

February 19/March 4, 1978

Dear Vladika Laurus,

Your blessing, please!

With reverence I kiss your hand and ask for your holy prayers.

Thank you for your Nativity greetings and your reply to my letter. While, on the one hand, I do appreciate your remarks concerning the fact that you understand my concern over the erosion of faith in the Greek Archdiocese, on the other hand I cannot in good conscience hide my grief over the intent and meaning of your other remarks.

I am very grieved, Vladika, because your remarks verify a suspicion that I have had since our first meeting in San Francisco some eight years ago during the glorification of St. Herman of Alaska. At the time, you informed me about the existence of Bishop Peter Asitifides -- a fact which I already knew -- and wondered why I was not under him. Back in Seattle, when I questioned the St. Nicholas choir director, G. Kalfov, as to why we weren't listed in the 1969 and 1970 Holy Trinity Calendar, I was told that the "bishops" told him we were to be placed under Greek bishops and for this reason were not included in the yearbook. I was hurt by his statement and your remark since our parish had been under the Synod for a few years already, and I felt as if these remarks meant that we were not wanted. I told my thoughts to Fr. Panteleimon during his subsequent visit to Seattle, and he assured me that this was not the case, rather that your remark was prompted by a personal friendship with Bishop Peter, and not to pay any attention to it.

As the years went by and the request of our parish for an antimension and holy Myron went unheeded, again and again I remembered your remark and expressed my suspicion to the other clergy of Greek extraction in our Synod. Fr. Panteleimon quieted me down every time, assuring me of the love and bond that we had in the Synod. Archbishop Anthony and Bishop Nektary repeatedly assured us that our love and respect was indeed reciprocal. Fr. Panagiotes Carras would also point out the great understanding and support that he and his parish found from Archbishop Vitaly, and would tell me that I am an alarmist.

Then, after ten years of being in the Synod, I am informed that our missionary efforts and our very existence is, at the least, embarrassing for one of our bishops, if not annoying, and that Your Grace remarked in your complaint against us to our Diocesan bishop "that now that we want to have better relations with the Greek Archdiocese (Constantinople)" our publication is presenting difficulties.

The information relayed to me by Fr. Paul by no fault of his own was so vague and confused and of such generalities, that I did not know exactly what it was that Your Grace was protesting and to what I should make answer. This is not surprising since it was third or fourth hand by the time that it reached me. For this reason I wrote to you directly.

Now in your reply, you specify the newsletter of our parish of 8/21 August, in which you see that we direct our attention "to the clergy of the Greek Archdiocese and call upon them to revolt against the Archdiocese." This article, to which I wrote the introduction, was written and signed by Fr. George Macris of our Portland, Oregon, mission. Fr. George is well known for his irenic and well-mannered way of writing, both in his personal correspondence and in his articles. He writes with a finesse and well-thought-out, calm manner, which I lack, appealing to the intelligence of his readers, rather than to their emotions. How, therefore, his article can be construed as a "call to revolt against the Archdiocese" is beyond us. What he called to the attention of the clergy of the Greek Archdiocese was the fact of the "corrosion of the Faith," as Your Grace so well put it, and the serious consequences that have already transpired. This leaves no other course of action from a Scriptural and patristic point of view than to separate oneself from ungodliness and error.

Yet in your estimation, Vladika, we should have remained in the Greek Archdiocese and waged a battle "from within." This is more easily said than done. I know only too well from experience. I tried this for a number of years and only ended up going to the hospital twice due to tensions and the nervous condition that resulted. When one's bishop is the cause of one's concern and protest, and the bishop refuses to listen, but rather in Papal fashion abuses his authority in order to silence the protest, how then can one fight "from within"? You tell me, Vladika, to follow the example of the two priests who protested from within. This is a very good example of what I have just said. What has been the outcome of their protest? Without any canonical basis, they have been put under indefinite interdict -- they are indefinitely suspended -- until they "repent" for having stood up for the Faith and dared to question the actions and statements of the Archbishop. Subsequently, they are deprived of an income, thrown out of the parish house into the street, and stigmatized as being insolent and trouble-makers. Does this not remind one of the course of action taken by the Soviet hierarchs under similar circumstances in the "free" society of the Soviet Union?

But aside from the uncanonical and unjust action taken by these apostate bishops, is remaining in communion with them and protesting from within the course of action that is prescribed by the Scriptures and the canons? Our Saviour teaches us that if one errs and does not accept the correction of two or three witnesses, then he should be taken to the Church, and if he refuses to accept the Church, then he should be esteemed by us as a publican and heathen man, i.e., we should have no communion or association with him. In the same line of thought, the holy Apostle commands us after we have admonished a heretical man once and twice to have nothing to do with him. The Apostle of love tells us not even to greet him. And these apostate bishops have been admonished by a whole score of brother Orthodox bishops, abbots and monastics of the Holy Mountain, by clergy and faithful, not once and twice only, but again and again over the past ten years, "and as iniquitous Judas they wished not to take heed." How can the Orthodox, therefore, continue to be in communion with them, because on the basis of the above injunctions of our Saviour and the Apostles and the canons of the Church, there is no other course of action to take than to break communion with them and seek out Orthodox bishops. This is the example bequeathed us by our Orthodox forefathers during the times of the Arians, Nes-

torians, Monophysites, Iconoclast, the papal insurrection, the false unions of Lyons, Florence, Brest, etc., etc., down to our day. This is exactly what the 15th Canon of the 1st-2nd Synod of Constantinople enjoins us, saying, "But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by the Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox. For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church." We have separated ourselves from these false bishops because they teach heresy with "bared heads" -- because they contradict the Church -- because they invent doctrines in opposition to the dogmas proclaimed in council by the Church, because they trample underfoot the canons and regulations of the Church. They refuse to listen to the Church, they no longer "sit in the seat of Moses," they no longer preach the kerygma of the Apostles and Fathers; consequently, they have become "heathen and publicans," and a "stranger's voice" we shall not follow, but rather flee from it as from a deadly plague.

If the reasons, Vladika, were administrative, moral, or ethical, we would be obliged to remain and fight from "within" as you write. When we were received by the Synod, it was ascertained that it was not for these reasons but because Athenagoras and Iakovos were preaching heresy. The Apostle does not command us "an immoral man after the first and second admonition reject," but rather, "a man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject." Heresy, Vladika, is like a raging, destructive fire. When a house is on fire, we don't say to the occupants, "Don't come out. Stay in the house; by all means stay and fight the fire from within." Yet, this is what you are telling us that we should have done, and what we should be telling those that are still in the burning house to do. Stay and fight from within.

Is this not the same argument used by the ecumenists when those who are in heresy show an inclination to join the Church? Was this not the same answer given by a bishop of the Greek Archdiocese last summer to the Anglicans that were disturbed by the ordination of women to the priesthood and other innovations? (See *Orthodox Witness*, April 18/May 1, 1977.)

But then again, if one begins to use such an argument, cannot this be turned right around and directed to us all that are in the Synod? On what basis do the bishops and faithful justify themselves for not being in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate? "World Orthodoxy" recognizes it as the legal and official Church of Russia. If, then, it is a canonical Orthodox Church, how do we justify ourselves in not being in communion with it? If our differences with the Moscow Patriarchate are not matters of Faith but of a political and administrative nature, how then can we justify our position? Why are you not a bishop of the Moscow Patriarchate, Vladika, preserving your freedom and integrity and fighting to correct things "from within"? Is this not the argument used by Archbishops Basil Krivosheine and Anthony Bloom to justify their communion with the Moscow Patriar-

chate? If the reasons, Vladika, are not dogmatic and of prime importance, then the argument posed by Metropolitan Sergius to those of the bishops who broke communion with him is valid, saying, "Since we are neither in schism, nor in heresy, having preserved the dogmas, rites, canons, and customs of the Orthodox Church, how can you justify breaking communion with us?" We have studied well the arguments of some of the confessing bishops and on what basis they were not in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, yet not denying its legality. At that early date, over 50 years ago, and in the midst of such confusion, they may have had a point, but as things began to become clearer and the policy of Sergius became more and more evident, it is not possible to maintain such a position. In his day, St. Theodore the Studite broke communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople in protest over an illegal marriage of the Palace, while not denying the legality of the Patriarchate. When the matter was cleared up, he resumed communion with the Patriarch. The whole matter was of short duration (several years), and taking into account the nature of the offense and having hope that it would be corrected, he ceased to commemorate the Patriarch, but did not deny that the Patriarchate of Constantinople represented the Church of Christ. A little later, though, when the Iconoclast heresy broke out, then he broke with the Patriarchate, denying that it had any legal and canonical status any longer, or that it represented the truth. He looked upon it as a false Church, a congregation of "atheists and heathens," as the Orthodox referred to the Iconoclasts.

We separated ourselves, dear Vladika, from the Church of Constantinople because of heresy and ungodliness, and for no other reason, just as our forefathers separated themselves from the same Church because of the Christological heresies of Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism, and later because of Iconoclasm and Uniatism. So also today, because of the ecclesiological heresy of Ecumenism and Syncretism, we have broken every and all communion with the same Church. And in doing so, it is for the same reason that we did not turn to Moscow, because Moscow is a false Church, not preaching Christianity, but rather a lie.

Thus, if anyone asks us why we are not in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, we answer directly and clearly -- because it does not represent the Orthodox Church in Russia. It is rather the Soviet Church of the Soviet Union, a product of the atheists like the Living Church before it. It preaches not Christianity but Marxism, Ecumenism, and a host of other heresies. Overturning the teachings and canons of the church, it proclaims synodically among other things that it is permissible for the Orthodox to give communion to those outside the Church.

We ask you, Vladika, can there be such a thing as a Christian Marxist? The Moscow Patriarchate says yes, and is trying to convince everyone that not only can one be a Christian Marxist but that everyone should be just that -- a Marxist Christian. Page after page of the Moscow Patriarchate *Journal*, as well as its hierarchs abroad, preach Marxist Christianity, given any and every occasion. Boris Talantov who died in prison writes concerning Metropolitan Nicodim of Leningrad and those like him, "Metropolitan Nicodim is betraying the Church not out of fear, but because he believes in what he is undertaking."

But we say that this is an impossibility -- a great error and deception, a monstrous lie. Either one is a Christian or a Marxist, a believer or an unbeliever, a Christian or a theomachist, a member of the Church or a Satanist, a worshiper of Christ or an idolater -- but not both -- one excludes the other by necessity. For this reason we cannot be in communion with the Soviet Church, because it is not the Church of Christ, it does not preach the truth but rather ungodliness.

Yet, Vladika, when you ask us to remain in communion with the Greek Archdiocese and fight from within, you are asking us to do a similar thing which cannot be done, that is, to be "Orthodox heretics." If there cannot be a Marxist Christianity, then by the same reasoning there cannot be a heretical Orthodoxy. Either one is an Orthodox or a heretic; one cannot be both. And inasmuch as it is impossible for Your Grace to be a bishop of the Soviet Church, by so much and even more so, is it impossible for us to be in communion with heresy and remain Orthodox. Constantinople, Vladika, through many and various innovations beginning with the calendar reform, through the lifting of the Anathemas of 1054, through the synodical approbation of the blasphemous Thyateira Confession, through the preaching of the heresy of Ecumenism, in word and deed is in heresy, and there can be no communion whatsoever between the Orthodox and this once venerable see of Christianity. Situations can change for the better, although of late they have been changing only for the worse in all realms, ecclesiastical, political, economical. Moscow and Constantinople could one day repent and return to rightly dividing the word of Truth. We both hope and pray for this, but until such a day comes, we can have no communion with them. Your Grace seems not to understand this, or rather, so your letter seemingly implies.

You counsel us in your letter, Vladika, that "it is necessary to fight against corrosion of the faith and it is necessary to make a stand for its purity, but I consider that that should be done from within as your brothers are doing, and not by hiding behind us." With what is written above, I have tried to demonstrate to Your Grace how this is impossible, and the opposite of what our Saviour and the Apostles and Fathers teach us. But how grieved we are, Vladika, that you look upon us as people who are hiding behind the Synod. He hides who is an evil-doer, but we have done no evil. He hides who is a fugitive, but we are not running away from the law. Rather we have come out to the forefront to contest for our Faith. My greatest joy when I came to the synod was that I would be able at long last to preach the gospel of truth, our Holy Faith, with the blessing of our hierarchs, and no longer with impediments. In order to be honorable with the Faith, we have left our positions and salaries in the Greek Archdiocese, and hearkening to the voice of our Saviour have denied parents and kinsfolk, families and properties and ourselves, espousing voluntary poverty and reproach for righteousness' sake. Not only we the clergy have taken such serious steps, but our flocks in following us have ostracized themselves, lost family and social contacts, and in many instances lost business partnerships involving many thousands of dollars. The Greek Consul will not validate documents for us and inheritance and properties in Greece are contested simply because people belong to our parish. It would have been wiser (according to the world) for them to have stayed and fought "from within." We have refused to be called the sons of these new Pharaohs, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. By faith we have forsaken Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king for we endure as seeing Him Who is invisible."

Fr. George Macris of Portland, Oregon, the author of the bulletin which you protested, left behind an \$18,000 annual salary, health insurance, pension, and other benefits, a lovely parish home, social contacts and friends, so that he might join the Synod. He was a very successful priest of the Greek Archdiocese, the dean of all the Greek clergy of the Northwest, a member of the Spiritual Court, and the pastor of one of the largest parishes of the Archdiocese. He was the Archiepiscopal Deputy (Archieratikos Epitropos, in all actuality with the authority of a choroepiscopos) for the whole Northwest. Yet he sacrificed all this and more for the Faith. Since he left the Archdiocese, he has been unable to find work, and his job applications have been rejected because we suspect his successor has maligned him. This has been a heavy cross for himself, his presvytera and their five children, but they carry it willingly. Both Fr. Panagiotis Carras and myself built new churches in the Greek Archdiocese before we left -- St. Demetrios in Toronto and St. Demetrios in Seattle. We headed large parishes with many benefits. Yet we gave it all up to be at peace with our conscience. Fr. Anthony Gavalas has never received any stipend in the form of a salary for his priestly services. He has been working all these years and supporting his lovely family. In leaving the Archdiocese, we have not gained any monetary benefits, rather we have lost much. My successor at St. Demetrios receives \$24,000 a year; the parish gave him \$15,000 toward the purchase of his own home; he is given a new car each year; and we could go on. In coming to the Synod, we have not sought positions and advancements, rather we have left positions and advancements; should we ever choose to return, we would be greatly rewarded. We have had opportunities to return to the Greek Archdiocese, and Metropolitan Theodosius as Bishop of Alaska offered me his personal protection -- we rejected these offers to remain in the Synod. The Greek Archdiocese would give anything to have our Monastery and Convent in Boston join them. From time to time, they have made attempts to convince Fr. Panteleimon and the fathers to do so, promising all sorts of benefits. The latest attempt was just last year. Had Father Panteleimon remained with the Archdiocese, he would have been made a bishop long ago. He had such offers at the very time that he departed from them. The same is true had he joined any of the Old Calendar jurisdictions of Greece. But he does not seek such a thing. Rather he rejoices in our church order and unity under the Synod, and with the fathers that are with him was the first to give us an example of self-sacrifice and dedication to follow. The same is true for all of our other non-Russian clergy who have left other jurisdictions in order to join the Synod. They have done so out of love and conviction, sacrificing much in so doing. Truly, we have "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." We are not fugitives hiding behind anyone. We are responsible priests of the Church who contend for the Holy Faith openly and honorably.

We are also grieved, Vladika, about your comment that the impression is created that the Church Abroad is interfering in "Greek affairs" and "that we should not become involved in other peoples' affairs, especially when we have our own pressing problems." The "affairs" that we deal with in the *Orthodox Witness*, Vladika, are matters of Faith, and matters of Faith are neither "Greek affairs," nor "Russian affairs," they are not phyletic af-

fairs nor yet "other peoples' affairs." Matters of Faith are every Orthodox Christian's affair, and there is no other more "pressing problem" today for the Orthodox Christian than the defense of the Faith through the keeping of the teachings, traditions, canons and life of the Church. It is the violations against the Faith that we protest in the bulletin.

Dear Vladika, we have tried to understand the problems of our Synod and have responded to them on many occasions. It seems though that there are some who do not try to understand our situation and griefs. It is not too long ago that Your Grace sent us the protest which you printed in behalf of the Pochaev Monastery and the persecutions against it. We immediately printed it in the *Witness*. You should see the protests that we have received both from within the U.S. and from abroad, from those who accuse us of not being consistent, in that we are protesting the closing of an institution of the Soviet Patriarchate. Some are of the opinion that it would be good if all the monasteries of the Soviet Church would be closed (there are so few), since they are only left open for propaganda reasons. At least there would be no false presence anymore concerning freedom of religion in the U.S.S.R. We can see the point of these our critics, but we can also see your point in protesting. That is why we printed it to begin with. I mention this, Vladika, in order to demonstrate to you that many times we try to understand your point of view and that of our other bishops and publish it even though we know that we shall be criticized for doing so.

There are times, Vladika, when unknowingly you have grieved us greatly. When you visited the Holy Mountain and took part in services in which Patriarch Demetrios was commemorated, this grieved us greatly, and the Abbot of Grigoriou Monastery, Fr. George, used it to taunt us, the clergy in the Synod who refuse to commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch. Many of the faithful in Greece were scandalized and wrote us. When you were received as a bishop at St. Panteleimon's Monastery, where both Patriarchs Demetrios and Pimen are commemorated and the Abbot, Fr. Abel, is a Soviet churchman, again this grieved us greatly. From time to time we hear reports that members of the Greek Archdiocese receive communion at Holy Trinity at Jordanville -- how this grieves us, Vladika, but we do not rush to make protests to the Synod. We do not agree, and to those that ask us to give explanations, we are forced to say that we do not agree and that we would not do the same. Sometimes we try to make excuses; other times we are forced to say that we do not agree. It is the same with us. We are human, we can make mistakes. Should you not agree with something that we say or do, it would be best to write to us directly and ask us to give explanations.

You have written one page, Vladika, and I have written you many. Believe me, this is a podvig of love. If we were not separated by such a great distance and I could be absent from my pastoral obligations, I would come to visit you personally to express to you my grief and my views. As it is, this is impossible, and this letter must serve the purpose of communication.

Know, Vladika, that what I have written is not my personal view, but that of Fr. George Macris also and of most, if not all, the non-Russian clergymen in our Synod with whom I am in continual communication, both by phone and letter. If I have taken some time to

write this, it is not that I wished to slight Your Grace in any way, but precisely because it concerns us all, and I wished that our other clergymen could first communicate with me before I wrote it. Please accept it as our collective Apologia. We are all in agreement. It is written by one in behalf of all.

We are all grieved, Vladika, by your letter and its implications. Grieved because we have gone through much with the bishops which we abandoned because they refused to respond to our concern for the holy Faith; rather they followed the ruinous path of Ecumenism. We are distressed at the prospect that we may again be found in a position where we are not understood, and our concern for the faith is not heeded. From what you write, it appears that you are not in agreement with the hierarchs of blessed memory and those that are still living who accepted us in the Synod for reasons of Faith. It seems that if it were left up to your decision, we would probably not have been received. This grieves us, Vladika, because we genuinely love all our bishops and the Monastery of Holy Trinity, of which you are the head. Please try to understand us. We are spoken of illy and ridiculed for obvious reasons by hierarchs and certain clergy of the jurisdictions which we left; it would be sad to have misunderstandings and contradictions among ourselves. We ask this not for ourselves, the clergy (We could easily retire and live a quiet life providing for our families), but we ask you to understand us rather for our flocks which have sacrificed parents, relatives, and friends in order to stand up for the faith in this unbelieving generation, and for all those of good volition who are left behind from whence we departed and have not yet come forth. As for us, the clergy, we would willingly be anathema if our people would come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.

We make a poklon and ask your forgiveness if we have grieved you in this letter or at any other time. We wish Your Grace and all that are at Holy Trinity Monastery a good and profitable Great Lent. Please bless us and pray for us.

With love and reverence in Christ,

Neketas, unworthy priest

NSP:ns

cc: Metropolitan Philaret
Archbishop Anthony
Bishop Nektary