



318. Sept. 25/Oct. 8, 1981B St. Sergius of Radonezh

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Dear Father Demetrios,

CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST!

I send you greetings on the feast of St. Sergius. We had Liturgy today and a procession outdoors to bless two new crosses erected in our wilderness. Glory be to God that we still have such freedom!

I presume by now you've received the decree of the Synod on the "Elder Tavrion" dispute. We agree 100% with it and only rejoice that the bishops have finally made clear some things which our Church has always believed, but because they weren't necessarily written down somewhere a few people have disputed them. Please note that it is the Metropolitan and bishops themselves who raise the question of the danger of "schism" with regard to those who are criticizing their Metropolitan. This is by no means a product of imagination on our part, but indeed a very real danger that faces us, and now that the bishops have dared use the word I hope there will be an awakening and sobering up on the part of those who are overly critical.

In general, I think you underestimate the gravity of what is happening: it is by ;; means a matter of jealousy between priests or monasteries (such things, it is true, exist, but they are secondary). The first question is one of a difference in the whole approach to the Orthodox Church, our witness today, our compassion for those striving to regain a lost or damaged Orthodoxy, etc. One group in our Church (mostly Greeks and converts) wants to define this question so narrowly that our Orthodoxy becomes almost a sect, and "we are the only pure ones left"; the other group, led by our Metropolitan and bishops, wants to keep the same open and loving approach we have had for sixty years and does not want to change it. This is why there are such bitter reactions on the part of those who do want to change and narrow our conception of Orthodoxy.

You think that our Orthodox Word has become more "controversial" in recent years? But really, try to look objectively (leaving aside the opinions of some people on the East Coast) at our issues of past years and our issues of today: don't you see that our tone has in fact become more rather than less meek than it used to be? This is the only difference, and it is a difference that has come about because our bishops have told us that they prefer this approach.

In actual fact, our articles on Elder Tavrion were not in themselves controversial at all—we simply presented the material which Metropolitan Philaret deliberately sent us with instructions to translate and print it. Our own editorial comments were intended to show how it is possible to have a strict



attitude towards the Soviet Church and still be sympathetic to a real struggler like Elder Tavrion. The “controversy” erupted only when some people insisted on imposing their legalistic definitions of the church situation upon this phenomenon. Bishop Gregory has just written us and told how tired he is trying to combat the very Western idea of the Church which the critics of the Metropolitan are expressing—this is our problem.

And do you really think that we have changed in recent years over The Orthodox Word of old? Except for the meekening of our tone, at the request of our bishops, we have not changed at all. Read The Orthodox Word for 1971: we called Boris Talantov an “Orthodox Confessor” (a name we have not applied to Fr. Dimitry Dudko or Elder Tavrion), despite the fact that Talantov called the Catacomb Church a “sect”—we saw that the latter was a secondary aspect of his teaching, and the primary one was his oneness with our Church in his anti-Sergianism. And all those who are now calling us names welcomed this article on Talantov; Fr. Neketas in Seattle even reprinted part of it. Read our Orthodox Word even in 1965: there we presented the monks of Pochaev and various other members of the Soviet Church in the most sympathetic light, and no one protested.

Do you want to know where the difference actually is, in my opinion? Those who are now criticizing us so strongly have themselves changed: now they wish to declare the Moscow Patriarchate as without grace (the recent articles by Fr. Michael Azkoul and Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Orthodox Christian Witness are the first that I know of in the past 13 years where this position is set forth so clearly), and they wish to cut off all active sympathy for the Moscow Patriarchate priests and laymen, thus contradicting their own position of ten years ago.

I pray that you will be able to look at this whole situation objectively, and resist the pressures which the “pressure group” on the East Coast is trying to apply. Our bishops need the active support of us priests in defending their wise and sober approach. The only “crime” of our Brotherhood is that we have openly defended this approach. Read the Synods decree (it is in the new issue of Orthodox America, is supposed to be printed in all of our periodicals) and I think you will agree.

If you do have influence with Holy Transfiguration Monastery, tell them we would like to send them (as before) 30 or more copies of Orthodox Word, which should be freely given to all brothers who want it—we are being censured there!

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim