simply advised Alexey to continue his own independent publishing; only later did we realize that by this means Fr. N. intended to “take over” Nikodemos and ensure that it would never print anything not in accordance with the “party

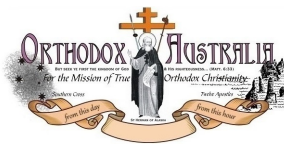


line.” Later our “Greeks” told Andrew Bond in England that they would distribute his publication, *The Old Calendarist*, in America, but only on condition that no articles be printed without their censorship. In 1973, when we had asked Fr. Nektas if he could help with the distribution of our proposed Russian-language periodical (which we were never able to begin), Fr. N insisted that we let him print it also—and we began to realize that even our Russian-language work was to be “censored in Boston”—and not even by Russian-speaking people, but by converts who had learned some Russian.

Other “political techniques” of our “Greeks” include “spreading the word” that some particular publication or person is “outside the party line.” For example, after the publication of the “Shroud” article, Fr. Alexey received a number of letters from Seattle all canceling their subscriptions to *Nikodemos* and offering, instead of the friendly criticism one would expect from fellow Orthodox Christians, a cold cutting him off. Alexey was so depressed and hurt by the treatment our “Greeks” gave him at that time that he would have given up printing altogether if we had not supported him and told him that the attitude of other people in our Church was not at all cold like that. Later, when it became obvious that Alexey Young was very talented and that his publications were quite good and important for our converts, Frs. P. and N. made a visit to him evidently in view of becoming “reconciled.” But even this visit was also a matter of politics, for Nina Seco (who has always been an unquestioning follower of Fr. P.) told Alexey later that the monastery in Boston had no interest in being friendly with Alexey if he was not going to follow their “party line.”

Thus, on many occasions we have received clear indications that Fr. P. and his followers did indeed intend to “take over the Synod”: i.e., to make their “party line” prevail at least over the convert wing of our Church, and if possible over the Russians also. This whole attempt is so foreign to the Orthodox spirit that we have found it to be extremely distasteful, a kind of “Jesuitism” that has crept into our Church with the coming of Fr. P. In fact, in 1973 when I visited Seattle and saw Fr. P. there, he told me something that I did not fully appreciate then, but which now I see as a part of the “problem” which he has become for us: He told me that if one is working for a good church cause, it is permissible for one to lie, cheat, etc., for the sake of the “good cause.” Sadly, we have seen this “Jesuit” principle in operation among our Greeks in the way they spread tales about people they do not like, misrepresent the position of people they wish to criticize, “warn” their followers against people like Fr. Alexey Young, our Brotherhood, etc.

(3) Also in 1973 began the era of Fr. P’s “open letters” to people in our Church whom he wished to criticize and “correct.” There had been some earlier “open letters” to people outside our Church, and even then we had noticed that, while these letters were basically “correct” in their points, there was something in the tone of them that was foreign to our Orthodox mentality. Instead of giving their opponents the benefit of any doubt as to their position or beliefs, these letters sometimes took unfair advantage of isolated statements the opponents had made in order to accuse them of beliefs which they really did not hold. We regarded this as a rather small point at the time, but even then I expressed the view that I myself would not like to be the recipient of such an “open letter.”

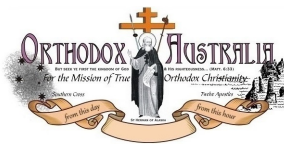


In 1973 (and perhaps before that, I don't know) these "open letters" began to be addressed to people in our own Church. We have seen a number of these letters, written by Fr. Ephraim, Fr. Mamas, Fr. Alexis (now Archimandrite), Fr. Panteleimon himself, and addressed to us, to Fr. Alexey Young, to Andrew Bond in England, to Metropolitan Philaret, and to several of our bishops. Almost without exception these letters have made a bad impression on us. In most of their individual points they are "correct," but in their tone they are filled with self-justification, subtle mockery of others, and a tone of cold superiority which seems to say: "Here is the Orthodox teaching; we are the authorities; you just listen to us and be obedient." These open letters, more than anything else, are what have led us to the conclusion that there is something "wrong" about Fr. P. and his activities.

We now have had quite a long experience of the activities of Fr. P. and his followers and of the "convert" movement in our Church, as well as of the "Old Calendarist" movement in Greece and America, where Fr. P. has also tried to exercise his influence. I can say sincerely that, having been most open and friendly to Fr. P. from the very beginning, we do not now have any hatred or bad feelings towards him. But in all honesty I must state the negative things about his activity which we have had occasion to observe in the 15 years or so of our contacts with him (actually, Fr. Herman knew him in Boston even before that, when Fr. P. was strongly arguing against our Church and in favor of the Metropolia). These negative aspects of his activity are serious enough that if he does not make a major effort to correct them he may well end by becoming an enemy of our Church:

(1) Holy Transfiguration has become a center for spreading criticism, rumors, and tales about other members of our Church, the Old Calendarists, etc. This is not an accident; it is precisely the way Fr. P. wants it and has planned it. From the very beginning Fr. P. has taken as his principle that the affairs of everyone in the Church are his business: he knows everything that is going on, has "files" on everyone, feels it his right to "correct" everyone in the Church (from the Metropolitan on down), and himself spreads the "correct" opinion about everyone and everything. He has criticized our own monastery just because we do not have a telephone and so are not in his "network," and he cannot call us up to "correct" us whenever he feels like it.

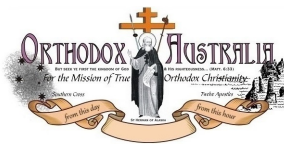
We believe that Fr. P. is very mistaken in his desire to know everything that goes on in our Church as well as outside it, more even than our bishops know; this desire is prompted by his involvement in church politics and is a very unhealthy thing, both for himself and for those many people whom he inspires to be interested in church matters which are none of their business. Fr. P. himself has "set the tone" of uncharitable criticism and the spreading of tales for which his monastery is notorious. As a small example: recently he told you of the rumor that Fr. Herman did not stop at Jordanville on his way back from Mt. Athos because he did not want to speak at the commencement exercises and because he was dissatisfied with Jordanville's "academic rather than monastic" emphasis. There is no truth whatever to this rumor, and this is the first time we have even hear it. Fr. Herman was not invited to speak at the commencement exercises at all, and he came directly back to California because he was totally exhausted from his trip and because our only helper at that time had left us. Why does Fr. P. repeat such rumors? We certainly knows that



the main effect of such rumors would be to spread discord and distrust between Jordanville and our monastery; his first duty, then, if he means well to us and to Jordanville, would be to refuse to believe any such rumors and to strictly forbid his followers to believe or spread them. But on the contrary, he “innocently” repeats such tales, and by his authority actually causes many people to believe them. This he has done time after time; especially among the Greek Old Calendarists his words have had a poisonous effect; many to this day believe that Bishop Peter of Astoria is a “simoniac” or a “sorcerer,” that Archimandrite Chrysostomos of Ohio is “not a Greek” (as though that were a crime even if it were true), is “a former Roman Catholic,” “has forged his doctors degree,” etc. If you question Fr. P. about any of these rumors, he always has an excuse that justifies him: he was misquoted, or he did not start the rumor, or it is true “in a certain sense,” etc. But the fact remains that there is no single figure in our Church today who has such a large following of people who are willing to obey his every word; if he himself were to make a strong attack against the believing and spreading of rumors in the Church, the worst part of this problem in our Church would be ended. Instead, however, he is the one who most promotes such rumors, always with the intention of making himself and his political “party” seem correct.

By this political technique Fr. P. has acquired innumerable enemies in the Church, both in America and in Greece. People who entirely supported him and trusted him in the beginning have been alienated from him precisely because of his politics and unfair political techniques. He has alienated most of the leading figures in the Old Calendarist movement in Greece, and in our own Church these political techniques of Fr. P’s are the main cause of the “coldness” which has come about between him and many of our bishops, priests, and laymen. For a short time, it is true, Fr. P. enjoyed great respect in Greece and helped give our Church great prestige there. But unfortunately, here again Fr. P’s techniques were first of all political, in order to make our Church look good, he felt himself free to misrepresent the real positions of our bishops, to tell half-truths about what we really believed, and as a result, in the end all of this backfired, and today Fr. P. (and also our Church, to a large extent) is not well thought of in most places in Greece, in particular among the Old Calendarists; he has his own small following there of people who belong to his “political party,” but he does not enjoy wide respect in Greece as a whole.

(2) Fr. P. and his monastery, in order to make themselves appear as “theological experts,” have systematically undermined the theological authority of the most highly respected teachers of the Russian Orthodox Church in general, and of the Russian Church Outside of Russia in particular. Here Fr. P. has applied his political techniques to a goal far worse than the “personal” triumphs he achieves when rumors are spread about people he disapproves of; in spreading the same kind of rumors about theological authorities, he is undermining the very ground on which we Orthodox Christians stand today. If such theological giants as Metr. Philaret of Moscow, Bishop Theophan the Recluse, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, Archbishop Averky of Jordanville, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and in general the theology taught in our seminaries for the last century and more, are not really “Orthodox” at all— then we are in a very dangerous condition, and where are we to find our theological authority by which to stand firm against all the errors and temptations of these times? Fr. P. teaches: We will teach you what is right, we will read the Holy Fathers for you and

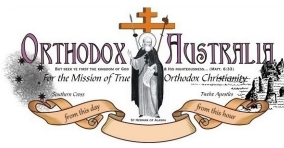


teach you the correct doctrine, we have excellent translators and interpreters who are more Orthodox than Bishop Theophan, Metr. Philaret of Moscow, Archbishop Averky, and all the rest. This is a terribly dangerous game that Fr. P. is playing, he is unwittingly undermining the Orthodox ground under his own feet.

The chief weapon which Fr. P. uses in his attempt to undermine the theological authority of our Russian theologians is the recent academic fashion of looking everywhere for “Western influence” in our theological texts. There is a half-truth in this search; Fr. Michael Pomazansky and other good theologians will readily admit that there were such “Western influences” in the theological texts of the latter period of Russian (and Greek) history—but they also emphasize that these influences were external ones which never touched the heart of Orthodox doctrine. To say otherwise is to admit that Orthodoxy was lost (!) in these last centuries, and only now are young “theologians” like Fr. P. “finding” again the Orthodoxy of the Fathers. Fr. P. is too cautious to say such a thing in so many words, but by his actions and statements he is promoting an attitude which is very close to this, and he has caused many, many ignorant converts to lose all respect for the great Russian theologians and to expect “real Orthodox theology” only from the circle around Fr. P.—including Fr. Lev Puhalo!

To give a few examples: Fr. P. has spread the idea that Metr. Philaret of Moscow was very “Western” in his theology and that his Catechism was “Roman Catholic” and should not be read; Fr. Nektas picked this up and, in his often crude way, printed several times in his Witness that the Catechisms of the 19th century were “awful” and should not be used by Orthodox Christians. (This Catechism was always the first book Vladika John would give a new convert!) Speak to any convert under the influence of Frs. P. and N., and almost certainly they will have no respect for Metr. Philaret and for Orthodox Catechisms in general. After we in The Orthodox Word and Fr. Alexey Young in Nikodemos had mentioned how respected authorities in the Greek Church (St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, St. Macarius of Corinth) had used Russian Catechisms (translated into Greek) in their own pastoral labors, Fr. Ephraim in one of his “open letters” spoke condescendingly even of these Greek authorities, saying that St. Nectarios was known “more for this piety than this theology” (St. Nectarios was also against evolution, which is another reason why his theological authority has been discredited).

Another example: Fr. P. spreads the rumor that Bishop Theophan the Recluse is “scholastic” and thus not to be trusted. I have seen no proof for this assertion; it is only another rumor which helps to discredit a major theological authority in the Russian Church. (And what if it were true? Is “scholasticism”—whatever that means for our Greeks—a heresy? Is Fr. P. not “scholastic” himself in some ways?) In one of his “open letters” which Fr. Nektas published in his Witness, Fr. Alexis of Boston went so far as to say that Unseen Warfare should not be read (!) because it comes originally from a Roman Catholic source and “just does not sit right.” What presumption! A major spiritual text for Orthodox Christians, which has the authority of two major theologians (St. Nikodemus and Bishop Theophan) behind it—is dismissed and regarded as of no value; a little group of basically American converts think they are more sensitive and authoritative than these



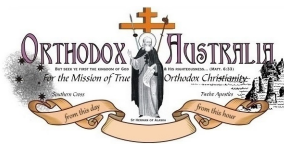
great Church authorities! Later Fr. Ephraim (I believe) explained that St. Nikodemus also was under “Western influence” and there [fore] is really not to be trusted.

Another example: the authority of Archbishop Averky was undermined by Fr. P., who spread rumors that he was “Western” and “scholastic” and the like. Followers of Fr. P. spread the tale that Archbishop Averky was “one of the worst” of our theologians who are under “Western influence.”

For years Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov was not subject to this criticism, probably because his writings are so anti-Roman-Catholic. But now also the attack against him is beginning: in the latest Tlinget Herald Fr. Lev states that Bishop Ignatius believed in the “toll-houses” because he was under “Western influence” and went to a “Latinized” seminary (he doesn’t know that Bp. Ignatius didn’t go to a seminary at all!). Fr. Levs whole recent attack against our Orthodox doctrine of life after death is a direct result of Fr. P’s influence. Fr. P., it is true, is not directly responsible for each statement Fr. Lev makes, but it was Fr. P. who has put into the air the whole idea of discrediting Russian theological authorities, and Fr. Lev only adds a few of his own ideas in order to make himself seem to be a “theological authority” in his own right. It was Fr. P. who produced Fr. Lev as a “theological authority, ” and Fr. P. could stop Fr. Lev’s publications in an instant if he wanted to (through Fr. Nektas who publishes them). Why does he allow him to continue? Fr. N. told Fr. Alexey Young recently: “We all know Fr. Lev is unbalanced, but he is one of us.” That is, he follows the “party line, ” and therefore we won't stop him! God only knows how many innocent people Fr. Lev has already confused with his fantasies of the “sleep” of the soul and with his attitude of open disrespect for the traditional teaching of the Orthodox Church.

This undermining of the theological and spiritual authority of the teachers of the Russian Church which took him in with such open arms when he was in need of a Church home—is surely one of the most serious and disastrous of Fr. P’s wrong steps. I really do not know how he can amend this mistake, now that so many unsuspecting converts have caught the “disease” of distrusting our Russian theologians. His work in accepting and translating Metr. Anthony’s “Dogma” (which he promised us several years ago that would never print, after we had explained to him Bishop Nektary’s objections to it) is already an indication of how far he and his followers are from being “theological authorities.” It does not bother us that he is wrong on this point; we all make mistakes, and in a healthy church atmosphere we can easily forgive each other and not hold such mistakes against each other. What bothers us, rather, is that Fr. P. insists that his group of “theologians” are the experts for our Church, and anyone (living or dead) of whom this group does not approve must be dismissed and discredited, often in a crude way. Thus he helps to poison the Church atmosphere, spreading distrust and suspicion.

(3) Fr. P. has established around himself a very unhealthy “authority complex,” built upon the insecurity of so many of our American converts (which includes our “Greek-Americans” also). Because of his “charismatic” talents for charming people he has made himself an “authority” which for many people overshadows all the theologians and spiritual giants of the Orthodox



Church, living and dead. Whatever he says is true, even if all the theologians of the past century teach otherwise. It is because of this inflated “authority” that the undermining of our theological authorities has been so successful: no one can be right if Fr. P. disagrees with him! It is because of Fr. P.’s “authority” that so many converts will not listen to reasoned theological arguments on any subject; “Fr. P. has spoken, the subject is closed!” This is papalism, not Orthodoxy! With people who accept Fr. P.’s “authority” in this way it is impossible to argue; their minds are closed on all subjects where Fr. P. or someone in his clique has spoken. This is why the arguments of Fr. Lev Puhalo, which if subjected to close examination can be seen to be very flimsy, are widely accepted by converts: he is one of Fr. P.’s “anti-Western” “theologians,” and thus his words can be accepted with almost blind authority and do not need to be discussed.

Whenever the opinion of Fr. P. on any subject is challenged, he (or more often, one of his monks) gives a reply in the form of a more or less “open letter” which “proves” that he is always “correct” (except sometimes in small details). This constant attitude of self-justification is made easier for him in that all his opinions are “group opinions” and there is usually no one responsible person who must answer for them.

I have already mentioned above what we think of these “open letters”; but most shocking of all to us were the two letters which Fr. P. himself wrote in 1975 to Archbp. Averky and our own Archbp. Anthony, in connection with Fr. P.’s refusal to serve wherever Bishop Peter of Astoria was allowed to serve. (We have heard all manner of arguments from Fr. P. and his followers about Bishop Peter, but in the end it became quite evident that the one and only cause for the “problem” with Bishop Peter was personal and factional jealousy: Fr. P. will not allow the existence in America of any Greek clergy who are not in his own “party.” Dr. Kalomiros has told us that the whole problem was that Bishop Peter was a real Greek who had rapport with Greeks, and Fr. P. is an American who has rapport only with Americans and Greek-Americans.) In these letters Fr. P., instead of apologizing as simply and humbly as possible for his mistake, did his utmost to prove that he was “right” and the bishops were “wrong,” and then he threw in a number of accusations against these bishops themselves: that Archbishop Averky never visits Boston, that Metr. Philaret does not like to visit Jordanville, that Archbishop Anthony has had a fight with our Brotherhood, etc. These letters were a final proof for us that Fr. P. in his Church activities is inspired first of all by political calculations, and that the “files” he keeps on everyone are weapons for his own justification and for making accusations against anyone who disagrees with him.

Fr. P. has been with our Church now for almost 14 years. In that time he has done many positive things. He has given money to worthy causes in the Church, has an impressive monastery and dedicated priest-followers, has in many ways helped the spirit of zealotry which is notably lacking among so many of our Russians. But by his political maneuvering, his undermining of our Orthodox theological authorities, and his promotion of an unquestioning “papal” obedience to the opinions of himself and his “theological party”—he has done so much harm that I wonder whether all of his good deeds can make up for it.



For some time now we have been aware that Fr. P. has been dissatisfied with our Orthodox Word, where we have expressed ideas in accordance with our Orthodox tradition but contrary to his opinions: that our bishops have not denied the grace of the other Orthodox jurisdictions, that Unseen Warfare, Metr. Philaret's Catechism, and other books of which he disapproves are quite Orthodox, that Blessed Augustine is actually a saint in the Orthodox Calendar, that those who criticize our recent theological authorities are going on dangerous ground, etc. Fr. P., has not written us directly criticizing these articles, but we do know that he has spoken publicly in sermons against our articles, has encouraged the spread of disdainful rumors about us (Fr. Mamas, for example, told one new convert that Fr. Herman was "Protestant" because of his enthusiastic sermons), and in general has let his followers know that our publications are not to be trusted. We have been very grieved at all this, because from the beginning we thought we were working together with Fr. P. for the cause of true Orthodoxy; and now it turns out that he has formed his own special mission and does not need our cooperation any more.

The most recent incident—the exchange of letters with Fr. Mamas—is only a small sign of the great disharmony described above, which has now come to exist, not merely between our two monasteries, but between two wings of our Church: that which accepts Fr. P. as the one authority over all others living and dead; and that which tries humbly to follow in the age-old tradition of Russian Orthodoxy and accepts as its first authorities such recent teachers as Bishop Theophan the Recluse, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, Archbishop Averky, Archbishop John Maximovitch, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, etc.

Briefly, the story of this most recent correspondence is this: Fr. Herman wrote a brief note to Fr. P., asking if his monastery could help as it did some years ago with some translations from Greek for The Orthodox Word. Fr. Mamas answered this letter and told us that they had no time to help us, but that he could help us by correcting the text of translations of Greek Fathers which we were making from the Russian (specifically, St. Symeon the New Theologian). In itself, of course, we have nothing against such an offer; if Fr. Mamas really knows ancient Greek well, he could probably help to make our translations of St. Symeon more precise. But the tone of his letter was so self-centered and disdainful (he spoke of the "horrible translation" that Jordanville had published, told how he was studying Syriac to translate St. Isaac the Syrian, and wrote in general as though he and his clique were really the greatest "experts" in sight) that I wrote only a very short note in reply, telling him in general that one could go astray by "correctness": also, that grasping the "savor of Orthodoxy" was more important, and that I sensed a danger in his becoming such an "expert" on St. Isaac—perhaps it would be better for his simplicity to translate this book humbly from the Greek or even the Russian, and perhaps to suffer another 20 years before daring to undertake anything so high. When I wrote this I thought: perhaps this will cause another "Boston open letter" teaching us about the importance of "correct translations"; but my note was so obviously personal that I put this thought out of my mind, and Fr. Herman blessed me to send the note.

But sure enough, Fr. Mamas wrote a whole "epistle" in reply, accusing us of being against



accurate translations from the originals, of promoting “pious fables,” of “a taint of Old Believerism,” of teaching the “baptism of the dead” (because of a quote in *The Orthodox Word* which he read in an overly-literal way and gave a meaning totally out of context), showing a disdainful lack of respect for both Bishop Theophan the Recluse and Archbishop Andrew of Novo-Diveyevo, and informing us that he could not go astray because he has an “elder” and “obedience.” The “tone” of this letter was cold, superior, “expert”—very different from the normal warm, unassuming letters we receive from Orthodox clergy and monks, even when they may be critical of something we have published. He also took the opportunity to translate long passages from a letter of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky on his translations from Greek, saying that “it is a great pity that you did not translate this letter in full to include in your book—when in fact we had translated the passages, and our very publication of the book on Blessed Paisius shows how much we value his careful attitude towards Patristic translations. We were very offended by the letter, which went to great pains to “correct” us on points we had never held, and we felt that the main purpose of the letter was to show to others how “wrong” we are and how “right” Holy Transfiguration Monastery is (all these letters they show to a number of people, whether or not they are “open”—that is how we ourselves received copies of their letters to Archbishop Averky, Archbp. Anthony, Metr. Philaret, and others which we never asked for and which should never had been made so “open”). In addition, he took the opportunity of criticizing Eastern Orthodox Books, thinking we have some connection with them, for publishing a book he disapproved of.

My reply to Fr. Mamas was rather indignant, and perhaps a little too “warm” for the Boston mentality. I told him his letter was so unnecessary, an “over-reaction”; that I wished him a good dose of “warmheartedness and simplicity”; that he is wrong if he thinks his “elder” and his “community” will infallibly preserve him from mistakes (since group passions can be worse than individual passions); that his criticisms are unfair and we don’t teach what he claims we teach at all; and that he should be more charitable to Eastern Orthodox Books and tell positive things about them—for example, p. xvii of their new edition of the *Ladder* deliberately omits mention of the Eastern Orthodox Books reprint which was still available then (this we took as an intentional indication that Eastern Orthodox Books is “non-existent” because it doesn’t follow the Boston “party line”). Fr. Mamas did not reply to this letter, but Fr. Ephraim replied for him, saying that I had tried to “psycho-analyze” Fr. Mamas, that no one there has even heard of the Eastern Orthodox Books reprint of the *Ladder*; and that they don’t want to receive any of our books in exchange for their books and incense which they send us. (I had asked Fr. P. in a note “how many” of our books he wanted for the Monastery, since he had never asked for any). This letter, while not disdainful and “expert” like Fr. Mamas’, indicates how far the gulf is becoming between them, who want to be the “experts” of the Church, and the rest of us, who value a humbler attitude towards church activity. How Fr. P. and his monks could have “forgotten” about the Eastern Orthodox Books *Ladder* is a wonder—Vladimir Anderson himself told Fr. P. years ago he was going to print it, Fr. Herman discussed it with Fr. P. later, and Nina Seco and other followers of Fr. P. knew all about it and were opposed to it, thinking it was “competition” with the Boston edition. (It wasn’t “competition” at all, since Vladimir kept this book in print for a good five years before the Boston edition was ready.) I suppose we’ll have to accept that Fr. P. “forgot” about it, but it still seems



strange. And that they don't want our books makes us sad—we have freely distributed their books and had hoped that they would want to give our books to monks and pilgrims. Years ago, when the monastery was friendly to us, it was Fr. Ephraim himself who had suggested that we “exchange” publications and handicrafts, but now our publications are out of favor. (Fr. Ephraim politely suggested that we “exchange” with St. Mark's bookstore, but that would be a purely commercial exchange which isn't what we asked about; they just don't want our books.)

From this correspondence it has only become more obvious that Fr. P. does not much approve of our publications, and is somehow going on a different path. I think it is simply the “party line” that is to blame—we do not follow it and do not intend to follow it, and this is why Fr. P. is dissatisfied with us.

What this means for the future, I don't know. May God preserve us! We wish to be friends with everyone who is struggling for true Orthodoxy, but the “spirit” coming from Fr. P. seems to be different from that of the humble strugglers we know, both in the Russian and Greek Churches. We've tried gently to communicate some of this to Fr. P. and Fr. N.—but up to now they have only replied with their “correctness,” and have indicated no desire to be more humble about their pretensions.

Please pray for us. We sense that the problem with Fr. P., is part of the much larger problem of church politics which has such disastrous results nowadays. We pray for Fr. P. and sincerely hope that he can have a humbler approach to church affairs, but we have little hope, since things have already gone so far. We have recently written a letter to Fr. Nektas also, complaining about Fr. Lev's latest Tlinget Herald, which was outrageous. This kind of thing cannot go on for long!

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim

P.s. Please do not show this letter to Fr. P.—we know it would go in our “file” and would only be used against us. Sad—but true, I fear.