



311. August 13/26, 1981 Apodosis of Transfiguration

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Dr. Johnstone.

May the blessing of the Lord be with you!

Thank you for your letter of August 10/23 and the copy of your letter to Metropolitan Philaret. We do appreciate your sending it.

I am sad to hear that you find *The Orthodox Word*, no. 96 so greatly disturbing. I honestly think the content of the issue does not warrant such a strong reaction. The real issue involved is surely no more than the propriety of presenting as an Orthodox model a priest who was, after all, a member of the Soviet Church, with which we have no communion (and with which, as our issue 96 states quite clearly, we should have no communion).

Articles on Archimandrite Tavrion, Fr. Dimitry Dudko, and other courageous priests of the Soviet Church have appeared for several years in the Russian-language church periodicals published in Jordanville, and there has been an outcry in our Church; it is generally understood that this is a matter of personal choice, and those who would prefer to keep the "strict line" and not even mention such priests have not shown any particular disturbance when others (such as ourselves) have considered the words and actions of these priests as having a positive value for us in the West. Our readers, judging from our mail, have generally agreed with us in this. The reason there has been no outcry, I think, is quite simply because our disagreement over the small question of propriety is outweighed by our much greater agreement on the nature of the Church, the stand of our Russian Church Outside of Russia, etc.

The outcry and the disturbance come, rather, from converts to our Church like yourself who, it would seem, find their disagreement to be much deeper. This disagreement may be seen in some of the value judgments you make in your letter to the Metropolitan: a bishop in the Soviet Church is a "pseudo-bishop," "Soviet bishops are no bishops." Your disagreement with us, therefore, is a deep one over ecclesiology; evidently you agree with Fr. Michael Azkoul who recently stated (*Orthodox Christian Witness*, Aug, 10/23) that "heresy has negated these ancient Sees. There is no 'church,' hence no Mysteries" in the Churches of Moscow and Constantinople.

I hope you are aware that our Russian Church Outside of Russia has never taught and does not now teach this; this is an opinion which has been introduced into our midst by some converts who think themselves wiser than our bishops. I am sorry that you seem not to see the obvious meaning of our Church's not having communion with the Soviet Church: that way we stay free of politics



and do not bind ourselves to bishops who are not free and who are often forced to betray the truth. But to state that this Church has no grace is a presumption our bishops have never dared to make. This view, in my opinion, is not at all the result of a sound or strict ecclesiology, but is the result of a too-strict logic (a typical disease of our Western mentality) being applied where it does not fit. I do think that the comfortableness of our Western life (in particular, the absence of the agonizing choices that sometimes present themselves to clergy in Russia) only helps one to be “strictly logical” without seeing the whole context of church life in Soviet Russia. I believe the statement on the church situation in the “Catacomb Epistle” printed in our same issue no. 96 says nicely what needs to be said on this subject, and I would encourage you to study it more closely, without hastening to think that it contradicts itself; it sets forth the very position of our Russian Church Abroad: no communion with the Soviet Patriarchate, but no statement about “lack of grace,” and compassion for those who have no other source of church life. This is surely the position of our Metropolitan Philaret, who in sending us the material on Archimandrite Tavrion for publication was not in the least inconsistent with his strict stand against the Soviet bishops.

Can't we agree on this much and let our disagreements be over small points? If not, I fear the schism that is brewing in our midst on the part of those who really think they “know better” than our bishops. I can already see in Fr. Michael's sermon in Orthodox Christian Witness the beginnings of exaggerations which can serve to accelerate a schism: certainly none of us who admire Fr. Tavrion think that he attempted, or that one can, “join the Moscow church in order to save it”; we have no “enthusiasm for the Moscow church” (I regard that as simple slander); we are not engaging in any kind of “muddled thinking,” “twaddle,” or “sophistry”—but the use of such language certainly shows that he is not well disposed to understand the position of Metropolitan Philaret and the rest of us.

I pray that, since you are so interested in this question, you will not be satisfied with a superficial answer, and will not press “logical deductions” that take the place of real ecclesiology, but will study the question more deeply in the statements of our Russian bishops (both of the Catacomb Church and the Russian Church Abroad—see, for example, our bishops' statements in *The Orthodox Word*, 1976, no. 5, pp. 160-166). I think you will find that the position of our bishops has not changed at all; rather, what has been uncovered is that you (and those who think like you) were not of one mind with our bishops in the past, and you are only now finding this out. I pray that you will find that you can be of one mind with our bishops; their attitude is really just about the only sound one in the Orthodox world today, even if it is not always easy to “define” it to our very Western, modern minds.

Please forgive me if anything I have said here has in any way offended you; I have certainly not intended to do so, and hope that there will be continued peace between us all in the Russian Church Abroad. Please pray for us all.

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim