



289. June 2/15,1980 New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

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Date : October 10, 2016

St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood
Platina, California 96076

AN OPEN LETTER TO FATHER NEKETAS PALASSIS

Dear Father Neketas,

Christ is in our midst!

I wish to speak a word to you from the heart, and at the same time to explain to you and others why I feel unable to come to your Seattle conference next month.

Of late, it seems, you have published some words against our publications and other similar publications in our Russian Church Abroad. First it was the insulting, offensive series of articles on life after death, which ended so badly for the author, who is now forbidden by our bishops to publish and give lectures; in these articles all of us who have tried to present the Orthodox teaching on this subject have been assigned to the ranks of heretics, blasphemers, and the like. You will have to excuse me if, seeing these articles, I (together with quite a few others) had serious misgivings about coming and speaking at your conference. I want no fight with anyone, but I hope you can understand that it is not a pleasant thing to go where one is distrusted, liable to be insulted, and where certain ordinary topics (like life after death) have suddenly become “controversial” because of such immature attacks on them.

For the sake of church harmony and peace, I myself went to visit you in Seattle a few weeks ago. On this visit, among other things, I told you how deeply Father Dimitry Dudko speaks to Orthodox Russians—and Americans too, for that matter; I have really met no Orthodox person who has read him seriously and sympathetically who has not been deeply moved by his Orthodox message for all of us today. And now, just a week or two after my visit, you have published a new attack, consigning Father Dimitry in effect to the ranks of the heretics and calling us who have printed about and defended him “unprincipled and irresponsible” and tellers of “outright fibs” (that is, lies) about him (p. 14, *Orthodox Christian Witness*, May 12/25). The specific quotations that are attacked in this article are from *The Orthodox Word* and *Nikodemos*, but *Orthodox Russia* and other periodicals in our Church have made similar defenses of Father Dimitry. These are serious accusations against members of one and the same Russian Church Abroad, and the anonymous author should certainly be identified and made responsible for his words.



This new attack is uncharitable in the extreme, both to Father Dimitry and to us who have supported him. And how unfair and inaccurate it is! The author of the article has selected a few statements made by Father Dimitry, but has passed over other statements which show him in a much more favorable light with regard to the question of ecumenism and the Russian jurisdictions (after he was better informed about these things by sympathetic people living abroad); he does not mention that, concerning the Catacomb Church, Father Dimitry has said nothing different from what some members of that Church themselves have said in recent years, and his words do not at all have the evil intent the author reads into them: he has not tried to understand what Father Dimitry is really trying to say in the statements that are criticized (they are not statements about “ecclesiology” at all, but warnings to his listeners not to make Orthodoxy into a “sect”—a warning which I believe you yourself should take to heart); he has not covered such shortcomings as Father Dimitry does have with love and sympathy, he has entirely missed the point of Father Dimitry’s message in his haste to “catch” him in an error and discredit him as an Orthodox spokesman, and thereby also to brand us who defend him as unprincipled and irresponsible liars and opportunists, as though the reason we speak about Father Dimitry is in order to gain glory from this “celebrity,” as the article calls him.

I deeply feel that it is terribly wrong, that it is a crime against Orthodoxy, for you to print such attacks, for you to grieve and insult your fellow Orthodox Christians so needlessly and without foundation!

You are not the only one to rise up against Father Dimitry; the Russian press also has its detractors of him, some going so far as to suspect him of being a KGB agent. Father Dimitry himself suffers immeasurably from these slanders and criticisms. Let me quote for you what he has written about his critics abroad, in a recent letter which describes his “sleepless nights”:

“You are bold to criticize us without seeing what is what, and not knowing our circumstances... Is it not time to learn to understand each other, to help each other, to rejoice for each other?... Russia is perishing, the whole world is perishing, protecting itself behind a false prosperity; and we hinder each other from doing the work of God... The people for whom I have decided to give over my whole life have suddenly begun to poison me. ? Lord, forgive them!... Help me to bear this very heavy cross!”

With all my heart I hope that you will learn from courageous Orthodox pastors like Father Dimitry and cease trying to “catch” them for phrases which may (or may not) be in error. Surely in your own heart—if you have read his writings with any kind of sympathy—you know that he is not an “ecumenist,” and any errors he may make in his writings come solely from his simplicity.

It is true that, at the present time, we clergy of the Russian Church Abroad could not concelebrate with Father Dimitry, but our unity with him in the faith is much deeper than this. As Father Dimitry himself has well said, our deeper unity is best expressed today (owing to the enslavement of the Moscow Patriarchate) by our external disunity, but this does not prevent us from being true



brothers in the Orthodox faith and learning from and supporting each other. This is why our bishops have decreed that Father Dimitry and other imprisoned for the Orthodox faith in the USSR should be remembered by name at the Proskomedia.

I myself would love to speak to the Orthodox faithful on the message of Father Dimitry Dudko, which is so needed now by us all. But I could not do this now in Seattle, because this subject too has become “controversial,” the air has been “poisoned,” and whatever I say will be discounted and undermined. Anyone who trusts your publications will surely suspect me of being an “ecumenist” myself if I dared to defend him. Forgive me, but I just cannot take part in your conference. The struggle for salvation and preaching the Orthodox Gospel in today's world is difficult enough without having to suffer obstacles from one's own brothers in Christ.

We are living in a time of world-wide spiritual crisis, when the best people in the West are beginning to wake up to the truth of Orthodoxy and are coming to drink of its living waters. We have the common task of feeding the Orthodox flocks, not attacking the shepherds who really care for the flock, as Father Dimitry does. In such a time, you should not be occupying yourself with needless and unfair accusations, nor with uncharitable deductions about the views of others or with legalistic “inescapable conclusions” about the Russian jurisdictions, such as you have published in your latest attack (p. 17); any of the bishops or theologians of our Church could have told you how over-simplified and false these “conclusions” are. I think that in your haste to prove how “correct” you yourself are, you are losing sight of the bigger picture of Orthodoxy in today's world and are pushing yourself into a deadend, cut off from some of the most positive and genuine manifestations of Orthodoxy today.

May you be able to open your heart to what our bishops and the suffering Orthodox people in Russia and abroad can teach you. Then we will all rejoice and be one with you.

With love in Christ,
[signed] Unworthy Hieromonk Herman
Hieromonk Herman
Superior, St. Herman of Alaska Monastery