

## 295. Sept. 3/16, 1980 Hieromartyr Anthimus

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Date : October 10, 2016

Dear John [Hudanish],

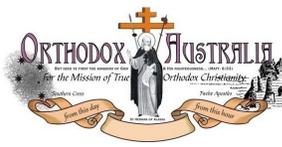
May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

A few words on a point or two of your recent letter; I was rather disappointed that you didn't appreciate Fr. Roman's letter. I read it again after reading your letter, and it's obvious to me that his letter comes from the heart and was written with suffering and compassion, and certainly with no bad feelings (he is known to be probably the closest of our Russian priests to Fr. Panteleimon, and certainly has no "anti-Greek" feelings). If there are one or two phrases you may have interpreted as "sarcastic," they are certainly outweighed by the heartfelt sincerity of the letter as a whole. In any case, you should certainly not be judging Fr. Roman for "pride," especially on the basis of a single word (and that from a person who is obviously not at home in the English language!). This temptation to make too-quick judgments of others is one into which we all fall, but that's where we have to fight our first impulses and try to correct ourselves. In actual fact Fr. Roman is a very humble, simple man, and he would never even have spoken out on such an issue if he did not feel something very wrong in the Witness attack on Fr. Dimitry Dudko. If even he speaks out, you can be sure that many of our silent bishops and priests are also disturbed (as indeed we know).

Fr. Roman uses a very good phrase in his letter (which I don't interpret as sarcastic at all): "theological microscope." That is what you are using in your reflections on Fr. Dimitry Dudko. To make him into an "ecumenist" because his Patriarch gives communion to Roman Catholics is certainly theological nit-picking.

Firstly, to give communion to Roman Catholics is surely an anti-canonical act, but in itself it does not constitute a "heresy" that deprives a whole Church of the grace of God and makes everyone in the Church a "heretic"—that is Jesuit thinking, not Orthodox. You can ask your own bishop what he thinks about that. Because we defend Fr. Dimitry does not in the least mean we defend this anti-canonical practice or approve of his Patriarchate; those are not the issues at all. Here we are in agreement with Fr. Nektas.

Secondly, this anti-canonical act is only one of many disorders in the Moscow Patriarchate, the worst of which is its acceptance of the dictation of the atheist authorities as a matter of principle (this is "Sergianism"). It is for this reason that our Church has no communion with Moscow. But our Church recognizes this as a temporary situation which will end when the Communist regime comes to an end. Until that time we refrain from judging the Church situation there; we simply stay



clear of the Moscow Patriarchate and have no communion with it.

Thirdly, our attitude towards Fr. Dimitry does not mean the acceptance of any views of his which may be mistaken, nor does it mean that we are in formal communion with him. We simply recognize him as a voice of the true Orthodox spirit which is so lacking in our world today, and even in most of our own church circles; his voice is a pledge that our lack of communion with the Moscow Patriarchate is only a temporary thing, because the Orthodoxy of someone like Fr. Dimitry is one with our own.

Fourthly, there is the question: Why does Fr. Dimitry not leave the Patriarchate and join the Catacomb Church? He has been criticized for saying he must stick with the Patriarchate because “that is what has been given us.” But did you ever think, realistically, about his alternatives?

(a) The Catacomb Church by its very nature is hidden and never reveals itself to outsiders, especially to such famous ones as Fr. Dimitry. It not only does not seek converts, it positively runs away from them, knowing the chances of being found out by KGB agents.

(b) To “join the Catacomb Church” Fr. Dimitry would surely want to meet some of its bishops and clergy and find out their real position on Church matters as opposed to hearsay opinions (would you join a Church or jurisdiction you knew only by hearsay?). This is virtually impossible under Soviet conditions. And there are many questions one would want to ask the Catacomb hierarchs before actually placing oneself under obedience to them: are the rumors that there are “sectarian” elements in their outlook true or false? Are the rumors true that they place “Russia” above “Orthodoxy”? etc. Wouldn’t you want these things cleared up before you joined such a Church? The point here is: the matter is by no means simple.

(c) Even if he could find the Catacomb Church and talk to its bishops, the decision to join it immediately puts an end to his activity, since this Church is totally illegal and all known members are instantly arrested. If you say that he should be ready to suffer this, then you should say the same thing about the clergy and laymen of the Catacomb Church—why don’t they “confess” their faith and be arrested instead of hiding in the catacombs and not making their faith available to all?

For these and other reasons it is totally unrealistic to expect Fr. Dimitry to “join the Catacomb Church” (if he did, glory to God, it would be a big message for all; but we can’t expect or demand it). This is not to say that we “recognize” the Moscow Patriarchate or deny the witness of the Catacomb Church; it is only to look at church matters in Russia realistically and compassionately. The Orthodox picture of the Russian Church situation today does not exactly correspond to the jurisdictional picture. Fr. Neketas and others, by trying to limit our view to the jurisdictional picture, and prove everyone a “heretic” who doesn’t belong to our jurisdiction, in my opinion are doing a disservice to the Orthodox Church and leading people in the direction of a sectarian outlook, away from the Orthodox outlook.



There are other aspects I could discuss, but no time for now. I will be seeing you soon.

With love in Christ,

P.s. I have just learned, from a seemingly reliable source, that one of the chief reasons Metr. Nikodim was “demoted” in the hierarchy of the Soviet Church in the early 1970’s (the official reason was his health), was precisely because he had given communion to Roman Catholics in Rome at the Russicum, and the conservative hierarchs of the Patriarchate had enough courage to protest against it. This “proves” nothing, of course, but it certainly shows that church life in Russia is by no means simple and our judgments about it should take into consideration the many facets of it and not just the narrow letter of the law.

Another thought: all these arguments pro and con Fr. Dimitry would be so unnecessary if only people would read his books with an open heart. His words are such a breath of fresh air for people today, especially (I think) people like you who find it difficult to read other basic books like Unseen Warfare—he speaks right to the heart of today’s people, both in Russia and outside. We had hoped to be able to print a translation of his Sunday Talks (printed in Russian by Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal), but Vladika tells us that he is having a translation printed in Washington. You should get it and read it.