

Letter 218 (excerpt).

Apodosis of Ascension, 1976

[May 29/June 11, 1976]

Dear Daniel,

...Before going ahead, we must stop and find out where we are. We wish to be zealots for true Orthodoxy, and our Church leaders have indicated clearly that we must have no contact with the Moscow Patriarchate and similarly enslaved Churches; must refrain from participating in ecumenist activities and must be aware that ecumenism is eating away the very Orthodox fiber of most of the Orthodox Churches, beginning with Constantinople; and must be zealously pursuing a path of true Orthodoxy ourselves, not only in outward acts but especially in spiritual life, but without falling into false zealotry “not according to knowledge”—a point that Vlad. Averky especially emphasized. About the latter danger we have been learning much of late from the situation of the Old Calendarists in Greece, which can help us to avoid some mistakes “on the right side.”

Here, briefly, is the Greek Old Calendar situation as we have it from Dr. Kalomiros who seems the most moderate and sensible of the Old Calendarists with whom we have any contact, and as confirmed from a somewhat different point of view by our own Bp. Laurus:

The “Mathewites” preach absolute “strictness”: since 1924 all New Calendarists and all those in communion with them are without grace; hence the “crisis” which caused Bp. Mathew to consecrate successors by himself—he and his followers believed that he was then the only Orthodox bishop remaining in the world. It is therefore astonishing that they could have been persuaded to have any contact with our Church at all, as at the Sobor of 1971, and **Dr. Kalomiros tells us that this was**

because Fr. Panteleimon of Boston told them that our bishops had “repented” and now were willing to accept the Mathewite position. Once they saw that this was not so, the Mathewites resumed their attacks on our Church, and the last we heard they were almost resolved to give our Church over to anathema. Dr. Kalomiros calls this group extreme legalists and “scholastics,” and this is our impression also from our small contacts with them. Obviously, if they are correct one must quit the Synod altogether and join them. **But their “strictness” really seems a little too close to sectarianism to be the answer for us today.**

The jurisdiction of Archbishop Auxentios, on the other hand, has been closer to our Church in its acceptance of “economy.” But last year they also proclaimed the sacraments of New Calendarists invalid—not because they are legally and technically “schismatic” (which is the Mathewite thinking), but because now (in their view) ecumenism has become a conscious heresy, and therefore the New Calendarists are formal heretics. **They asked our bishops to make the same decision, and our bishops refused, on the grounds that this is a question beyond their competence to judge. Bishop Petros of Astoria refused to accept the Auxentiite decision and was therefore excommunicated. Our bishops have not accepted this excommunication and continue to serve with him (as five of our bishops did at the funeral of Archbishop Averky). In February of this year, as Vlad. Nektary recently informed us, one of the Old Calendar groups solemnly anathematized our Church—I don’t know which group, but doubtless both of them will be doing it soon. However, the Auxentiite group itself is in danger of splitting into several jurisdictions, chiefly over questions of pride and power (as Dr. Kalomiros himself tells us).**

As if all this is not bad enough, there are zealots on Mt. Athos who are part of none of the existing Old Calendar jurisdictions, because of their particular views about “strictness” and “economy.” Dr. Kalomiros tells us that our friend Fr. Theodoritos is

now in communion only with his own group of four or five monks and is being considered as a candidate for bishop by one group of Auxentiites; although Fr. Theodoritos himself does not mention any of this to us in his letters to us. At any rate, the Mt. Athos zealots are themselves more and more divided and some of them pride themselves on not speaking to those of other shades of belief.

All of this should be sufficient warning of the danger of going overboard on the question of “strictness” and “zealotry.” The danger of going astray on the “right” side has become so great now that Metropolitan Philaret, when counselling Fr. Alexei Poluektov two years ago in his publishing of *Vera i Zhizn*, cautioned him not to use the word “zeLOT” at all (the milder word “revnitel” is sufficient).

I think the lesson of this is, first of all, to teach us not to be too certain of defining things (especially “strictness” and “economy”), and not to be too quick to “break communion.”

Now we have a recent example in our own Church: Fr. Basile Sakkos of Geneva. Seeing that his own bishop had not broken all contact with the “ecumenist” jurisdictions, he broke off communion with him and asked our 1974 Sobor to answer unambiguously two questions (he sent us a copy of his appeal): (1) Are ecumenists and new calendarists heretics? (2) Do we have communion with them or not? Our Sobor did not give him a satisfactory answer, and he apparently now is with the Mathewites.

We at first were sympathetic to his desire to have our bishops make matters “clear” and “consistent,” especially realizing that Archbishop Anthony of Geneva is indeed probably too “liberal” in his views and contacts. But on further reflection we find several considerations which make the issue quite complex and not subject to an easy answer:

(1) Ecumenism itself is not a clear-cut heresy like Arianism, or a clearly-distinguishable body such as the Roman Catholic Church. It is seldom preached boldly in so many words by its Orthodox participants, and even when outrageous statements are made by Patrs. Athenagoras and Demetrius, or by the new “Thyateira Confession,” they are often accompanied by at least a verbal confession that Orthodoxy still is the one true Church of Christ. There is therefore some justification for those who refuse to break off with ecumenist hierarchs, or who do not know at what point they actually become “heretics.”

(2) Ecumenism, rather than a formal heresy, is more like an elemental movement, an intellectual attitude which is “in the air” and takes possession of individuals and groups and whole Churches to the degree of their worldliness and openness to intellectual fashions. Thus, it is in our Church also, and even in our minds, unless we are waging a conscious warfare against the “spirit of the times.” All the more difficult, then, is it to define it and know exactly where the battle-line is.

(3) Our own flocks, to the degree that they are worldly, don’t understand these matters, and a decision to formally “break communion” with all ecumenist Orthodox Churches would simply not be understood by many.

(4) There is a fear, increased by knowledge of the Greek Old Calendarist situation, of falling into a sectarian mentality—that “we alone are pure.”

What, then, should we do?

Let us first of all take guidance from our hierarchs who are most aware of the spiritual situation of the Church today and have spoken out. We have especially Metr. Philaret, who speaks rather about the spiritual essence of ecumenism than about its formally heretical nature, and warns other hierarchs and his own flock

against participating in ecumenist activities and ideas; and Archbishop Averky, who viewed the whole matter also not in terms of formal heresy but rather as an elemental movement of apostasy, the answer to which is first of all a return to spiritual life.

In general, as long as our Church is one and united, let us trust the judgment of the local bishops; if something they do is disputable, let us be guided by the judgment of our most spiritual bishops (and preferably not just one), but without making a “demonstration” if this disagrees with the local bishop. But let us beware of the conclusions of our own logic and “definitions.” I’m afraid that Fr. Panteleimon of Boston has fallen into this latter trap, and is pursuing a course which none of our bishops approve, even while he tells others that our bishops’ position is synonymous with what he thinks it should be (sometimes the politics of the Greek Old Calendarist situation apparently forces him to do such things in order to “save face”). He and the Greeks who follow him have formed a kind of autonomous psychological “diocese” within our Church, and it is obvious that they trust and respect none of our bishops; they look for their authority rather to Greece—and in Greece the situation becomes more confused every day, so it is Fr. Panteleimon’s thinking alone that becomes their authority. This is a terribly dangerous situation, and it seems inevitable that unless our Greeks change the tone of their “zealotry,” it is only a matter of time until they leave us, whether for the Mathewites or to form their own jurisdiction—which will only confuse matters more. Already Fr. Panteleimon practices “selective communion” with our Church, as when he refused to serve at the funeral of Archbishop Averky, but stood in the Altar with a group of his priests and monks. Fr. Panteleimon of Jordanville, when he saw this, told Fr. Herman (who was able to be present to bid farewell to his Abba): “Look what kind of monks we have now. They came here to make a demonstration. It must be the end of the world.” That is typical of the attitude of our Church to the too-eager “zealots”

of our day: without bitterness or indignation, but with a deep and calm awareness that this is not the answer. It is to us a bad sign that Fr. Panteleimon was in a state of “strained communion” with Vladika Averky in the latter’s final months of life, and that for the same cause (Bishop Petros, which our bishops seem to view as merely a question of “competition”) he would not serve at his funeral. Vladika Averky was the greatest pillar of our Church, and he wrote to us in his distress over Fr. Panteleimon a heartbreaking letter which shows how great the gulf is between the great elders of our Church and the younger generation which has not received its guidance from them and now thinks it “knows better” than they.

We do not wish to judge Fr. Panteleimon or any of the “zealots,” including the Mathewites; but it is clear that our path cannot be with them. Their “strictness” forces them to become so involved in church politics that spiritual questions become quite secondary. I know for myself that if I would have to sit down and think out for myself exactly which shade of “zealotry” is the “correct” one today—I will lose all peace of mind and be constantly preoccupied with questions of breaking communion, of how this will seem to others, and “what will the Greeks think” (and which Greeks?), and “what will the Metropolitan think?” And I will not have time or inclination to become inspired by the wilderness, by the Holy Fathers, by the marvelous saints of ancient and modern times who lived in a higher world. In our times especially, it is not possible to be entirely detached from these questions, but let us place first things first: First comes spiritual life and striving for the Kingdom of Heaven; second come questions of jurisdiction and church politics. And let us approach these secondary questions from right direction: not first of all from the viewpoint of legalism, canons, “strictness,” but rather spiritually. The chief danger of our times is not “lack of strictness,” but loss of the savor of Orthodoxy; “strictness” will not save us if we don’t have any more the feeling and taste of Orthodoxy, and love it with our

whole hearts.

Dr. Kalomiros has written, in a letter to Alexey Young a few months ago, something which gives us a clue:

“Father Panteleimon and Father Nektas and those who are around them may be of Greek origin, but they are not Greeks. They are Americans 100% with all the American characteristics. I do not calumniate them, for that is natural. What is sorrowful, however, with them, is that their being Americans and insisting on their being Americans has cut them off from the Orthodox Tradition, which is not something theoretical, but comes from father to son in a continuous man to man handing down which is possible only when one is united in soul and love with those who are handing him down the tradition. But the American Orthodox have no American ancestors in Orthodoxy. If they declare themselves Americans and want to cut themselves off from their national background...they cut themselves in reality from the possibility of receiving living Orthodox Tradition. This is why I who am Greek and who in certain point of theoretical discussions may disagree with the Fathers of Platina and agree with Father Panteleimon, do not sense in him the “feeling of Orthodoxy, which makes the real Orthodox in spite of our many human errors, and I sense this “feeling” in your periodicals Orthodox Word and Nikodemos, and your practical tendencies are nearer to my heart than the whole atmosphere of The Orthodox Christian Witness, which is directed towards the world, and not from the world towards Eternity.”

I fear that our new Orthodox Word, with its attempt (in the introduction to Metr. Philaret’s epistle on the “Thyateira Confession”) to give the actual thinking of our bishops on questions of “breaking communion”—will be another of those “theoretical” points with which Dr. Kalomiros will disagree. **I am sure that our “Greeks” will blast us for it, because they do not want it even to be known that**

our bishops have never officially broken communion with Constantinople and do not want to. But we cannot insist that we know better than our bishops in a sphere which it is their business to know. If we still have the “feel” of Orthodoxy (and we pray that we will not lose it in the difficult days ahead of us)—it is because we have trusted and loved those bishops and older priests who have handed the faith down to us and have not thought that we can teach them. If on some points we have “theoretical” differences with some bishops, this has not broken the bond of trust and love, and we would not presume to publicly declare such differences. But Fr. Panteleimon, quite frankly, thinks that he is called to teach our bishops, even to the point of publicly rebuking our Metropolitan (as he did at a banquet in 1974). With this we cannot agree, and we would indeed fear to lose the savor of Orthodoxy if we believed we knew better than all our bishops and elders.

This letter is already too long, and we haven’t yet “answered your question” about the Serbian hieromonk who serves in our church. **On the question of the Serbian Church there has not been unanimity among our bishops. Archbp. Averky thought we should class them with the other Communist-dominated Patriarchates and have no communion with them; but most of our bishops haven’t thought so, and in fact Bishop Savva was so firm on this point that he said he would go into retirement if we broke communion with the Serbian Patriarchate. Our bishops apparently have made no decision on the subject, which means Serbia is classed more or less with the “canonical” Churches of the free world (probably a little better than they, because it is Old Calendar), with whom our relations were strained or discouraged but not entirely broken. In the absence of contrary advice from one of our bishops, we would advise you to accept whatever the local bishop allows, even including the reception of Holy Communion; however, if you feel uneasy about receiving Holy Communion from this priest, for personal spiritual reasons you could**

easily receive communion in some other of our churches there without being guilty of judging the bishop.

Letter 227(excerpt).

June 30/July 13, 1976 Twelve Apostles

Dear Father Panagiotes [Carras],

I believe that the words in our article, which you find so shocking express fairly well what most if not all of our Russian bishops, think. Our Synod has not, nor ever said that it has, broken communion with any of the main “canonical” churches; only with Moscow is there an official break, and that for reasons which do not involve a question of heresy (it is rather the “dead rat” in Blessed Xenia’s barrel) and which look to the eventual restoration of communion when the political situation changes (it being understood, and expressed by various of our hierarchs, that when the Communist regime falls the betraying hierarchs will be appropriately handled). (The giving of communion to Catholics is a new element in the Moscow situation which our bishops haven’t drawn final conclusions about as yet.) **Whether we like it or not our Synod has used precisely the term “avoiding communion” with regard to the Metropolia—meaning, for all intents and purposes, a break in communion, but without any proclamation of them as “schismatics. The thinking behind our Synod’s actions in recent years seems to be in reality quite different from what you have been told, namely: Fr. George Lewis was allowed to be baptized and ordained solely because he was not received in the Metropolia by a bishop, but only by a priest—thus he was not considered ordained or properly received and was received by us like a Catholic (not one of our bishops, I am sure, would dream of ordaining anyone already correctly ordained by the Metropolia);** the establishment of multi-national parishes is a missionary answer,

in the midst of a chaos of jurisdictions, to an urgent demand on the part of these groups, with **no opinion expressed or implied about the Mysteries of other jurisdictions of the same nationality; the reception of Greek clergy without canonical release from the Greek Archdiocese is a case of economy, because they have been accepted for reasons of conscience but without our bishops officially breaking communion with the hierarchs from whom they have separated (this is the explanation given us directly by an Archbishop who has received two such priests); only very recently (if then) have any of our bishops begun seriously to question the validity of the Mysteries in the “canonical jurisdictions,” and probably all of our bishops still believe that the Mysteries of at least most of the jurisdictions are valid (just recently our bishops refused the request of the Synod of Archbishop Auxentios to agree with it on the non-validity of New-Calendarist Mysteries, and it was not until a year or so ago that this Old-Calendarist Synod ceased to believe that the new- calendarist Mysteries are indeed valid); our Church has open communion with the Serbian Church, Jerusalem, and probably others, and leaves separate hierarchs free to serve even with Constantinople if they wish. Indeed, even on the “right” side there is a glaring enough “inconsistency,” in that we continue to have communion (as long as they will allow it) with two groups of Old Calendarists who have no communion with each other.**

We ourselves at times have wished to see a little more “consistency” in the positions of the Synod, but for the time being we have to be satisfied with the basic Synod position, which seems to be: **individual members and communities of the Russian Church Abroad are free to have no communion with any of the “canonical jurisdictions,” but the bishops themselves are not willing to break communion with these jurisdictions as yet. We spoke just a week ago with one of the leading Archbishops of our Synod, whose views are undoubtedly typical**

of our Synod, and he made it quiet clear that officially we have broken only with Moscow, and our official responsibility at this time, as far as breaking communion, does not extend beyond the Russian Church situation; about the other jurisdictions we do not yet have to define things so precisely. Like it or not, that seems to be the position of our Church as reflected in the views of individual hierarchs and in the decrees of Sobors and the Synod (and also by the lack of such decrees on some points). In future the Synod or Sobor may change this position; but we must be aware of what their position is now.

Judging from your letter, you will receive these words with unbelief; if nothing else, then, our article will have served to bring into the open something which has been too long covered up. Apparently some people in our Synod prefer not to “upset” people by telling them what the bishops really think; but we cannot see anything but trouble ahead from such a pretense. Better to know the truth in the beginning, even if it is unpleasant, than to be confronted with it later and find that one has been acting on false presumptions for months or years. Judging from the “Open Letters” of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Fr. Panteleimon is well enough aware of what our bishops really think—but apparently one can read those letters with a different set of presuppositions in mind and not see this.

Even the letter of our Metropolitan on the “Thyateira Confession” does not indicate that we have broken communion with Constantinople; the distinct implication, I would say, is that it threatens a final break in communion if the rest of the bishops of Constantinople do not condemn the document.

We ourselves follow the confessing stand of Archbishop Averky, who based his stand, however, much less on canons and dogmas than on discernment of the spiritual substance of the apostasy of the “canonical jurisdictions”; the break of our Church and the Catacomb Church with Sergius in 1927 was also not

primarily a question of canons or dogmas, but a rather more subtle question which the Catacomb hierarchs expressed most frequently as the loss of “freedom” (that is, inward freedom). We as much as you wish to be separate from the “canonical jurisdictions”; but we wonder how adequate is the stand that this separateness must be defined on canonical and dogmatic grounds. The Old Believers to this day defend their separation from the Orthodox Church precisely on canonical and dogmatic grounds; and our hierarchs, in what you probably regard as their excessive caution in breaking formally with the “canonical jurisdictions,” have very much in mind our Russian experience with a tragic mistake made on the “right” side out of immoderate zeal. Dr. Kalomiros and others in Greece who follow the Old Calendar have written to us of the “legalism” and “fanaticism” of some of the Old Calendarists; are we supposed only to praise such people even though we see that they are sowing distrust and discord in the name of “correctness”?

It does not seem appropriate to discuss such things in print, and perhaps even what we printed was a little too much, especially if it is interpreted as a condemnation of many zealot fathers, as you say (although Fr. Theodoritos of St. Anne’s Skete did not tell us in his recent letter on this subject that he was at all offended by the article).

But you should know that some of the words and actions of those on the “right” side (we don’t know how else to say it!) are indeed causing trouble among us, and in particular there is good reason to suspect that some of the recent actions towards the “left” of a few of our bishops are a direct reaction to what they regard as a dangerous fanaticism. **We fear that if our bishops are going to be told (without asking them) that they regard all the “canonical jurisdictions” as “heretical” and “without grace”—that they may regard it necessary to go a little overboard on the other side. Let’s not force them to that! That danger is greater than you might think.**

This is enough to give you our reasons for raising such a controversial point in The Orthodox Word. We fear that the future for true Orthodoxy may be indeed as dismal as Dr. Kalomiros paints it, with isolated groups of believers cut off from each other and even anathematizing each other over points of “strictness” and “correctness.” While we have our free Russian Church Outside of Russia we should treasure it, even while we may have disagreements among ourselves over questions such as breaking communion. If some in our Church are going to insist that their opinions on such questions must prevail—there will be discord and possibly schism, which indeed would do more harm than any possible good, for it would prove to “canonical Orthodoxy” that “true Orthodoxy” is only a conglomeration of fighting sects. May God preserve us from this—this is what made us write the article. Our “correctness” must always be accompanied by humility, and with sufficient doubt in our own opinions as to listen to what those who differ may say, without calling them betrayers or heretics. Thus far the circle of betrayers and heretics is fairly clear, and we should not cease to denounce their path and remain separate from them; but with those who sincerely wish to remain in the tradition of Orthodoxy we must have a spirit of conciliation and openness to listen.

Letter 231.

July 16/29, 1976 Dear Fr. Nektas,

Evlogeite!

Thank you for your letter, which we accepted in the spirit of love and concern with which it was written.

Father, for you everything seems simple; but many even of the points you raise in this letter are by no means as simple as you would make them. And this is not our

personal opinion, but the opinion of many bishops, priests, monks and laymen with whom we have discussed them, both here and in Greece. The need to speak against the dangerous temptation on the “right side” (which you don’t seem to understand at all) has been impressed upon us above all by highly respected clergy and faithful (respected by you also) in Greece who follow the Old Calendar; I am surprised that you either do not know what they have been saying or choose to take no notice of it. If Father Panteleimon would not be making so many enemies in Greece (which may be the reason why these people no longer speak openly to you), I am sure it would help you and all of us.

We are certainly willing to admit that part of the difficulty here is our inadequate expression of some of the things to which you so strongly object. But the misunderstanding cannot be entirely our fault. It is surely unjust of you, in the context of our past work, of this issue, and of this very article to which you object—to say that this article gives “ecumenical orientation and support.” We will try to express ourselves better in future—but you should also try to see things a little less narrowly, as though it were not possible for your position to be incorrect or imprecise in even the smallest point.

We have not spoken of a “right wing” or a “left wing,” much less of a branch theory. You have read that into the article. Father, we are hurt; in this you are slandering us! We spoke only of the Patristic dictum of the “danger on the right side”—of being too correct and too precise, without the saving medicine of profound humility, which causes discord and division and only helps the work of the devil. Surely you are familiar with what the Mathewites are doing in Greece? And of how they led Fr. Basile Sakkos to his disaster? You must know that you and we are no longer in communion with the Mathewites, since they have broken communion with our Church precisely over the question which we raise in this article — **the deliberate refusal of our bishops to declare the new-calendar Mysteries to be without**

grace?

You ask us: “Are Fr. Nektas and Fr. Panagiotes priests or are they not?” We answer: we believe you are—not because this is our personal opinion or the result of our own logic but because our bishops accept this, and we see no reason to challenge them on this. But if you ask us further, **“Does Constantinople then have grace?”—we will give you the same answer: we accept what our bishops tell us, which is — we cannot say that they do not, and there certainly has been no official breach of communion. (Separate hierarchs, as we mention in the article, have warned against and broken communion, but not our whole Church.)** If you do not approve of this, you should direct your complaint to our bishops, not to us who are only reporting what they say. We can easily see how this “inconsistency” would make you personally feel uneasy, if you really did not know whether you are “defrocked” or not. I do not know any defense against this feeling (at least until our bishops shall declare an official break with Constantinople) except your own trust of our bishops: if you trust that they are true bishops and know what they are doing (even though your own logic should tell you otherwise for a time)—then you need have no doubts. Certainly, precedents in Orthodox history may be found where the Mysteries of a Church have been recognized and the anathemas of the same Church have not been recognized (as in the troubles between the Churches of Constantinople and Greece in the 19th century). There are often such mitigating circumstances that make the strict application of canons impossible, and likewise strict “consistency”—that we should be very cautious when we think we know better than our bishops how to apply the canons.

Father, we have not become “ecumenical”; this is a slander caused by your insistence on pushing your own (and not our bishops’) point of view on every point. If our words will be interpreted in an “ecumenical” light we will certainly express ourselves more clearly in future, hoping that the church atmosphere will be such

that faulty expressions or puzzling statements will not be leaped upon to “prove” we are really ecumaniacs. Unfortunately, the healthy church atmosphere in which even mistakes can be made without causing schisms and charges of heresy—seems to be vanishing, largely under influence from Greece, and you yourself are participating in putting this unnecessary “tenseness” and suspicion into the air. In your well-meaning zeal you are sometimes expressing yourself too strongly; in particular, you are giving your opinions as though they were those of our bishops. I will tell you frankly that a number of our bishops do not like this, and you are in danger of pushing them to a more radical position than they would like solely as a reaction to your “pushing too hard.” (We are reasonably sure that this is a chief reason why Vladika Laurus chose to serve on Mt. Athos.) Be zealous and express yourself strongly—but do not tell everyone what our Church or our bishops think unless you have discussed it thoroughly with them yourself. I realize that communications for non-Russians are a little difficult with our bishops, and that it is very easy to leave some things unsaid on both sides — but this will not excuse you for letting vague general impressions dictate what you think (and even print) about the views of our bishops. **We know one high- ranking bishop of our Synod who was very upset when he read in the Witness that (approximately) “Our Church has no communion whatever with the canonical jurisdictions.” The idea had never entered the head of this bishop that we have no communion with any of these jurisdictions** — and yet here it is presented as a authoritative fact in the Witness. Do not blame this lack of mutual understanding solely on our bishops — they also suffer from the fact that “one can’t talk with our Greeks—they won’t listen to any other point of view.”

We have always been sure that Fr. Panteleimon knew such elementary facts of life in our Synod and would have told you about them; but he is either misinterpreting things himself, or simply hiding things from you. Please do not judge us too harshly

if we are the first to tell you of them. We do not blindly believe anything just because some or most of our bishops believe it; but we treat their opinions with the utmost respect and try to understand why they think that way. **Perhaps in future, and especially after the “Thyateira Confession,” our bishops will find it necessary to issue more precise statements and to formally break communion with Constantinople (and perhaps other Patriarchates); but up to now they have not done this.**

You may ask, “Why are our bishops so slow in doing this, when the progress of apostasy seems so clearly to be destroying these Churches?” Without pretending to speak for the bishops, **I can give you several reasons which should make you less insistent that they should have broken communion by now: (1) the abnormal, often anarchic conditions of our times, which tend to make the bishops think more in terms of maximum “economy” rather than emphasize “strictness”; (2) the “temporary” nature of the Russian Church Abroad, which makes it disinclined to make sharp or final decisions about Pan-Orthodox questions; (3) problems of language, psychology, etc.—including the presence in Greece of a group which has been identified by other Old Calendarists themselves as “fanatics,” “legalists,” and as giving justification for the comparison of the Old Calendar Churches in Greece with the Russian Old Believers.** (These are not our words.) You seem to be constantly preoccupied with “what they will think in Greece” of the words or acts of our Synod or some bishops. But since you are in our Russian Church, you must at least try to realize that our bishops do not act on such a basis, but on the basis of the needs of their own flocks.

Father, it is your and our duty to remain in and hand down the spirit of true Orthodox doctrine and piety; but it is not for either of us to usurp the position of our bishops and speak our opinions in their name. If we think their position should be stronger (and we sometimes think so also), we will bring this about much better by

not “pushing” them. We should be tolerant and patient when we think they are not strong enough in their statements, realizing how we also can be guilty of errors in the many complex questions that beset us today. We should be aware of how much more difficult their position is from ours and yours: we are free to have no communion with the “canonical jurisdictions” on our local level; but the bishops must examine the repercussions of such an act on the whole Church, where it is much more difficult to make such “simple” decisions. If you are going to insist that only your position is Orthodox, and everyone who falls short of your logic and preciseness is “ecumenical”—then it seems only a matter of time until you follow Fr. Basile Sakkos in his unfortunate “consistency” (unless, of course, you can force the decrees you need from our bishops, which is highly unlikely). The very fact that you did not follow Fr. Basile is already a sign that you are not totally “consistent” yourself (for **our bishops would not give him precisely that which you regard as so necessary: a statement that all new-calendarists are heretics and that we have no communion with them**).

Once again, we are not preaching to you “blind obedience to bishops”—but we are asking you to be a little less sure of yourself when you see that no less zealous Orthodox (including some of your own bishops), while in substantial agreement about the state of Orthodoxy today, advocate a humbler path. The position of our bishops, which I believe we have accurately described in the article to which you object, while of course “inconsistent” from the point of view of absolute “strictness,” seems to us to be a good enough starting point, out of which a stricter and more precise position can come later with the minimum of divisiveness which the pressing of your view would cause at the present time. Again, please learn humility from the example of Greece today: does not each one of the bickering parties there believe that it is “correct” and the others wrong? (I speak of the Old Calendar parties). **Do you seriously think to impose the views of one group of Old**

Calendarists on our Church, when this group cannot prevail over the Old Calendarists even in Greece? And surely you know that the question of the grace of new-calendarist Mysteries is still much disputed by Old Calendarists themselves, and that the decision of the Auxentiite Synod in 1974, being prompted by political motives, has not at all brought peace or resolved the question? (Many of the bishops have since changed their mind about it.)

By the way, with regard to Moscow, you should realize that the cause for the break in 1927 was not for any of the reasons you mention, but was a much subtler thing. “Sergianism” in 1927 was not a question of ecumenism, modernism, the new calendar, the acceptance of non-Orthodox Mysteries, violation of canons, or teaching of new dogmas; and it was not of course a question only of politics, either. What then is left?—something very difficult to define and which the Catacomb hierarchs of 1927 in their epistles usually identified as the “loss of inner freedom.” (To be sure, new factors have entered the situation in recent years.) Before such a subtle temptation it is precisely a feeling for the spirit behind the phenomena which is the decisive factor, and not merely “correctness” in canons or dogmas. Several highly-respected Old Calendarists in Greece have written us that it is precisely the “fatal disease of correctness” which has caused such anarchy there now in the church situation—a “disease” which they place second only to ecumenism itself as a destroyer of souls. Do you have any idea what this means? If you don’t, there is something very much lacking in your awareness of the Orthodox situation today, and this should make you all the more humble and cautious and unsure that everything you say and think is right. You must try to see things as other sincere zealots of Orthodoxy see them, or else your godly zeal will only end in causing divisions and strife and you yourself will be helping the devil’s work of destroying Orthodoxy. We all (we as much as you) must be ready to see that we do not have “all the answers,” that we are sometimes

wrong or express ourselves poorly. Let me give you a few examples.

(1) Bishop Petros. You think it is a terrible scandal and inconsistency that he is allowed to serve with us, and in your ignorance you blame this all on Vladika Laurus. Have you even tried to understand what others think of this? Fr. Panteleimon says he presented his “evidence” on Bishop Petros to our bishops; well, our bishops were not convinced by this “evidence,” and frankly they have good reason to believe, as many Old Calendarists in Greece believe and say, that this is primarily a matter of mutual jealousy and power politics. You insist that our bishops choose your side—but why? **Bishop Petros was in close contact with our Synod before you and Fr. Panteleimon were, and Vladika John himself told us in 1965 that logically you and Fr. Panteleimon should be under him; you were granted an exception by our Synod—in order to form a second group of “Old Calendar Greeks” in America, a very dangerous thing** — and yet you continue to insist that we “get rid” of Bishop Petros. I’m not saying who is right or wrong here — I’m only saying that you must view things logically and reasonably and try to understand things as others see them, and if necessary reconcile yourself to the fact that you cannot always have your way.

In 1974 Bishop Petros was cut off from the Synod of Archbishop Auxentios, and our bishops have been given no proof that this was for anything else than his refusal to declare the New-calendarist Mysteries to be without grace. Our bishops likewise refused to do this—are we then to cut him off because of his agreement with us? Does church politics require such stabs in the back? You say that we must be “canonical” and accept the decrees of the Auxentiite Synod—but did Fr. Panteleimon think that in 1971 when he dealt with the Mathewites behind the back of the Auxentiite Synod and thus aroused tremendous anger and resentment in Greece? This turned out to be a bad blow against our Church. Who is being “consistent” here? You blame Bp.

Laurus for letting Bp. Petros serve—but we know that many of our bishops are weary of this “Greek fighting” and want no part in “taking sides” in it, and we know for certain that it was Metropolitan Philaret himself who made the final decision to allow Bishop Petros to serve at the funeral of Archbishop Averky.

We ourselves are not “taking sides” in this matter—but since no one else seems to do so, we must tell you that your over-zealousness on such points is giving you many enemies in our Church and among Old Calendarists in Greece. If your objections against Bishop Petros are indeed sound, then we and many others would be much more inclined to believe you if you acted with more sense and moderation. Your very violence and “demonstrations” on this subject make it indeed look like a battle over “who is to rule the Greeks in America”; our bishops don’t want any part of such a battle, and if they sometimes “back down” before your demands, it is solely because they treat you as spoiled children who might get violent if you don’t get your way. Is that the role you want for yourselves? Is that true zeal? Be humbler! (2) Your comments on “awful catechisms,” the “heretic” Augustine, etc. show very poor taste, great immaturity, an insult to the very bishops under whom you are placed (who think differently, and you did not even think of asking their opinion, did you?), and a work of undermining the authority of the great Fathers of recent and even ancient centuries with whom you are not in agreement. Father, there are usually kernels of truth in your comments—but you take those kernels and blow them up with violent language that totally misses the point. Our Russian theologians of the past two centuries have handled the question of Augustine (with all his errors) very soberly—but you don’t think of asking their opinion, because you regard them all as “polluted” and in “Western captivity.” Be humble enough to see that your zeal is not always godly, but is sometimes the result of your personal prejudices and faulty points of view and a “Western captivity” of your own. If you can’t see this, your Orthodoxy will become narrow fanaticism, with disastrous results; you will destroy

many souls.

Believe me, Father, this letter is written with blood. There is time for you to step back from the path of fanaticism, and we will be 100% with you if you do; we ourselves will willingly accept correction from others who are on the same path with us, together with our bishops. But if all this letter tells you is that we are “misguided” and totally off the right path—then may God help our poor American Orthodoxy, for the future is dim!

I don't know what more to say at this time. We will continue to be outspokenly anti-ecumenist. But we pray that you too will begin to realize some of the more subtle temptations that lie before us. **On basic points concerning ecumenism and the apostasy we do not disagree with you; our emphasis and desire not to lose contact with our more cautious bishops is different, but no more. You say: “All the Patriarchates have lapsed into heresy”; we would prefer to say “Are lapsing and let the bishops decide the moment when the lapse is irremediable.”**

Please forgive our frankness if it is in any way offensive to you. We know no other way to make you see things more objectively before it is too late.

With love and respect in Christ our God,

Seraphim, Monk

Letter 241(excerpt).

Nov. 4/17, 1976

St. Johnichius the Great

Dear Father Johnikios

We ourselves were a little shocked to see how Mathewitely “simple” the whole question of ecumenism and the New Calendar is for several of our Greek priests—certainly the soundest representatives of the Old Calendarists in Greece (Dr. Kalomiros, Archimandrite Kyprian, Father Theodoritos, etc.) do not agree with them here and are much closer to the position of our bishops.

This narrowness prevents our Greeks from seeing some rather obvious things and making some elementary distinctions which are rather important for us all now and in the days ahead. Anyway, we stuck our heads out and told them some of these things, and perhaps when their displeasure dies down this will help the development of the more “objective” atmosphere in our Church which seems to us so necessary. Despite our differences, we are by no means “against” Father Panteleimon, and it would be a tragedy if two artificial “camps” were created in our Church. Fr. Panteleimon has some good and fresh emphases which could enrich our Church; but the attitude that “we are right and every other view must be crushed” which some of his followers are projecting, can only lead to trouble and disaster.

The real differences in our Church today are not based on “liberal” vs. “strict” attitudes to ecumenism—that is an artificial distinction. The real difference is between an anti-ecumenism with humility, love and discretion (which also means “flexibility” without compromise), and anti-ecumenism which is narrow and rigid and in real danger of falling into fanaticism. One really does get the idea that those who come from the Greek Archdiocese are “protesting too much”—their positions often seem based more on the need to protest their own past than to face the present and future soberly and with balance.

Letter 250 (excerpt).

Theophany, 1978

Dear Brother in Christ, Andrew,

...The situation indeed is not healthy, but if Vladimir and Olga are indeed going to go “off the deep end,” it might make others stop and think, especially Fr. Alexis. We certainly hope that the responsibility and the practical needs of his position will tone down his “zeal,” which certainly, in the cases you have mentioned, goes beyond anything necessary or proper. **Our Church as a whole (and certainly almost all bishops and priests, apart from the Boston wing) does not believe Moscow and New Calendarists to be without grace. Those who wish to believe this as their personal opinion are not persecuted for it, but they certainly cannot make such an opinion obligatory on others. The two cases you mention would have caused no problem among any non-Boston clergy; our Church’s policy of non-communication with Moscow is certainly not threatened by an occasional death-bed communion of someone who is unaware of the jurisdictional differences, and no issue need be made over it. Unfortunately, the whole Boston approach to such questions seems to remain very “academic.”**