



292. July 19/Aug. 1, 1980 St. Seraphim of Sarov

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear John [Hudanish],

May the blessing of the Lord be with you.

It was good to hear from you at such length. I will answer your questions as well as I can in the little time I have:

Regarding Dr. [Stephen] Reynolds: no, we had not invited him to speak at our Pilgrimage nor did we put him on the program. Our talks are on practical Orthodoxy rather than on an academic level and he would be out of place as a speaker.

The One Thing Needful was printed privately (and rather expensively)—I think its \$8 per small volume), but we will be reprinting it soon at a more accessible price.

I was glad to hear of your reconciliation with Fr. George and your receiving of the Holy Gifts. It goes without saying that to lead a fruitful Christian life you should be reconciled with everyone for whom you may have any bad feelings.

However, in connection with the recent “open letters” I would caution you not to accept all that Frs. George and Nektas tell you about the Church situation. The present tension between us is indeed a deep one and is over the basic point (as Bishop Nektary explained it to us two days ago): These and other Greek priests have come to our Russian Church Abroad thinking they will teach our bishops and people what Orthodoxy is. On a number of points their interpretations are not in harmony with those of our bishops and theologians; this is bad enough, but they further insist that the views of our Russian Church Abroad are wrong and must be corrected. This is arrogant, proud, and can have no possible outcome but schism, for which Fr. Nektas has been preparing his people for some years now (“When the crunch comes and we have to separate from the Russians”). If you trust their interpretations of the Orthodox Church situation today, you will be cut off from the rest of us in the Russian Church Abroad and will end in an Orthodox “sect” with them. If you will ask Vladika Nektary’s frank opinion about this subject, I think you will get the same answer (if he will speak frankly to you).

Regarding your more specific questions:

1. Has Deacon Lev been forbidden to preach and publish? This is what we were informed by our two bishops by word of mouth. Both bishops thanked Fr. Herman for his “open letter” without



mentioning that it was inaccurate (although now Bishop Nektary says he isn't sure of the details, since he wasn't at the Synod himself), and Bishop Laurus of Jordanville, in his own letter of thanks to Fr. Herman, said that "your open letter is correct, both in content and tone? Whether the original decision of the bishops was toned down, or whether the prohibition concerns only the subject of life after death, I cannot say. I do know that the bishops were extremely upset with Fr. Lev's articles and laid a prohibition of some kind on him because of them. Fr. George Macris has written Fr. Herman that the letter from the Synod to Fr. Lev accused Fr. Lev of "heresy" in his articles and took "our side" entirely, for which Fr. George blames us. We have not seen this letter from the Synod, but the petition to the Synod to discuss this question came not from us but from another priest quite independently, and the hostility of the bishops to Fr. Lev's articles has nothing to do with us. These articles, by the way, were really quite outrageous, both in content and tone, and scandalized many (one bishop travelled to San Francisco and told our Archbishop Anthony that he has a "heretic" publishing in his diocese), and it was certainly quite right for the Synod to prohibit their continuation. I have sent you separately our new book, *The Soul After Death*, where the last appendix constitutes my own "Answer" to Deacon Lev on the issues involved there. That Fr. Nektas offers not one word of apology for printing these articles (at least for their crude and disrespectful tone if not for their content) seems to indicate the depth of the hostility he has for what he regards as the "Russian" teaching on these questions (a teaching which, however, is actually almost entirely derived from Greek sources).

2. Is Fr. Dimitry Dudko an ecumenist or not? This is a "red herring" if there ever was one. Call someone an "ecumenist," and say it loud enough, and you will frighten people away for sure! I'm enclosing Fr. Roman Lukianov's answer to Fr. Nektas and Fr. George on this question. Read Fr. Dimitry's books and articles yourself and surely you won't be able to accuse him of this.

But the real source of disagreement between Seattle-Boston and the rest of us ("Platina" is only a small part of the other side) is not particular opinions on whether Fr. Dimitry is an ecumenist—it is the tone with which they push their opinions, spreading distrust and suspicion of everyone but their own group, indulging in name-calling and innuendo, cleverly telling only half the truth to make themselves look better. For example, Fr. Nektas' "open letter" clings to a technical point: was Deacon Lev forbidden to speak on all subjects or not? But he does not tell the truth that he was indeed forbidden to speak at least on life after death. This is dishonesty, not telling the truth; but in their eyes it is justified because the purpose of the letter is not to tell the whole truth, but to discredit Fr. Herman. Fr. Nektas' letter asks the question: does Fr. Herman perhaps believe that Roman Catholics have grace? He has nothing to base this on (the evidence against it in numerous statements in *The Orthodox Word* is clear enough)—but his purpose is not to tell the truth, but to place doubts in his readers about Fr. Herman. Again, in Fr. Nektas' letter one cannot but note the glee with which he reports Fr. Dimitry's "retraction." Simple decency would have dictated a refusal to take advantage of this unfortunate event, which should cause us to pray for and sympathize with this poor man, apparently broken in his sense of mission (but not in his Christianity). But not only does he gloat over it, he deliberately rubs it in by quoting some Western news services (which at times can be so notoriously insensitive and inaccurate, as Fr. Nektas surely knows) who said Fr.



Dimitry was “cheerful” and the like. This is playing dirty; and when one considers that Fr. Nektas omitted quoting other Western news reports which said just the opposite—that Fr. Dimitry was obviously “nervous and ill at ease”—it again adds up to dishonesty: the aim is not to tell the truth, but to discredit Fr. Dimitry. Such innuendo and half-truth should have no part in the Church, in polemics and otherwise.

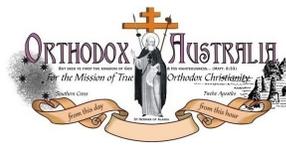
As for name-calling, Fr. Nektas in his open letter defends his statement that the editors of *The Orthodox Word* and *Nikodemos* are “unprincipled and irresponsible” for stating that Fr. Dimitry is well-disposed to the Catacomb Church and that he is not an ecumenist. Honest people do not use words like “unprincipled and irresponsible” with regard to differences of opinion like this; their intent is only to discredit, not to speak the truth.

Fr. George Macris, in his recent letter to Fr. Herman, has now called him an “ecumenist” also (or rather, someone with the “venom of ecumenism” in him). This would be ludicrous if it were not so tragic. These people are forming a sect which is far from the spirit of Orthodoxy which brought me, you, and many others to the Church. It is the “political expediency” of this sect which blinds them to the dishonesty and unfairness of their accusations and condemnations of others.

Both of our bishops blessed Fr. Herman's decision not to attend the Seattle conference. Two days ago, in a long talk with Vladika Nektary, we asked him again: was this right? He answered: it was right, and he himself would not have attended save out of obedience for the sake of “peace.” Bishop Laurus also withdrew the Jordanville speaker from the conference, although without any statement about it. Our purpose is simply to let it be known that we separate ourselves from this kind of wrong Orthodox spirit. When Fr. Nektas and others change their attitude and cease their unfair criticisms, judgments, innuendos, slanders, and this whole so-unorthodox technique which they use to spread their views—then there will be peace between us. Frankly, we have given up; they don't want peace, and they won't stop their technique. They have become too politically involved in it. I hope I'm wrong.

To touch on another point: those who regard Fr. Dimitry Dudko simply as an “enemy of the regime” have certainly missed the point about him. His words on the spiritual crisis of our times, and the need to start being Orthodox Christians right here and now, no matter what the circumstances, are a message we all need. His writings are most inspiring and helpful for us poor strugglers today, and it is tragic that many who could benefit from him may now turn away from his writings because of the “red herring” about him. As for his relation to the Moscow Patriarchate: if you don't understand it with your heart (as all our Russian clergy have indeed done), then I suppose it will have to be explained in detail. Give us time and we will try. Unfortunately, there is so much calculation and so little heart in so much of our “correct” Orthodoxy today. May God preserve us all!

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim



P.s. This is a private letter. Please do not show it to Fr. George, Fr. Nektas, or anyone close to them, or else it will be sent all over the world as some kind of evidence against me and added to the “file” on their enemies. I have obviously spoken very frankly to you in trust, and I would certainly not use this kind of language when talking to them or to a wide audience.