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The Acquisition of Faith

1. To a person in doubt who asked how to find the truth.

To find the Truth one must begin not with men, but with God the Creator. The religion that is able to provide us with an authentic encounter with Him is itself the Truth. Naturally, those faiths that do not acknowledge the very existence of the Creator are false (Buddhism, atheism, shamanism, occultism). Those religions that, while acknowledging the Creator, require only the observance of the law are false. These provide no encounter (Islam, Judaism). Those religions that promise an encounter but offer no real path to union are wrong (Protestantism). This leaves only apostolic Christianity—Orthodoxy.

Religions that speak of a law but do not provide the strength to follow it are playing men false. This is like demanding that a person with no legs run a marathon.

Religion must provide not only commandments, but also the strength to keep them. Besides, the essence of these commandments lies not in the commands themselves, but in union with the Creator (which is the mean-

ing of the very word *religion*). If religion does not unite with God, it is a false bearer of the name.

February 21, 2009

2. To an unbeliever who suffered from depression and asked how to acquire faith in God.

The first thing you must do is prepare for confession and cleanse your soul of sin, which is the cause of your depression. Begin reading the Gospel (at Mark), the Wisdom of Solomon, and the epistles of the apostle Paul.

For the logical, intellectual aspect, begin your study by reading the ordinary Catechism, so as to at least clearly understand what the Church believes. Read the work by the holy hierarch Theophan the Recluse, *The Spiritual Life and How to be Attuned to It*. I would also advise you to read the *Dialogues* of Archpriest Valentin Sventsitsky.

Most importantly, begin simply praying to God, Who sees all and knows all, and He will help you.

October 23, 2008

3. To a student about his sense of mortality, about what faith is, and about what God is like.

Greetings, Anton!

I will attempt so far as I am able to answer your question. The sense you have of mortality and of the world's corruptibility is natural for an intelligent person. It shows that his life's purpose can lie only in the Eternal Immortal God (not in abstract immortality, but specifically in personal contact). And since we are speaking

specifically of personal contact, we cannot substitute our own musings for it. Only a personal encounter with God can resolve this issue at its core.

Now, regarding what faith is. There is faith in God, and as far as I can tell, you are very near to it. After all, you acknowledge the existence of an immortal and eternal Being. I think that you will be able to accept that this Being is able to make contact with His creatures (otherwise why would you have sought this, if it were fundamentally impossible?). And if God reveals something of Himself, here there can no longer be any room for reasoning such as, "I didn't picture Him like that, so it must not be Him; my heart does not accept Him." It would be like me saying, "Anton ought to be a stout, curly-haired black man with bright white teeth, and so I cannot accept Anton as he actually is." God exists, and He has His own precisely defined nature, which is magnificently expressed in the Gospel and in the Bible in general. You can take my word for it that all who continue to encounter Him to this day know that since that time His nature remains unchanged.

Thus, faith in God means the simple acceptance by an intelligent person of the fact that a certain personage from the Bible actually exists, independent of our wishes, and that He has a perfectly concrete nature, which likewise is absolutely independent of us, and that He made a promise that He will surely keep, because He gave His word.

Further, ordinary logic suggests that since this Person exists, and hiding from Him is impossible, it is essential to establish some sort of a relationship with Him. Here there are two options:

1. I know about God, and when possible I try to avoid conflict with Him, but I do not allow Him into my heart.

2. I know about God, I love Him, and I wish to enter into eternal union with Him.

The first option is not the wisest, because God may not agree to this sort of relationship (by right of Creator and Life-giver), and may banish me from His presence (which, though logical, would of course be highly unpleasant for me).

In the second instance, however, we see not faith in God (for which, as you realize, one needs nothing but an honest intellect), but rather trust in God. This means trusting that the Creator will not let us down, and that we can rely on Him. This faith is a gift from God, since it is born of the experience of a personal encounter. But it is a gift that we may and must ask for. God says that if a person first corrects his ways and his thoughts (that is, leaves off committing base sins that prevent him from encountering God, and leaves off stubbornly forcing upon God his own concepts of Him), that person will cry out to God and He will hear him, and will deliver him from all misfortunes. And so leave off imposing your own ideas on God, repent before Him, and turn to Him with prayer (incidentally, here even the body can be of assistance: if you kneel before an icon and ask God, even this will break down your pridefulness which is stifling you).

There; I have written to you as well as I am able. Forgive me if anything is unclear. May God keep you.

July 9, 2007

4. To a certain person who asked about Christ.

For me, Christ is the true God, the Son of God, who became Man without forsaking His divinity. He is my Creator, my King, my Savior, my Redeemer, my Judge, the Head of my Church, and the Delight of the age to come.

February 21, 2007

5. To an irreligious person who inquired as to how and why people are declared saints.

God became man, and by His power any Orthodox Christian has the power to become a saint. Sanctity is accessible to men by virtue of the divine power that enters into us through the Sacraments. For this reason, through co-operating with eternal divine power, a person of flesh and blood actually becomes a saint, which the Church declares in canonizing them.

April 30, 2009

Theology

6. To a mathematician who wished to know why God permits innocent people to suffer during natural disasters.

God rules the whole world; hence, when catastrophe strikes, the idea that blind forces are at work is out of the question. We believe in God Almighty. He brings about disasters, and the people who perish in them do so not by chance. It is a known fact that when airplanes are doomed there are approximately one third more returned tickets and passengers who miss their flight. There are several answers for why this or that person may have perished. Either they were ripe for eternity, or they had sunk into the abyss of evil, or they could have fallen into sin. For God there are no large numbers, and He leads every person. For a Christian, death is not the end, but the beginning. God will heal the malady of death in the day of resurrection. Hence, what matters is not whether death occurs, but the state in which a person leaves this earth. This is why God deals thus with this or that person. But He also has another purpose. According to St. Basil the Great, national transgressions are treated by national disasters.

August 28, 2005

7. To a student who asked to Whom Christ's sacrifice was offered.

In accordance with the dogma of the Council of Constantinople in 1156, Christ's sacrifice was offered to the Holy Trinity. You can read about this sacrifice in the writings of Saints Cyril of Jerusalem (his "Catechetical Homilies"), Athanasius the Great ("Homily on the Incarnation of God the Word"), and Homily 45 of Gregory the Theologian. Quotations from the fathers are collected in the writings of Metropolitan Makary Bulgakov and V. Lossky (*The Dispute About Wisdom**).

August 15, 2007

8. To a person who asked why he declared heretical an evolution-based interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis.

Peace be unto you!

The principles of scriptural commentary are given to us in the 19th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. The correct explanation is the one which all or the majority of the holy fathers have maintained. Indeed, the consensus patrum forbids rejecting a literal understanding of the six days of creation.

Merely rejecting the literal duration of the Six Days is not heresy; it is simply an erroneous interpretation. What is heresy is the teaching that death and corruption existed prior to the fall into sin. This contradicts our chief

* Russian title: *Spor o Sofii*. –Trans.

hope—that of salvation through Christ from the death incurred by Adam’s transgression. Another heresy is the declaration that Adam’s ancestors were animals. (The Fifth Ecumenical Council condemned the teaching that the soul and the body are not created simultaneously.)

February 21, 2007

9. To one who asked about the source of divine grace and the possibility of reunion with the Catholics.

Every gift of God comes into the world from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. All three Hypostases bestow one grace, though in diverse manner. As for whether the Son alone bestows the grace of the Holy Spirit, remember that in the Gospel of John (chapter 7) it is written that the Spirit was not yet upon them because Jesus had not yet been glorified. The condition for the bestowal of the gift of the Spirit is the death and resurrection of Christ. It is extremely important to emphasize this in our time, when many attempt to believe that the Spirit can act outside of Christ (for example, Metropolitan George [Khodr] of Mount Lebanon), and hence non-Christian mysticism can be perfectly acceptable.

But you are right that it is impermissible to mix the Hypostasis and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this lies the chief error of Blessed Augustine.

As for the question of reunion with the Roman Catholics, I am for it, on Orthodox grounds. Let Rome acknowledge the Orthodox teaching concerning the Trinity and grace, the Church and salvation, and we will gladly

be together. I think that Christ also desires precisely this. But union based on compromise in matters of faith (that is, based on an obvious double lie) is impermissible.

It is time for us to stop walling ourselves off from heretics, and instead to strive to return them to the embrace of the Church.

And another thing regarding “union,” or rather, the reunion of Rome to the Church—I trust you do not think that I assert the existence of two Churches?

But as to whether it is possible, here I disagree with you. The main thing is oneness of faith, from which there also proceeds oneness of Tradition. When in A.D. 435 St. Cyril united with Antioch (which had fallen into Nestorianism), this took place based on a common confession of faith (without compromises, you may be certain), but without other conditions. Except for Nestorius, who was condemned already, no one was condemned. Although in Antioch the heretic Theodore of Mopsuestia was considered a saint, this error was overcome only later, and with time the Church was healed. The same is true of Rome. If (as St. Nicholas of Japan hoped) it acknowledges the inviolate faith, then the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the one Father and sends grace through the Son will heal all the rest as well. For then all the sacraments of the Catholics will become salvific, and the Creator Himself will supply what is lacking.

January 30, 2007

10. To a Christian who asked about the martyrs and the reasons for the crown prince Demetrius' glorification.

A martyr is a witness to Christ's victory over death. His courage in the face of death manifests the power of the risen Christ.

As for the glorification of the crown prince Demetrius, these are questions for God, Who Himself glorified him by miracles. The innocent blood of the prince is like the blood of Abel, which cries out to God.

June 20, 2008

11. Concerning modern errors concerning the Eucharist.

Among the many false teachings of modernism, one of the most notable is a heresy that repudiates the transformation of the Holy Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. According to this heresy (promoted by Prof. Alexander Osipov and his disciple Alexey Zaitsev), the gifts are hypostatized into the the divinity of Christ without changing, but they can be called the Body and Blood in the sense that all created matter shares the same essence. This false teaching is also closely linked with evolutionism, first and foremost that of Teilhard de Chardin, the greatest blasphemer of the 20th century. This latter heresiarch, in his demonic revelations in the Gobi Desert, became conscious of the essential oneness of the universe, which ended up taking the place of God the Creator for him (see *The Divine Milieu*). This link between evolution and panmaterialism is not coincidental. For if the Six Days are false, then there is no difference between created entities. Everything is fluid and changing, and only in this way can bread and wine be of one essence with our own body and

blood. But according to Orthodox teaching (and ordinary common sense), sharing a common essential trait—such as being created—by no means equates to sharing the same essence. As St. Athanasius the Great wrote, “The light is not the same thing as the night; the sun is not the same thing as the moon; dumb beasts are not the same as rational man; angels are not the same as thrones, and thrones are not the same as powers. On the contrary, although they are all creatures, each created thing is and remains of its own kind, in its own essence in which it was created” (Homilies Against the Arians, 2.19). Thus, the teaching concerning a fictitious “oneness of essence” of all creation is by no means patristic or biblical. From the very beginning God created all entities “after their kind” (Gen. 1), and not in some kind of cosmic unitotality. In the end likewise, the distinction between creatures will remain. As the apostle Paul writes, “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. So also is the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:39–40, 42). The apostle states that those who do not believe that the Holy Chalice contains the transformed Humanity of Christ eat and drink unto their condemnation, not discerning the Body and Blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:39).

December 23, 2005

12. To a person who asked about the judicial theory of redemption and the views of Prof. Osipov, who said that God is only love.

Christ is Risen!

The judicial theory of redemption is wholly grounded in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church.* The Bible also speaks of the restoration of human nature in Christ. These are simply different aspects of the reality of salvation.

As for the teaching of Alexander Osipov, it is quite incompatible with Christianity. In order to accept it we must reject all of Scripture. The denial of the justice of God was condemned back in the second century as the heresy of Marcion.

May God preserve you.

May 14, 2009

13. To a person who asked, "What fate after death awaits those who did not know Christianity?" and who stated that, in his opinion, "threatening people with hellfire" was more typical of Islam.

According to the Lord, all the unbaptized, except for those who were executed for Christ's sake, will go to *hades*." This is not because it is their fault that they did not know Christ, but because of their personal sins and the original defilement transmitted to us at conception.

* It is important to distinguish between the Orthodox understanding of redemption, which places less emphasis on the judicial aspect, and the more legalistic approach of many Western confessions. –*Trans.*

** In Russian, *hades* and *hell* are the same word, while in English *hell* denotes a place of suffering, while *hades* lacks this obligatory connotation. As such, we have used *hades* except where *hell* is clearly implied or typically used. –*Trans.*

Such is the sad reality. Whether one acknowledges it or not, such it remains, for God Himself said this.*

As for the comparison of Christianity and Islam, the Muslims err not in speaking of hell, but rather in that, by superstitiously acknowledging Muhammad to be a prophet, they have rejected the original Revelation of God and stripped themselves of the opportunity for salvation. Muhammed is not God, even in the teaching of Islam. But Christ asserted by both His words and deeds that He is equal to God the Father. On what grounds, therefore, ought we to believe a false prophet and not believe God?

As for “threatening people,” it is not we who create hades, but the just decision of God. For us not to warn unbelievers of this would be despicable.

September 29, 2006

14. To a young woman who asked about recompense for sins, about the fate of innocent infants who died unbaptized, and about those who died prior to the coming of Christ.

You have rightly noted that God is just. But from this it follows that He cannot overlook obvious iniquity.

* This is the personal view of the author. The Orthodox Church does not teach that all the unbaptized without exception will spend eternity in hades, nor did Christ say this. On the contrary, to the unbaptized thief on the cross who repented and believed in him He said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43). In this same paragraph the author himself acknowledges the possibility of salvation for unbaptized martyrs who accept the Christian faith—an exception not found in the Gospel. —*Trans.*

All evil must be punished. And for this reason the innocent Christ takes our sins upon Himself, so as to bear our punishment. My regret for the evil committed cannot stop the act already performed. Once the bomb is already exploding, my remorse will not stop the destruction in progress. And God is by no means indifferent to man's sins. God vehemently hates evil and punishes for it. I am speaking not of some god produced by the intellect, but of the real Creator of the universe, the God of the Bible and the Church, whose works we see to this day.

As for innocent infants, there simply is no such thing. Every man has a distorted will from the moment of conception. Every man joins the devil's "mafia" by virtue of his birth, and it is this that made necessary the sacrifice of Christ, which acts in us through baptism, so that infants might be saved.*

A person does indeed answer only for his own sins: the problem is that sin makes its way into us before our consciousness becomes active. This is why it was necessary for the Creator to intervene, to pull all men out from under the burden of death and sin.

As for those who died prior to Christ, all of them (including the righteous ones) were in hades until Christ

* This is the personal opinion of the author. The Orthodox understanding of original sin is not that all men are guilty of Adam's sin, but rather that all men inherit his distorted nature, including his inclination toward sin. The majority of the fathers teach that infants are, in fact, innocent, having had no opportunity to sin. The *Catechism* of Met. Philaret (Drozdov), cited further on by the author, states not that every man born is a compatriot of the devil, but rather that prior to baptism the devil has "access to men, and power over them, as his captives and slaves" (296). – *Trans.*

came there. Those who sought God during their lives He Himself found there.

January 10, 2008

15. To the same person, when she asked whether it were not treachery to love the enemies of one's friends.

A Christian must love everyone, including the enemies of his friends. There is no treachery in this. At the same time, he must hate the sin that engendered the enmity between men. But one must do good to all men.

June 3, 2008

16. To an Orthodox person who tried to assert that the unbaptized can be saved.

We must listen to God, and not to men. Christ Himself said that he that believes and is baptized will be saved, and that he who does not believe will be condemned (Mk. 16). Thus, none of the unbaptized can be saved. In this lies God's love—that He sent His Son to us who were perishing, so that by being united with Him we might attain salvation in communion with God. As for all other people, they perish—not because of not being baptized, but because of their sins. Read carefully the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Romans, where in the first six chapters your question is examined in detail. As for the passages that you quote, they say nothing whatsoever about the possibility of salvation for non-Christians. Yes, every non-Christian will be judged and will be con-

demned for failing to do as his own conscience requires.*

The homilies of St. Gregory pertain only to unbaptized infants, but even these do not presuppose their salvation. As for the homilies of St. Nectarios, they are no more than a secondhand paraphrasing of his ideas. Incidentally, it is virtually impossible to find a Hindu who believes in the Almighty and does not worship idols (which, let me remind you, is the greatest crime of all).

God is love and righteousness. And He has opened the path for all who seek the truth. Everyone who seeks the Truth will find it; it does not matter to Him how many are saved. Not by chance did Christ answer this very question of yours: "Hasten to enter by the narrow gate before the gatekeeper arises and shuts the gate. Then you will knock, but you will be told: I never knew you." This is the real God of the Gospel, and I would advise you to take this very seriously.

June 1, 2008

17. To an evolutionist who attempted to dispute the biblical account of the flood and the deliverance of all the animals in Noah's Ark.

* This is the personal view of the author, and not the teaching of the Orthodox Church, whose position regarding those outside the Orthodox Church is that, while salvation is found in the Church alone, the judgment is God's: "What have I to do to judge them also that are without? ... But them that are without God judgeth" (1 Cor. 5:12–13). Christ said not that all the unbaptized will be damned, but rather those who willfully reject Christ when He is preached to them: "Go ye ... and preach the Gospel. ... He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:16). –*Trans.*

It appears that you have not read the book of Genesis very carefully. It never even hints that Noah was constantly occupied with looking after the animals. The usual response of the creationists to this is that the animals entered a state of suspended animation throughout the duration of the Flood. In this case the animals would have needed to be fed only at the beginning (the first week, that is, before the onset of the catastrophe) and at the end, after the end of the Flood.

As for the dispersion of the animals, from the standpoint of the Orthodox Church they did not disperse haphazardly. Orthodox angelology knows that one of the ranks of angels (the principalities) are the rulers of the plant and animal kingdom. They are the shepherds of the animals, and they drive them wherever God pleases. Incidentally, fossilized marsupials have been found not only in Australia, but also in South America.

For us Christians, divine intervention is an ongoing process. With good reason neither the Bible nor the saints speak of the existence of any “laws of nature,” but only of the constant manifestation of Providence, which even scientists are able to decipher in part (otherwise nature would be unknowable).

Such is my brief answer. If you wish to know something more, please write. I will be glad to discuss with you any questions that arise.

August 14, 2008

18. To a young man who asked how to reconcile dinosaurs and primal man with the Bible.

Dinosaurs did exist—they were the dragons that God created on the fifth and sixth days of Creation.

Primitive men were those who had to survive after the catastrophes of the Flood and others. They are even described in the Bible, in the book of Job.

August 21, 2009

19. To one who doubted, who asked him twenty questions about Christianity.

I think you simply need to read the Catechism of Met. Philaret. It contains short but precise answers to your questions.

As to the questions which you asked, here are my brief answers:

1. *“Is personality an attribute of nature?”* No. The Personality is the One who rules nature. Nature is a “what,” while personality is a “who.”

2. *“Is nature an attribute of personality?”* No. See the answer above.

3. *“Is human freedom inherant in personality or in nature?”* In personality.

4. *“Does evil exist subjectively or objectively?”* Evil has no substance.

5. *“Is it true that personality is the source of evil?”* Yes, and that personality is called Satan. But what matters is not so much the personality as its improper use of its properties.

6. *“Does the personality act as it wills, or in accordance with a law? That is, is the personality ordered somehow, or not at all?”* The personality acts as it wills, but within the

context of the abilities presented it by external circumstances. Put more simply, it is not in my power to not be born in Moscow, but I can leave it. Nevertheless, this change of location is limited by my technical and financial abilities.

7. *“Is it true that God is unchanging in His nature, but changing in His person?”* Yes.

8. *“Did the person or the nature of God become incarnate in Christ?”* The second Personality of God—God the Son.

9. *“When we say that Christ saved us, do we mean that He saved our nature or our person?”* He has saved our nature, and He gives the person the opportunity to be saved.

10. *“Is the will an attribute of the person or of nature?”* The will as desire is an attribute of nature, but as the ability to choose it is an attribute of the person.

11. *“Can we say that the Lord gives us a new nature, but that we must transfigure our person ourselves?”* No. In baptism God gives us a new state of nature, and He gives us the power for our personality to be transformed together with Him.

12. *“What must we transform in ourselves on our own—that is, by our own efforts?”* Nothing. Without God it is impossible to transform anything by oneself.

13. *“Which of the following will remain after death: my person, my nature, or my will?”* My person, part of my nature (until the resurrection, when everything will be restored), and my will.

14. *“Does the Church suppose that I have the right do anything at all as I myself wish? Perhaps not in this state, but at least in some state—specifically as I myself desire?”* You may do all morally neutral things yourself, and all morally im-

portant things only together with God (but also yourself).

15. *"Is it correct to say: 'If you go to heaven, the Lord will become intermingled with your nature, but not with your person (that is, imbuing your nature with His divine qualities)'?"* No. God does not destroy either our nature or our person. He unites with us (both with our nature and with our person) without intermingling.

16. *"How are we to discern spirits, 'whether they are from God'? See the first epistle of John."* A spirit that confesses Jesus Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh, is from God, while one that maintains a polite silence is not. Since the Church is the Body of Christ, a spirit that is from God will not lead people away from the Church.

17. *"What is the difference between humility and the state described by the word 'schmuck'? In general, what comprises humility as a human quality, at least approximately?"* Humility is seeing oneself through God's eyes. In essence, we are nothing (being created), but we are endowed by God with various gifts that must be properly employed. In this lies our dignity.

18. *"Certain pagans are confused: 'You are very strange people, to be delighted that God has finally come to earth. We have no need to wait so many thousands of years. We originated from the gods ourselves; we are the progeny of the gods. And quite literally so – God formed a body for himself out of earth and entered into it. And we were born of him. So why did your God wait so long for an All-pure Virgin to be born in the human race? Couldn't He have become incarnate in a new body?'"*

The gods of the pagans are demons, and people do not originate from them. But from the standpoint of clas-

sical paganism, God the Creator is unknowable in principle. For this reason the New Testament is scandalous for paganism.

As for the wait time, on the one hand God allowed men to attempt to free themselves from death and sin on their own, while on the other He raised up people who were faithful to Him until the Holy Virgin appeared.

Conversely, an incarnation in a new body would have been of no help to us mortal, sinful people.

19. *"Is it correct to say: 'Christ is for man, and not man for Christ'?"* No. The world and man are created for the Son of God, Who took pity on us and saved us by His Blood, so that in Him we might become adopted children of the Heavenly Father.

20. *"At what point can a person consider himself a Christian?"* From the moment when he confesses the Symbol of Faith and receives holy baptism.

November 4, 2008

20. To a group of baptised persons who asked fifteen perplexed questions.

Dear N. and friends,

I will attempt to give a brief answer to each of the questions you have put forward. If anything does not satisfy you, please write.

1. *What role does religion play in human morality?*

This depends on whether the religion is true or not. The word *religion* means "reconnection." But the morality this religion engenders directly depends on the being with whom this reconnection is made in the spiritual

world. If this reconnection is made with the true God the Creator, the morality will likewise be true and congruent with human nature (for the One God is the cause of both the former and the latter). If this connection is made with a false spiritual being (a demon), the morality will be perverted and unnatural for man (for man was not created by the demons). Since God is One, the true religion is also one. It is called Orthodox Christianity. And in it lies the true knowledge of what comprises good and evil.

2. *What role do the commandments play in human morality?*

The commandments are the divine foundation of morality. For only what is pleasing to God is good, and only what is not pleasing to him is evil. There are no other criteria of good and evil. All other moral systems of morality are self-contradictory, for they have no actual basis. In the day when God enlivens our bodies and leads them up out of the graves, the Day of Judgment will ensue, and Jesus Christ will judge all men without exception specifically on the basis of God's commandments.

3. *In the Christian religion have there been any instances when the Lord God abolished commandments for observance by mankind, or permitted their violation?*

Let me remind you that a commandment is following the will of God; hence this question is a contradiction in terms. God prohibits violating His will and, consequently, the commandments that follow therefrom. At the same time, His will can be variously applied. For example, there is no such sin as the shedding of blood. There is the sin of murder, which comprises the *lawless* taking of a life. Consequently, for example, soldiers in war are not

murderers, if they are following military regulations. But we must remember that when we refer to the Law we mean not human innovation, but the Law of God.

4. *Why did the Lord God Himself violate the command "Thou shalt not kill" with regard to His own Son Jesus Christ?*

God did not kill His Son: He gave Him in sacrifice for the sake of our salvation. Furthermore, the command "Thou shalt not kill" was given specifically because God alone has the right to take away the gift that He Himself bestowed. As for why the Son of God died on the cross, the reason is this. We know that God is righteous and merciful. These two properties of His can never be at odds with each other. Hence, on the one hand, no evil may be left unpunished, and on the other, God does not desire that His creation should perish. Hence, the innocent Son of God voluntarily takes upon Himself the righteous punishment, and in this way we receive forgiveness from God. He who wishes to receive forgiveness can do so by availing himself of the voluntary sacrifice of Christ, while he who does not wish this will receive retribution from God for his evil deeds.

From this there follow the answers to your next questions:

5 and 6. *After the execution of Jesus Christ, why did "God's chosen people" lose the land of their ancestors for 2000 years? In our own time, why cannot this "chosen people of God" live in peace and raise their children?*

When the Jews killed Christ, they did this not out of a desire to do God's will, but out of malice and envy, being instigated to this by Satan. For this reason they promptly lost their divine election. Since they did not

wish to accept God's forgiveness, they incurred just retribution for the evil they had wrought—the very same which you cite in your question and which we see in the news.

God did not wish His Son to suffer at the hands of the Jews, but He foreknew this, and for this reason He foretold it through the prophets. To know something and to be the cause of it are two entirely different things. God used the evil will of Satan and the Jews in order that His compassion and justice might save man. But the Jews are no less guilty on that count. If a person blows up a house, and a palace is then built on the site, the terrorist is not the cause of the palace and merits no admiration. But the One Who took the full force of the blow upon Himself and turned the evil unto good is admirable indeed.

7. Why is it that not one of the principal religions involves human sacrifice, except for the sacrificing of Jesus Christ?

It is actually Christianity that has no human sacrifices, which do indeed exist in the majority of pagan religions. The human sacrifices offered by Hindus and other pagans are a diabolical parody of the voluntary self-sacrifice of the Son of God, Who became Man while remaining God.

8. Who then is the Lord God, in your opinion, if He pre-determined death by crucifixion as the mission for His Only-begotten Son?

The Lord God Who sent His own Son into the world is the Creator of the world, its righteous and merciful Master. He is love and justice; the eternal God Who Is; the Life, Light, and Judge of all that exists. He eternally exists together with His Son and the Holy Spirit, Who

are equal to Him and have one divine essence with Him.

9. *Are there really no other options for establishing a religion for mankind besides the death of the Messenger Who founded the religion?*

Yes, there are other options. These are either the establishment of a false religion through fellowship with the demons, or the proclamation of the salvation from sin, the curse, and death that the incarnate God Jesus Christ brought to earth (the way in which ancient Judaism arose).

10. *Why was the blame for this execution placed specifically on "God's chosen nation"? Muslims and Buddhists accepted their religion from their Messengers without destroying them.*

The execution was not blamed on the Jews. They themselves hated both God and His Eternal Son. For this reason they killed Him out of envy, and for this they suffer righteous punishment. As for Muslims and Buddhists, they received their religion not from God the Creator, but from a rebellious creature—Satan—and hence their religion neither knows anything of God's love nor is able to give man salvation from eternal destruction. Unfortunately, after death eternal punishment awaits both Buddhists and Muslims for their own evil deeds, from which neither Muhammed nor Buddha will be able to save not only them, but even themselves.*

11 and 12. *Why do religions established among mankind*

* This is the personal opinion of the author. With rare exceptions, the Orthodox Church does not undertake to declare that a person or category of persons is condemned to eternal punishment, whether because of their creed or for any other reason, but rather leaves that judgment to God. — *Trans.*

no longer employ the “sacrifice of crucifixion”? Why do none of the supreme hierarchs of the Church take upon themselves the sins of the flock and offer themselves in sacrifice through crucifixion?

Regarding false religions, I have said above that, being unable to save man, they likewise do not know this kind of divine self-sacrifice. And regarding the Church of Christ, Christ offered Himself in sacrifice once and for all. He rose from the dead, and sitting upon the throne of God He cleanses all the sins of Christians by His sacrifice, if they repent of them and avail themselves of baptism or confession. Naturally, no person can save another from death and sin, and for this reason there is no need for the hierarchs of the Church to die for the sins of men (for Christ already cleanses all sins). It would be pointless. Only God in the flesh can save us.

13. *What need was there for the crucifixion if the Lord God absolves sins through repentance?*

The very possibility of forgiveness for those who repent arises only when the innocent Son of God takes upon Himself the punishment for our sins. If the Son of God had not deigned to save us, the door of repentance would be shut.

14. *Why did “God’s chosen nation” itself confess Judaism and not Christianity? After all, Jesus Christ was a Jew, His disciples were Jews, Holy Scripture is written by Jews, and “God’s chosen nation” confesses Judaism. Or is spiritual food also separated into “kosher” for themselves, and “unclean” for others?*

The Judaism confessed by Jews today is not the religion revealed by God to the Jewish prophets and recorded in Scripture. The essence of ancient Judaism was in sac-

rifices, which reminded them of the need to be cleansed of their sins, and in the expectation of divine deliverance from sin and death. Conversely, the new Judaism preaches strict adherence to the standards of the Law. The Jews of old knew that the point of the commandments was to show men the path to the salvation given by God. But the new Judaism trusts in its descendance from the righteous ones of old, as though this could save a person (which the Bible categorically contradicts). Today the Jews have no temple, no sacrifices, and no priests. Without these the Torah cannot be observed. This is to say nothing of the fact that modern Jews ignore the scriptures from the prophets that directly point to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who became man, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. Thus, spiritual food is indeed separated into beneficial food for Christians and detrimental food for all others. The Jews of today are apostates from the Word of God, and they will remain so until they accept Christianity.

15. *Why was the name of the nation changed after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? The ancient name Jews was changed to the unbeautiful Hebrews.* Was this to disassociate from Judas the transgressor?*

Here you are simply mistaken. The name *Hebrews* is mentioned 2000 years before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Genesis, chapter 15). It comes from the name of the righteous Eber of old, who refused to build the Tower of Babel (this was about 3000 years before the

* This question is specific to the Russian language, in which *iudei* (*Jews*) sounds similar to *Judas*, and *evrei* (*Hebrews*) can carry pejorative connotations. –*Trans.*

Nativity of Christ). He became the progenitor of the Hebrew nation. As for the name *Jews*, this too is in no way connected with Judas Iscariot. Saint Jacob (the grandson of Abraham) had twelve sons, the fourth of which was Judah, and the birthright passed to him (read the book of Genesis to learn the reasons for this). From this Judah (who died about 1750 B.C.) proceeded the royal line of King David, through which the descendants of Judah played a leading role in the Hebrew nation. In His human nature the Lord Jesus Christ is in fact a descendant of Judah. Here you are simply mistaken.

I have answered your questions, but now I wish to caution you in one important matter. You write that you are “baptized” and “Orthodox.” But while the former is, of course, indubitable, the latter is hardly accurate. The fact is, an Orthodox Christian is not merely one who believes in God and is baptized, but one who shares the faith of the Creed. To this faith, at present, you do not adhere. I am glad that you wrote with your questions sincerely, but remember that until you acknowledge the faith of the Church with all your heart—in the Triune God, in the Divine Incarnation, in the redeeming death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection—and acknowledge that outside the Church there is no salvation, you are neither Orthodox nor Christians. I write this not to offend you, but simply stating the facts of your religious position. Just as a square cannot be called a triangle, one who does not believe in accordance with the Symbol of Faith cannot be called a Christian. Nor, I think, do you understand the point of baptism. After all, we baptize into the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection.

I sincerely hope that this state of affairs may soon change, and for this reason I exhort you to contemplatively study the Orthodox faith and divine revelation.

May God preserve you.

With love in the Lord,

Priest Daniel

January 5, 2009

21. To an Orthodox Christian who pointed out to him an article by Deacon Andrey Kuraev, in which the latter attempted to defend evolutionism.

Unfortunately, Fr. Andrey acted unscrupulously from a theological standpoint. He simply lied, inventing a non-literal Western school of thought regarding the Six Days. In actuality, Augustine acknowledged either that the Six Days were literal, or that creation was instantaneous. Ambrose was a literalist, like all the Fathers of the last twenty centuries without exception. Dual allegoricity (a day being as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a million) arose only in the late 19th century, and is therefore novel to Orthodox theology. And to the mind of the Church, all novelty is indicative of heresy. All the more so since Fr. Andrey offers no explanation of the chief contradiction between evolutionary mythology and Revelation—the problem of the existence of death prior to the fall into sin, which automatically leads to a rejection of Christ's redeeming sacrifice.

Thus, creationism with its literal understanding of the days of creation as a 24-hour period is the only Or-

thodox understanding of the Six Days. For arguments I refer you to Met. Macary (Bulgakov).

As for the scientific component of creationism, its weakest point is the vapor canopy. This theory is not needed from the standpoint of the Flood (it being easily explained by the opening of holes in space, the entry of water from a celestial body, and water emitted from magma). Furthermore, this theory contradicts Psalm 148, according to which the water above the firmament remains to this day. From the standpoint of biblical catastrophism, this hypothesis of Morris is unnecessary. The speed with which massive strata of sediment rock are formed during catastrophes was superbly demonstrated at the eruption of Mount St. Helens.

As for the circular logic of the geochronological time scale, Fr. Andrey is simply behind the times. It is acknowledged today even by modern scientists. All the more so given that the calculations were made without allowing for global catastrophes, the existence of which is now common knowledge in geology (the asteroid hypothesis for the extinction of the dinosaurs).

I consider highly unprincipled the argument that since Morris is a Protestant, everything he says is sectarian. This is simply twisting the facts. Morris and White recognize the existence of God, whereas modern science does not. Does this mean that the Orthodox assertion that God exists is also a form of sectarianism?

Unfortunately, our pseudo-apologists, who know neither Christianity nor modern science, undertake to combine two disciplines of which they know nothing. This clearly does them no credit. It is still more unscru-

pulous to quote Fr. Seraphim (Rose) in support of one's arguments, when the latter remained a vehement supporter of Mr. Morris to the very end—even in those aspects which, to my mind, are unsubstantiated.

In general, our problem is exactly this—that those people who wish to be friends of this world do not even take the trouble to learn what the mainstream thinking of this world currently is. If you really want to keep up with the times, why keep up with doctrines from 50 years ago?

February 7, 2009

22. To an Orthodox Christian who asked whether an individual can be responsible for the sins of the nation—namely, the sin of regicide.

We are responsible only for what we are able to influence. We are responsible for the nation only when God invests us with power. For example, today we are responsible for whom we elect. But nothing more. As for opposing revolution, if we observe revolutionaries preparing to revolt, we need to either subdue the evildoers ourselves or else report them to the proper authorities. (I mean with reference to opposing a government that tries to maintain the minimum necessary order in accordance with the will of the Creator. For example, in 1991 it is my view that Yeltsin was in the right, and not the State Committee for the State of Emergency, and that the collapse of the USSR was a great mercy from God. For the Church received its freedom.) We do not answer for the sins of our ancestors. The Bible talks about this directly (see Jer. and Ezek.). Hence, all talk of repentance for the

sin of regicide is antibiblical propaganda. Lenin, Sverdlov, Yurovsky, and the whole band of communists are guilty of the tsar's murder, but not the Russian people.

November 6, 2007

23. To an Orthodox woman who asked what to do if the bishops are infected with "the heresy of ecumenism" and serve molebens with the Catholics.

Ecumenism is not a heresy, but a particular movement. Heresies include the "branch theory," the teaching that all will be saved, confessing the "invisible Church," and so on. These teachings have been condemned by multiple councils, the last of which was the Bishops' Council of 2000.

If you have priests or bishops who are confessing these forbidden doctrines, you have the right to bring a case against them before the Spiritual Court.

As for molebens with Catholics, they are explicitly prohibited both by the canons and by the Council of 2000. This is not a heresy, but a canonical violation, and this too is a matter that can be brought before the Spiritual Court.

March 23, 2009

24. To the same woman, in answer to a question about rumors that Saint Seraphim was an Old Believer.

Regarding Saint Seraphim, we have no actual evi-

dence that he was an Old Believer, other than his use of an Old Believer prayer rope. He served, communed, and lived in the ordinary Nikonite Church, just as we do.

March 27, 2009

25. To a man who was perplexed as to why God commanded the Hebrews to destroy the Amalekites, and in general as to why there are examples of cruelty in the Old Testament.

According to Saint Basil the Great, national crimes are punished by national disasters. In God's eyes the Amalekites were so repugnant that He commanded that they be wiped off the face of the earth. Ordinarily He does this by means of the elements (hurricanes, floods, etc.). But here it was by the hands of the Hebrews. Such was His will.

The cruelty of the Old Testament existed because at that time sin could not be cured: one could only prevent the spread of sinful contagion. In this lies the essence of the violence blessed by God. In the New Testament this changed, in that sin became curable through the Sacraments, and for this reason God does not obligate Christians to destroy sinners: they can be cured. But to this day God Himself personally wipes particularly impious nations off the face of the earth (recall, if you will, the tsunami of 2004).

March 26, 2009

26. In answer to a question about which human nature Christ took on, when exactly He healed

it, and what Body of Christ is imparted in the Eucharist.

The Lord's human nature was without corrupt passions, but it did have the sinless consequences of sin (mortality, the need for sleep, hunger, sadness, etc.). With regard to sinfulness, our nature was healed at the moment of the incarnation, and with regard to the vanquishing of death—in the Resurrection.

We commune of the risen Body of the Lord, and for this reason we are heirs of the resurrection. For more details see the resolutions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

July 10, 2009

27. To an Armenian who asked whether the Armenian Apostolic Church was monophysite in its beliefs.

I am actually about to write an extensive work on the Armenians.

Regarding the monophysite heresy, the AAC officially adheres to monophysitism as put forward by Julian of Halicarnassus. For this reason, when the Armenians say that they condemn monophysitism, they mean by this the heresies of Eutyches and Severus. In a certain sense the Armenians are more radical monophysites than the Copts. Monophysitism is asserted in the creed of the AAC, which the priests read at the morning prayer rule.

But their teaching is a very complex question. The fact is, the Armenians as a nation never accepted the monophysite heresy in its entirety. Right up to the great

genocide of 1915 there existed large Orthodox communities of Armenians. Even today there are far more Armenians who acknowledge Chalcedon than who reject it. Consequently, theological chaos reigns in the theology of the AAC. At their consecration, the bishops of the AAC simultaneously acknowledge all seven Councils and anathematize the Fourth Council. The reason for this is that a great many catholicoses of Armenia have been in unity with the Church. This gave rise to the chaotic situation described above. Another problem resulting from this is that in theological schools very little is known about the AAC. It is very difficult for a non-specialist to make sense of this kind of chaos.

Officially, the ROC receives Armenians according to the third rite (based on the 95th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council).

From God's perspective, those who do not abandon the monophysite heresy place their eternal salvation in jeopardy.

August 31, 2009

Holy Scripture

28. To a Christian who asked how to reconcile the various accounts in the Gospel concerning Christ's appearances after the Resurrection.

Christ rose from the dead, then appeared to Mary Magdalene and the Theotokos. At this same time, several groups of myrrh-bearing women were on their way to the tomb from various points in Jerusalem. Next the Lord again appeared to Magdalene. Then to Peter and James. Then to Luke and Cleopas. Then to 10 of the disciples. Then to the 11 a week later. Then at the Sea of Tiberias, then in Galilee, then in Jerusalem on the day of the Ascension.

June 10, 2009

29. To a person who asked about the concept of "the last times."

The last times began when God came to earth. The essence of this concept is that now time and eternity have intersected directly. As for the Day of Judgment, Christ said explicitly that it is impossible to calculate it.

December 18, 2008

30. Concerning the explanation of the seventh chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Christ is Risen!

If we undertake to interpret the Bible, we must proceed not from our own theories, but from the Tradition of the Church. This is all the more important because the Bible has interpreted its own self. This text of Isaiah 7:14 is explained in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1. Both the one and the other are part of the Bible, written by the One Holy Spirit.

Now as to the essence of the prophecy. The seventh chapter of Isaiah speaks of a critical situation for Judea—an invasion by two kings who wished to overturn the dynasty of the descendants of David. Other invasions had not pursued this sort of objective. At that time, in accordance with the quaint Eastern custom, an overthrow of the dynasty would have meant the destruction of the entire line of David. This would have meant that God's promise given to David concerning the Messiah would not have come to pass. Ahaz was in a panic, and so as a sign that these threats would not come to pass Isaiah offered him the sign of Emmanuel's birth from the Virgin. Further on the prophet foretells how God will fulfill His promise. These two kings would be destroyed by Assyria, which was to be a greater enemy to Judea than these two kings. The sign that the threat of these two kings had passed would be the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. But all this would take place under the direction of Emmanuel, to whom the Holy Land already belonged as King. This refers to the pre-existence of Emmanuel prior to the incarnation. Chapters 8

and 9 go on to describe how the kingdom of Emmanuel would come to pass and Who He is.

The prophet presents a broad panorama of historical events which Christ directed in order to prepare for His incarnation. Here is a brief analysis of these chapters.

May God aid you.

April 21, 2009

31. To a person who asked where Cain and Abel found wives.

The wives of Cain and Abel were their own sisters. Marriage to one's sister was prohibited later by Moses.

September 17, 2009

32. To a young man who asked about the so-called "deuterocanonical" books of the Bible, and why the Protestants do not recognize them.

Dear N.,

These books are a part of the Bible, according to Orthodox doctrine. The Protestants leave them out because they are absent from the Jewish Old Testament canon. The fact is, however, that the Jewish canon was conclusively formed later than in the Orthodox Church, and so the opinion of the Jews is of little interest to us. From the list you provided, only the the second and third books of Ezra are controversial. They are not included in the official canonical list of the books of the Bible. Consequently, there are no grounds for treating them like the other books of the Bible.

August 21, 2009

33. To a person who asked about the Old Testament law: if it is abolished, does this mean that we can now ignore the Ten Commandments?

The law was abolished in its ritual aspect, but the significance of the commandments is eternal. And the Ten Commandments are valid not merely in a literal sense (though obviously one must not kill or commit adultery), but according to their spirit. Today we not only must not kill, but also must not be angry without cause. The prohibition does not hinder love, but rather safeguards it.

October 30, 2009

34. In answer to a question about the origin of the term *uranopolitism*.

The term *uranopolitism* is simply a new word formed from the expression “citizen of heaven.” In the Bible the word *heaven* (*uran*) is used in the sense of the place where the angels and God dwell, and not in some other, pagan sense.

Spiritual Life

35. To a woman who had sinned, who was afraid to confess her sin.

Dear N.,

Stay strong. May God grant you aid! A person ought not to fear being barred from Communion, but rather that God will send him to hades. Do not wait for anything. We are in the midst of the fast. At the earliest opportunity go to the church and repent of everything to the priest. The forgiveness that Christ gives is the greatest happiness. I hope to hear from you again with the news that you have been reconciled to God. If you find it hard to say in words, you can write it on paper and give it to the priest.

May God aid you, and more courage to you.

August 14, 2008

36. To a person who had fallen into despair.

Christians must not despair. God is with us, and He never forgets anyone. As for the betrayal, remember that if you become reconciled to God and live according to the commandments, all your former sins will not return to you.

July 10, 2007

37. To a woman who was despondant after giving birth to a daughter.

You ought to rejoice that God has given you a new life. I myself have three daughters, and they are wonderful. Your daughter too will bring you great joy. Drive away your melancholy with prayer and hasten swiftly to Communion.

September 15, 2008

38. To a man who was despondent.

Despondency comes from lack of trust in God. Trust in God, and despondency will flee from you. Predestination has nothing to do with it.

June 10, 2009

39. To a young woman who asked whether premarital relations are permitted.

Christ is Risen!

Your question is, unfortunately, not unusual today. But the Lord has answered it: fornication (which is precisely what your friends are proposing to you) is a mortal sin, one that will destroy both you and your future family. What are you to do? Look for companionship not based on the principle of "somebody, anybody," but based on your own personal interests. I do not think your goal in life is simply to run off and marry the first person you come across. Incidentally, the fact that you are a virgin at 19 years old does you credit. I have seen many people marry early so as not

to be considered “old maids.” This usually resulted either in divorce (at best) or in a living hell. A true friend is not someone who is interested in your body, or even in you (it is a serious mistake to think so). A true friend joins you in seeking the truth, which is more important than both you and him. If you can find such a friend, this is a mercy from God. And this is something to pray for. Only this kind of person can establish an enduring family. With him you will never be bored. And as for companionship, what hinders you from finding companionship among people of any age? (Incidentally, old Christians are frequently far more contemporary and intelligent than young people—spending time with them is extraordinarily interesting.) But remember the words of Solomon: have a thousand acquaintances, but only one friend.

Do not sell your heart cheaply; try to conceal it from everyone. Read the book of Proverbs in the Bible. It is quite contemporary.

I wish you success, and I await further questions if need be.

May God preserve you.

40. To the same young woman, who asked what was meant by “do not sell your heart cheaply,” about how to recognize a true friend, and about how to shake off bitterness toward those around her and vindictiveness.

Greetings on the Day of the Holy Spirit!

I will attempt to answer in order. What does it mean to preserve one’s heart and not sell it cheaply? Our heart

is not just feelings, but the very depths of our spirit. It is the intellect, the will, and the feelings at their ultimate depth, which fortunately are not fully accessible to us. What can harm it? That which we call becoming “earth-bound”—that is, seeking happiness here and now. “I have a right to be happy,” our heart says, foolish though this is—it is the same as saying, “I have a right to win the lottery”—“and I will achieve this at any price.” I would not say that the goal is unattainable, but it is unattainable by these particular goals. Earthly happiness always promises counterfeit joy, and ends in real sorrow. This is natural, for a thing that changes cannot offer anything unchanging (including joy). Consequently, we must find heavenly treasure here and now.

The first thing required for this is an understanding that God the Father really does exist, Who is willing to support us, strengthen us, and comfort us. An understanding of the mind, the will, and the feelings. There are ways to facilitate this, but perhaps we will leave that for the next time.

The second is this: we must stop seeking the mirage of earthly sufficiency. Not just financial, but also emotional. Nobody owes you anything (unless you have an I.O.U. in hand), nor do you owe anyone anything, except for God. If you realize this, you will shut the doors inside you that allow the enemy into your heart.

The third is the most important thing in the world—more important, more intelligent, more valuable, and more powerful than you, me, or any friends you may have. It is the Divine Life, and it is attainable for you, for you are baptized and chrismated. This must be your adornment,

your defense, and the increase of your strength. And you can do this if you find the right path to it.

This is the chief treasure of the heart, and without it you will suffocate, as may be seen from your letter. It is this that defines a true friend, one who can be trusted. He is one who seeks the Lord together with you. If this is not so, better to search alone than to use people as a crutch.

How can you help people without opening yourself up to them? Quite simply, out of love for Christ crucified. If you help people for men's sake, and expect gratitude in return, you will receive precisely what you are receiving. There is an old Russian saying: "Do no good and you'll be done no evil." This refers precisely to these kinds of good works. It is no wonder that you have grown bitter, no wonder that you condemn everyone, no wonder that you see the people around you as targets. You have sought good where there was none; you have tried to do this by your own strength (and not by God's), which is impossible, and for this reason you have stopped communing and making confession. Without God you have simply overexerted yourself, and it is only going to get worse. Either (God forbid) something terrible will happen to you, or you will be sucked into trivialities and become a mere shadow of a person. But the Holy Spirit is knocking at your door, and this is why you are flustered. Thus, the reason lies with you yourself (and you are not so much at fault as you are unfortunate)! You can break free: the path is open, and the laws of the Church exist as signposts along the way, and not as shackles to hold you down. But it all depends on you.

As for looking for someone to love you as you are—why bother? Do you actually find yourself particularly appealing at present? Is everything about you aligned with the truth? We love people as the image of God in spite of their evil, not along with it. As for your friend, please do not seek revenge against him. There is no fault in him. Here is where honesty comes into play. For God's sake, talk things over with him. Be brave! Why drain both him and yourself of emotional strength? And do not condemn others, to say nothing of causing trouble, for then there will be nothing left within you.

May God preserve you!

June 20, 2005

41. To a person possessed with a demon.

What is happening to you is called demonic possession. It usually occurs due to an unrepented sin (pridefulness, fornication, apostasy, etc.). Your only hope is to have firm faith in God, repent of your sins, and go to an experienced priest who can drive out the demon. Start by having your apartment blessed (invite a priest from the nearest church) and ask him about making confession. Never take off your cross. Do not despond, but remember that even demonic possession can be to your benefit, if you change your ways.

Think more about the Lord and try to unceasingly pray to Him, even in the briefest of words.

May God aid you.

You are in my prayers.

January 29, 2007

42. To a person who wished to overcome fearfulness and insecurity.

Trust in God and pray to Him. The Psalter is especially helpful (you may read it in Yungierov's Russian translation so that it is understandable). You can also ask the intercessions of the right-believing princes and emperors, beginning with Joshua the son of Nun, Constantine, David, Justinian, and Alexander Nevsky. May God help you.

April 7, 2009

43. To a man who asked how to go about increasing in the virtues.

Christ is Risen!

The first virtue required is Orthodox faith. Next follow prayer and outward works (almsgiving, prostrations, fasting, etc.). All this must be accompanied by obedience to the Church. Next you ought to fight against the passion that presently wars against you, and practice its opposite virtue. By no means must you undertake those virtues that are linked to the vices from which you suffer.*

These are the basic principles; for more detail I refer you to your spiritual father and to *The Ladder*.

May 11, 2009

* Here the author refers to the patristic concept that every vice is a perversion of a virtue, and he advises the sufferer to defer practicing those virtues which in him have already become perverted into vices. —*Trans.*

44. To an unchurched person concerning demons.

The fallen spirits are angels that rebelled against God. They invent every kind of evil. They are called demons because they strike fear in people. What is happening to you at night appears to be their work. Your defense against them is the power of God. In order not to fear the demons you must cleanse your heart in the sacrament of Confession and receive Communion. Likewise, evil spirits cannot abide prayers said with faith and the sign of the Lord's Cross.

June 16, 2009

45. To an Orthodox Christian who wished to drive out demons from the possessed and asked how best to do so.

The Lord gave Christians the power to drive Satan out of people. This power belongs to all Orthodox Christians. But this power should be wielded carefully, lest the enemy overpower you due to your pridefulness. In the past, necessity has obliged me to take part in this, but I would not deliberately make a practice of it. The greatest power accessible to a Christian is the Word of God, which subdues all the attacks of the foe. If someone shows signs of demonic possession, simply begin to read the Gospel and the enemy will retreat. But if you brashly go looking for a fight with the evil one, without being charged with this by God, it could end badly. May God preserve you.

September 23, 2009

46. To a man who wished to learn whether our prayers for an unbeliever can cause him to believe, and if not, of what use they are.

God saves people, but only if they are willing. Our prayers can help only those who are willing to accept this help. Likewise, God can use our prayers to bring a person to the point where he has to make a choice. But ultimately the choice is up to the person.

May God preserve you.

August 13, 2009

47. To an unchurched man who questioned how cleansing of sins could be possible.

Man cannot do this, but God, who became man, can. For is anything impossible for the Creator? God died in the flesh (but not in His divinity) for our sins, yours and mine. He paid for us with His life. And now all Christians receive actual forgiveness through faith in Him in the mystery of His direct intervention. Any person can receive complete forgiveness by believing in Christ. And this forgiveness is not empty theory, but actual fact. Try it, and you will see that the Lord is good.

October 3, 2009

48. To a Christian who complained that he was not permitted to commune because he had not been at the all-night vigil the evening before.

Dear N.,

Being at the all-night vigil the evening before Communion is obligatory for any healthy Christian. Consequently, it was right that you were not permitted to receive the Holy Mysteries. I hope that in the future you will strictly observe the Tradition of the Church.

November 13, 2009

Church Life

49. To an Orthodox woman who asked about whether participating in church life is permissible during menstruation, and also about working as an insurance agent and studying psychology.

The church canons prohibit a woman from communing and receiving the sacrament of baptism during this period. All other prohibitions are not grounded in Tradition and are absurd. The woman with an issue of blood touched Christ's garment and was healed. We do not remove the cross we wear during this period. How then is the power of the cross different from the grace of any other icon? Consequently, one may enter the church, light candles, and approach to be annointed at the polyeleos. As for unction and confession, I think that if you are not suffering from any gynecological complaints and are not at risk of illness, it is best to refrain from these sacraments during your time of the month.

As for the profession of insurance agent, I see nothing here that is contrary to the Word of God. Neither the Bible nor the fathers of the Church prohibit protecting one's property against loss. This in no way opposes Providence, which will come to pass regardless.

As for psychology, this is a somewhat more complex matter. Freudism, Yungianism, behaviorism, and other atheistic psychologies are not only false, but actually destroy the soul. I would suggest that you first familiarize yourself with *The Ladder* by St. John and *Fundamentals of the Art of Sanctity** by Bp. Varnava (Belyaev). There you will find a good foundation for studying the human person.

May God aid you.

February 14, 2008

50. To a woman who asked when one ought to wear a headscarf and how to dress, and also whether cosmetics are permissible.

A married Orthodox Christian woman must wear a headscarf when praying (at church or at home). See the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 11. One must dress modestly and chastely, without arousing lust. Pants may only be worn when there is acute necessity (uniform, work clothes) or in those cultures where a particular style of pants is a distinctively feminine feature (the *Salvar*** in Central Asia). There are medicinal cosmetics, and then there are those that compensate for deficiencies of appearance, but without inciting others to the sin of fornication.

March 25, 2007

* Russian title: *Osnovy iskusstva svyatosti*. –Trans.

** A form of baggy trousers, worn by both men and women in certain Muslim countries and in areas of Turkish influence. –Trans.

51. To a person who was scandalized by rumors of debauchery among the bishops.

Dear N.,

Your definition of the hierarchy as “a tool in God’s hands” precisely defines the reality of the Church. Indeed, the sacraments are performed not by the priest, but by God through the priest. Hence, the sin of the man does not affect the faithfulness of God. As for sodomy among the hierarchs, I have lived three decades in the Church, yet I know of not a single confirmed instance, and of only one instance that more or less resembled one (the alleged sinner has already died). The mechanism of how these rumors take shape is simple: we accuse the married man of debauchery, and the monk of being gay. People will always find some accusation to make. Do not let it trouble you. Even the affair of Nikon of Ekaterinburg is impossible to separate to this day from the financial scandal (the bishop had put a stop to the clerics’ profiteering).

To this day, even if there are sinners, they are ashamed of their sin and condemn it publically. Remember how the church in Nizhny Novgorod where two gays were “married” was torn down. Thus, God will judge them and all of us. We ourselves ought not to look for sins in others, but to condemn ourselves. In the hierarchy let us seek only precise adherence to dogma. May God forgive us all and deliver us from sin.

March 28, 2006

52. To a Russian living in the USA, who accused the Orthodox Church of numerous faults, including promoting telegony, conspiracy theories, etc.

Dear N.,

I agree with you entirely in that you have pointed out a series of real ailments in the Body of Christ that is the Orthodox Church. In it there are also people who profess false teachings (the theory of evolution), as the Savior foretold. There are also priests who sin, as well as emphasis on things of secondary importance. All this is true.

But there is also a certain reality. The Church is at war with the devil. It sees the real danger of fornication, drug addiction, abortion, etc. It sees in this the action of Satan. And it attempts to oppose it. But many apologists uncritically put foreword imprecise arguments against actual sins. Yes, they are wrong in promoting telegony.* But they are right in combatting fornication. They see a satanic conspiracy, but they think it is directed at Russia alone. This is an imprecise description of reality, and not outright fiction.

You will notice that the official documents of the Church teach nothing of the kind. And this is very important. Despite all the errors of individuals, the Church

* Believed baseless at the time this letter was written, today scientists are revisiting the theory of telegony—the idea that a female's first male sexual partner can influence her subsequent offspring with other partners. In 2014 this phenomenon was documented in the fly *Telostylinus angusticollis* by evolutionary ecologists A.J. Crean and colleagues. —*Trans.*

officially preaches the truth of Christ.

Here it is important to note how this differs from the Protestant denominations, in which there is an absolute pluralism of opinions. The Baptists in the USA are divided within a single organization. Some are in favor of homosexual marriages, while others are categorically opposed. Yet both are Baptists. This would be impossible in Orthodoxy.

And another thing I wish to say to you. There is no salvation outside the Church. He who does not have the Church as his mother does not have God as his Father. If you do not enter the actual Church of Christ, you will perish. It is a matter of the soul's salvation, not of the ills of an organization. If the Baptists were the Church, I would be with them, even despite their sins. But of all the Christian churches only Orthodoxy not only traces its lineage directly to Christ via apostolic succession, but also officially preserves the faith of Christ.

May God help you.

August 27, 2009

53. To a person who asked about the conflict in the Sourozh diocese concerning Bishop Basil (Osborne).*

* This conflict arose between Bishop Basil (Osborne), head of the Diocese of Sourozh, and the Moscow Patriarchate. From being a purely ecclesiastical dispute it went on to become an issue of international political import. The British Orthodox community, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church for over forty years, split in two, with part of it following Bishop Basil to come under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople. —*Ed.*

You wrote to me this past winter, asking me to participate in discussing the issues of the Sourozh diocese on Kuraev's forum. At the time I could not form an objective opinion of what was happening, and I tried to avoid becoming involved in the polemics at all until I should have acquired objective information. I cannot abide partisanship in the Church, and so I do not wish to take the part of either side. Since that time the event has become clearer to me. What we have is an undue division of the Church of God. (I cannot call it a schism; it is rather a "parasynagogue"—that is, when the flock of an unsubmissive bishop rallies around him, supported by the papist ambitions of Constantinople.) This state is sinful in the extreme for its organizers.

First I will attempt to evaluate the situation from a canonical standpoint. Was Bishop Basil right in suspending Father Andrey from serving? I believe so, yes. After all, one who vexes a bishop is subject to defrocking. Did the rank-and-file parishioners have a right to collect signatures for an appeal to the patriarch against the bishop, without his blessing? Again, obviously, yes. For the right to appeal and petition regarding unlawful acts by a bishop is prescribed by the canons (the 6th canon of the Second Ecumenical Council and many others). To require the consent of the accused is absurd. According to the church canons, if an accusation is brought against a bishop, he loses the right to impose prohibitions against his accusers until the case is heard by a higher institution. This is also obvious. But should the accusations prove false, the slanderers are to be excommunicated.

How ought we to evaluate Bishop Basil's behavior?

Judging by all that we see from his supporters and detractors, he simply did not wish to deal with managing his new parishioners. He held the reins of power; he could have and should have met with and exhorted them privately, then before two or three witnesses, and then, if they had not obeyed and had been in violation of church norms, imposed suspensions.

Here the standard ought not to be “the legacy of Metropolitan Anthony,” but the universally accepted norms of the Church—the Bible and Holy Tradition. If these norms were not violated, it were better to adhere to the words of St. Augustine: “Unity in what is primary, freedom in what is secondary, and love in all things.” Bishop Basil actually showed himself to be a poor shepherd who abandoned his flock. This is simply a sin, no matter what you call it. Christ died both for the “old Sourozhites” and for the “new Russians.”

And this, I believe, was the chief cause of the division.

As for the appeal to Constantinople, contrary to the opinion of the Moscow Synod I believe the right to do so does in fact exist. We know from the resolutions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and other historical records that the Synod under the Patriarch of Constantinople (as in Rome) had the right to hear the judicial disputes of the bishops of other patriarchates. But Bishop Basil simply had nothing to appeal. He had not yet been tried. His right to appeal comes into effect only once the Bishops’ Council of the ROC has condemned him. As it stands, invoking the right to appeal to Constantinople is completely inappropriate.

Bishop Basil could have rejected his removal from office and retirement as being contrary to the charter of the ROC. (This is the privilege of the Synod, not the Patriarch). But once again, this was not a judicial decision, and it presupposes no right to appeal. According to both God and man, he ought to have met with the patriarch before leaving to join the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. But his behavior resembles a kindergarten quarrel. "The Department for External Church Relations is being mean to me, so I'm not speaking to them." This is ridiculous. One invested with the apostolic gift must always be prepared to give an account of his hope, especially before his own fellow bishop. It would have been no great matter to withdraw the petition to the patriarch of Constantinople.

Now, concerning the decision of the Synod of Constantinople. It should be noted that its canonical basis is completely unsound. Besides the fact that there was nothing to appeal, and hence the 9th and 17th canons of Chalcedon are simply moot, the 28th canon can have no bearing on the Church of England, which according to the 6th canon of the First Ecumenical Council has always fallen under the jurisdiction of Rome. Until the Roman See is reunited to the Church, dioceses that have been established by other local churches temporarily belong to the same.

Bishop Basil's actions can only be termed a flight from the Cross and canonical willfulness.

The question of the certificate of release is more complicated. Strictly speaking, the canons cited by the Moscow Synod pertain only to clerics, and not to bish-

ops. Strictly speaking, a bishop may leave his see, either to retire due to illness, or he may be deposed, or in extreme cases he may be transferred to another see by decision of an authorized Council. But Bishop Basil himself acknowledged the necessity of obtaining a certificate of release, and hence he incurred all the canons specified in the resolution.

What caused these events, if we set aside Bishop Basil's ambitions? I think that here we have an obvious combined case of the nationalism and elitism typical of all local Churches—those of Russia, of Greece, and of Constantinople. We do not wish to experience the wondrous novelty of the universality of the Gospel; we are too caught up in our own local traditions, whether of Moscow or of London, and we forget the words of the apostle Paul: is Christ divided? Was Metropolitan Anthony crucified for us, that we should be divided over his memory?

I think we need with all our might to seek reconciliation between these two great warring Churches—that of Constantinople and that of Moscow. We must completely root out every offshoot of nationalism in the Churches. We must learn to fear division like the plague, for it is contrary to the last prayer of Christ.

How is this “Sourozh issue” to be resolved today? I think here it would be helpful to have a joint session of the Synods of Moscow and Constantinople, with the mediation of other local churches; for Bishop Basil was justly suspended, and there is no need to entertain Satan with new divisions. May divine justice and love prevail.

August 5, 2009

Family

54. To a father whose child decided to cohabit without benefit of marriage.

Naturally, this so-called “trial cohabitation” is nothing more than fornication. Incidentally, marriages formed after living together disintegrate far more often, specifically because they are not founded on mutual trust and responsibility.

What are parents to do? This depends on whether or not they have influence over their children. If they do, they should try to persuade them not to anger God, and either to marry or to separate. If not, they should state their position on the sin, then hold their peace, but on the condition that the children support themselves and live on their own. We must not support sin either with housing or with money. That being said, we ought not to break off personal relations with sinners in areas that do not require us to approve of sin. For if they do repent, they need a place to return to.

August 9, 2006

55. To another father regarding proper relations in the family and his relationship with his adult daughter.

May God bless you and your family!

I read your letter and was somewhat surprised. You are indeed the head of the family, but only for your wife. Your eldest daughter must provide for herself. She is already an independent adult, and is able to answer for herself. If she herself can afford a trip to the coast, why should she ask anyone's blessing? If she wishes, let her go; if not, let her stay.

Why are you interfering in the affairs of others? A daughter is not your property, nor mine. She is an independent person. And she needs to become accustomed to that independence. There is nothing more terrible than when parents attempt to govern their children until they are old and gray. You and she have the same freedom, and it has nothing to do with the fact that you are the head of the family.

It seems to me that many problems in your family arise from the fact that you misunderstand the Christian teaching on marriage. The expression "head of the family" does not mean that the husband has continual authority over his household; rather, it signifies that the husband must know how to make important decisions and explain them to his household in clear, convincing language. Leave your "Drop down and give me twenty!" for the army; otherwise you may very quickly destroy your family and lose your children. I advise you to read the book of Sirach (in the Bible). It contains much helpful advice on how to live wisely.

Pardon me if I have misunderstood you. It is just that too often men who convert to Orthodoxy begin thinking that Scripture entitles them to military obedience. In ac-

tuality, the husband must have authority, but this authority is born of wisdom and the ability to clearly explain one's demands. Groundless orders may be given in the family only under the most extreme circumstances. As for obtaining authority, remember that it is not assigned, but earned. It is earned by the wisdom and correctness of your counsel. A wise ruler can always command obedience in such a way that the person obeying will think that he himself wishes to do that very thing.

I wish you and your household ample wisdom, love, and mutual respect. May God preserve you.

July 10, 2007

56. To a woman who converted to Orthodoxy, while her husband remained an unbeliever, and who asked about living with him and raising their adult sons.

Regarding your relationship with your husband, re-read 1 Cor. 7; your case is described there. If your husband is willing to live with you and does not hinder you from living a godly life, live together; if not, seek a divorce. Regarding the children, do not pressure them; only speak to them when they are obviously violating God's commandments. Your sons must become independent persons, and your task is to guide them to this—naturally, on the basis of God's commandments. Try not to denounce them for passions, and if it does become necessary act with love, and when they are able to hear it. I advise you to denounce these passions in the third person.

Regarding the relationship between your husband

and children, step back and try to maintain an equable relationship with everyone.

July 10, 2009

57. To an Orthodox young woman who had long searched for a husband without success.

I think you indeed had better accept that at present it is not God's will that you start a family. You are an Orthodox Christian; do you really have nothing better to do than look for a husband? Do not forget that according to Orthodox teaching, celibacy for Christ's sake is superior to marriage and can be a source of far greater strength. Reread the apostle Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, where you will find many of the answers to your questions. Even from a practical standpoint, a person who is hyperfocused on having a family has almost no chance of a normal marriage. It is like trying to sleep when you have insomnia by thinking, "When on earth will sleep come?" Learn to do deeds of mercy or to missionize, and God will help you.

December 15, 2006

58. To an Orthodox man who wished to start a family.

Peace be unto you! I think that before asking for marriage you ought to reexamine your former worldview. Why we live, what we want, where we are going—all this you must know with certainty. Otherwise you will not be able to find a suitable bride. Regarding prayer for

your future family, if you have understood what kind of family can help you come to God, ask God for this and you will receive it.

Molebens for families are served in Moscow every Friday evening in the Small Ascension Church across from the Conservatory. God is merciful and forgives the sins of all who repent, if they wish to live according to the commandments, so you need not fear to ask. Take courage, and may God help you.

July 9, 2007

59. To an Orthodox young woman who asked how to determine whether a man is suitable for marriage in the Church.

Dear N.,

Here the rule is simple. If the person is Orthodox and wishes to keep the commandments, all is well. If not, of what use is he?

The canonical obstacles to marriage are not being baptized and heresy.*

The Lord preserve you.

November 7, 2009

60. To a Christian woman who wished to learn whether the marriage bonds remain in eternity.

* In the Orthodox Church there are additional canonical impediments to marriage, including close kinship, an existing godparent-godchild relationship, and being under canonical or legal age or already three times married. – *Trans.*

In the Gospel the Lord has answered your question. He says directly that in the resurrection people do not marry, nor are they given in marriage, but that they abide like the angels of God in heaven (Mt. 22:30). I do not understand how you could think of preserving your familiar bonds in eternity, contrary to the clear teaching of God. Furthermore, spouses not only will not be obliged to be together, but may even meet opposite fates. Christ said: "In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left" (Lk. 17:34). Thus, the concept of spouses as eternal counterparts is baseless. For Scripture does not say that the two will be one person, but one flesh. Furthermore, the apostle Paul applies these same words to union with a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:15–18). Indeed, in the fleshly union a certain link is formed, but it by no means results in the creation of some kind of personality. All it can do is destroy the soul by sin, if it takes place contrary to the will of God, or to serve as the spark that kindles warm relations between the spouses. Even ordinary life shows that over time natural relations gradually die away. If the relationship between the husband and wife does not become a friendship, and is not adorned with the divine love of which the apostle Paul speaks (1 Cor. 13), then after death there will be nothing holding them together. As an example, consider our childhood friends. If the friendship consisted of nothing but getting into trouble together, we will have nothing to talk about as adults. In the same way, if relations in the family were limited to children and keeping house together, what will we have to talk about after the excarnation?

Here we should note that the widespread idea that God Himself selects an “other half” for every person has no basis in Holy Tradition. St. John Chrysostom writes, “When a certain wise man saith, ‘It is by the Lord that a man is matched with a woman’ (Prov. Xix. 14, LXX), he means this, God made marriage, and not that it is He that joineth together every man that cometh to be with a woman. For we see many that come to be with one another for evil, even by the law of marriage, and this we should not ascribe to God.” It is not God, but we ourselves who select our spouse, and so we bear the full responsibility for this.

Thus, if you wish to be with your husband in eternity, hold a competition to see who will run the fastest toward the ultimate reward: talk about this, strive for this, and pray for this always. Never under any circumstances forget that your husband is a human being; do not think that you understand him fully (for people always change). Hinder each other from doing evil, and spur each other on to good works. May God help you!

May 31, 2006

* Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 13 (NPNF¹ 11:551).

The Modern World

61. To a Christian who wrote about modern civilization as having renounced Christ.

When you asked about the paths of civilization's development, civilization as such is actually following the path of magical revolution. To me as a missionary this is patently obvious. But this by no means implies that this cannot be changed. Here a secret counterrevolution by the Church is needed. And that is precisely the work I am doing. The most important force in the world is the word. Words can change everything. We therefore need the following:

1. Church-wide education on three levels (mission, catechesis, higher theological and secular religious education).

2. New peoples must be attracted to the Orthodox faith—not those that are already “traditionally Orthodox.”

3. People must be brought together who are willing to incorporate the ideal of sanctity in the world.

4. The Gospel must be preached with maximum honesty. For it is the Gospel that is able to transform the

world.

These, in my view, are the paths for the expansion of the Church's influence in the world. Only inviolate Christianity can break through the current situation.

May 18, 2009

62. To an Orthodox Tatar who wished to use Western cinematic adaptations of the Gospel for missionary work.

I am very cautious about stage productions of the Gospel. They can create problems in one's prayer life. Instead of the actual Lord, into one's mind will float the image of the actor. Furthermore, the novelty of the Gospel will be overshadowed by this interpretation alone.

November 5, 2009

63. To a person who asked about Nazism.

Regarding Nazism, any assertion that there are higher or lower races contradicts the Bible (mankind has a single progenitor—Adam). Hence, Nazis cannot be Orthodox.

April 21, 2009

64. To a seminary graduate who asked, "What is transsexualism from an Orthodox perspective?"

Esteemed N.,

According to God's law, transsexualism is an abomination unto the Lord (Deut. 23). Essentially, transsexuali-

ty is when a debauched person is no longer satisfied with natural attraction. He needs something to “spice it up.” And so the person falls beneath the level of fornication and grows ever closer to the devil.

August 28, 2005

65. To a young man who asked about rock music.

Rock music is complicated. It is not always Satanism; still more rarely is it Christianity. As long as one does not become carried away, “all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12).

September 23, 2005

66. To a person who asked whether it is a sin to trade on the stock market.

The stock market is not usury. Banks and especially pawn shops are more akin to usury. But the stock market is simply a virtual marketplace. Of course, there are also sinful activities on the stock market, such as speculatively crashing the market.

April 22, 2009

67. To the same person concerning speculation.

Speculation is not merely buying low to sell high. There is nothing wrong with this. Speculation is when in this game one disregards the plight of others. If goods are

sold in our stores at an obvious mark-up, this is normal. Otherwise the sellers would have nothing on which to live. The problem arises when a person is hungry and they triple the price of bread, or when goods are withheld so as to hike the prices beyond any reasonable limits. In this lies the sin.

April 25, 2009

68. In answer to a question regarding his view of the twelve-step program.

1. I take a negative view of the twelve-step program because it is syncretic in nature ("I speak to God as I imagine Him to be") and because for this program to work a person must be wholly committed to it.

2. There have been successful attempts to Christianize this program on the part of Alexey Baburin (in Romashkovo). Consequently, the twelve-step program can be effective if its erroneous premises are corrected.

July 24, 2009

69. To a man who wanted to learn whether studying the martial arts is detrimental to the soul.

Those martial arts that are connected with occultism and Eastern philosophies are detrimental to the soul. These include karate, kung fu, etc. Those that only involve exercising the body are neutral for the soul, if they are not used for evil. These arts include all the European martial arts and Sambo.

August 13, 2009

70. To a man who sent for critique an article that he had written, full of abuse and accusations against current Russian government officials.

I do not see what there is here to critique. It is nothing but foolish malice, hatred, and unsubstantiated howls. I myself am not enthralled with the current government, but all your outcries are complete nonsense. You have rejected the true historical Church, which strictly adheres to the biblical commandment to pray for the authorities, and you yourself are in violation of the scriptural principle: "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:5). Your accusations against specific persons are completely unsubstantiated, and hence can be viewed as nothing less than bearing false witness (a sin against the 9th commandment). What is there for us to talk about? As a priest, my advice is that you would do better to repent of your own dreadful sins, which link you with Satan. Otherwise all your words will be perceived by all men as the outcries of an embittered troublemaker. As for pleasing God with such deeds, do not bother trying. The Creator is not served by hatred and slander. These works are the works of the devil.

Forgive me for speaking sharply, but the truth is always sharp.

June 7, 2006

71. To a monarchist who wrote concerning "Sergianism" and stated that the current Russian government is unacceptable for a Christian because only a tsar can be legitimate.

The problem with our patriots is that they serve their motherland instead of God. Scripture and the fathers clearly teach that it is God, and no one else, who is the ruler of the universe. He appoints kings and deposes them, and He does as He pleases. And no one will say to Him, "Why hast Thou done this?" This teaching is even reflected in the Symbol of Faith, where "ALL-mighty" refers to God the Father, and not the current ruler.

The holy fathers examined in detail the question of how to regard evil rulers and to what degree they are to be obeyed. The fathers knew, moreover, that ordinarily all government must be obeyed in all that does not contradict the will of God. Conversely, the opponents of Patriarch Sergius (along with the Manichean heretics of old) rejected the all-encompassing power of the Creator, and thereby flung themselves into continual strife not against the devil, but against flesh and blood. The enemy lost no time in taking advantage of this and incited a schism, introducing terrible hatred into the hearts of many "church-abroaders." To this day those infected with this spirit have become entirely unlike the great saints. They have no meekness, patience, compassion toward those in error, or love—only a proud assertion of their phantom "rightness" and "purity," which makes them akin to the Pharisees. What is more, by "rightness" they mean purely earthly things, which are ascribed an eternal dimension. Neither St. Sergius, nor St. Philip, nor St. Hermogenes called for civil strife; yet our zealots do exactly that. Incidentally, Mamai was not the lawful khan, which is why St. Sergius blessed opposition to him, taking into account that Mamai was not looking for tribute, but only wanted

to destroy Christianity in Rus (read his authentic life). St. Philip did not demand the overthrow of Ivan the Terrible. And Patriarch Hermogenes many times proposed that even a Polish prince be accepted if the latter would accept Orthodoxy. St. Tikhon condemned the godlessness of the Bolsheviks, but when they came into power he rendered them “loyalty.” This has been the path of all Christians of all time. We serve God—not Rus, and not Byzantium. But for some reason people have forgotten this.

May the loving Heavenly Father preserve you.

February 17, 2006

72. To a Christian who wrote that the Russian people need to repent of the murder of the tsar, that democracy is unacceptable for Christians, and that the current government must be denounced.

May God help you!

The government is given by God to prevent sin. Insofar as it accomplishes this, it is from God. The personal sin of the monarch and of those who urged him to abdicate can have no effect on those who had nothing to do with it. As for denouncing sin, here we must be careful, lest we go from denouncing to judging others. Many times the patriarch has pointed out the sins and problems that we face, both to society and to the government. But the fact that not everyone listens is a matter of free will, which even God is not willing to violate.

Regarding your evaluation of democracy, let me re-

mind you that the Church exists no matter what the regime and leads her children to salvation, while outside the Church salvation is impossible for anyone, in any place. So I do not think it is a matter of the form of government (especially given that today we practically have a monarchy). Even the motto “liberty, equality, fraternity” is naturally false. But I have not noticed people living by it in our time. Certain civil liberties only serve to benefit the Church (freedom of speech, of print, and of religion). Nor is anyone likely to gainsay equality before the law. But of fraternity today we see not a trace—even, unfortunately, among Orthodox Christians. Preaching tolerance of sin, however, is indeed dangerous and frightening. Extremism is indeed rampant among the denouncers. I myself have heard Orthodox patriots preaching racism, ethnic cleansing, and the execution of those Orthodox who disagree. The Gospel can hardly be used to justify this.

You say that priests are speaking out in support of the current status quo. Well, and what would you have them do? Would you have us speak out in favor of the committee for closing churches established by Emperor Alexander II, or for the rebirth of the godless USSR? Today the government does not hinder us from doing good, and attempts to restrain evil to the best of its abilities. And this is really all that it is capable of doing. No government can change a person’s will. God Himself resolved not to do so.

Words of denunciation must be mingled with love for the sinner; otherwise they will merely play into Satan’s hands. Flee condemnation; it is a sin from the anti-christ. And remember that the venerable Sergius brought

about Russia's rebirth not by protests and denunciations, but by striving for holiness. And this is something that we see too few calls to emulate.

May the Lord preserve you.

October 23, 2008

73. To an unbeliever who asked about the origins of government.

If God the Creator exists, undoubtedly it is He that governs the world. In that case He, as the Bible says, is King of kings and Lord of lords. Consequently, absolute anarchy is impossible for the simple reason that there is an absolute Master: God the Creator. Here the following question arises: how does He (and He alone—not this or that person) see fit to manifest His absolute power?

The Bible says that certain kinds of authority have existed since the very beginning—the authority of parents over children, and of the husband over the wife. But higher levels of authority did not exist prior to the Flood. And this caused evil to spread in the extreme. For this very reason after the Flood God established the right to execute people for murder. And this right gave rise to government.

But like everything else in the world it is permeated with sin, and consequently often becomes a monster. This takes place through the action of Satan, and therefore can be overcome only by spiritual means—that is, by prayer. It is for this reason that the Church always prays for the government—so as to drive out of it the monstrous component. And sometimes this is partially successful.

But this property of government cannot be completely destroyed until death is driven out of this world. When death is no more, all earthly governments will end, and the sovereign rule of God will ensue.

Such is my brief answer to your question.

I think man's authority over man as such is a good thing, for it was established by God's will (see Rom. 13, Gen. 9). Abuse of power is bad, love of power is bad, and unjust courts are bad, but not the courts themselves.

April 25, 2009

Atheism

74. To a Christian who was troubled by an atheist book that asserted that Christ did not rise from the dead, and that the disciples stole the body from the sepulchre.

Dear N.,

These arguments, to my mind, indicate the reality of the resurrection.

1. The watch set jointly by Pilate and the Jewish priests. We have no evidence that anyone attempted to take the body by force. Neither Pilate, nor the priests, nor even the Parthians would have benefited from the theft. No investigation was conducted to learn the identity of the thieves. If the resurrection were not the subject, any interested party would have demanded an investigation.

2. The grave clothes were left in the tomb, permeated with a sticky substance. Why would the thieves have removed the grave clothes in the dark (without even damaging them), when they could have done so in any other place?

3. After the resurrection Christ was seen by hundreds of people. Ascribing this to mass hallucination does not work, for the simple reason that none of the witnesses was in the least expecting to see the Risen Jesus. Nor

is it particularly logical to cite one inexplicable phenomenon to explain another inexplicable phenomenon. (No one knows what mass hallucination is, or whether it occurs at all. More likely it is an attempt by foolish atheists to explain the visions.)

4. Where did the food go when this alleged ghost ate it?

5. Why were all attempts to stop the apostles from preaching merely prohibitory in nature? Given the threat of terrorist attacks, would it really not have been more advantageous for the government to conduct a thorough investigation to calm the populace?

6. Why to this day do demons come out of people who call upon the Risen Christ? Why do miracles of healing (I myself have witnessed at least three) and resurrection take place through His name?

In general, we need to remember that attempting to find natural explanations for everything is by no means indicative of a profound intellect—rather, it suggests extreme narrow-mindedness.

Incidentally, the easiest way to become convinced of Christ's resurrection is to encounter Him personally.

August 12, 2005

75. To an unbelieving young woman who asked seven questions about the priesthood, confession, worship, Islamization, apocryphal gospels, and the Church.

1) History often mentions priests who pursued mercantile goals, such as Pushkin with his "muddleheaded priest." What

view are we to take of career priests? Are careerism and the pursuit of financial gain inherent qualities in priests?

Priests are people too, and as such they do sin. There are priests who sin by careerism, and there are lovers of profit, but this does not harm their ministry. For they are merely God's servants, not His vicars. They are His witnesses, tools in His hands. Just as a witness at court is required only to give true testimony, so also the priest, in order to perform the sacred rites, need only be in communion with the Church, to which the power of the Creator has been entrusted. For the sinner himself, the power of God can serve either to cleanse him of his sins (if he repents) or for his judgment and condemnation.

2) What right does a clergyman have to hear confessions and counsel people? Is the clergy privilege always observed? Can a priest disclose a crime so as to prevent it from being repeated?

The Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ, gave the power to forgive or not forgive sins to the apostles, and they, by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, passed it on to the bishops and priests who succeeded them. From them this uncreated gift of God was passed on to us. (Concerning this read the Gospel of John, chapter 20.)

Clergy privilege is always observed when a person repents of his sin. Even civil law does not require a clergyman to notify the authorities of a crime. But if there has been no confession, and a person communicates that he is preparing to commit a crime, either in order to avail himself of the priest's approval for the evil or to make him complicit, naturally there is no violation of clergy

privilege here, nor can there be (for there has been no confession as such).

3) The church service has a complicated system, one frequently incomprehensible to simple parishioners. Why do the ceremonies need to be so complicated?

Bach's symphonies have a complicated system, one frequently incomprehensible to ordinary listeners. So what need is there for such a complicated piece of music? We ought to stick to "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep." The service is also a work of the highest art, created by the joint labors of the saints, the angels, and God Himself. Through its inimitable rhythm it elevates a man to the celestial realities after which it is modeled. There is no need whatsoever for the service to be comprehensible to the person on the street, just as there is no need whatsoever for any first grader to understand everything at a lesson in advanced mathematics. The service is a spiritual university, and to demand simplicity here is inappropriate.

4) Can a former atheist become a clergyman—for example, a former communist party official?

Yes, he can, if he sincerely repents of his error and leads a life of piety. For God is forgiving and merciful.

5) Is Islamization really happening in the world? To what will this lead?

It is true that the number of Muslims in the world is increasing rapidly (though Christians are increasing at an even greater rate). This is leading to increased threats of terror and a plummeting cultural level in many countries.

Islamization is largely due to the fact that certain nations that were once Christian have apostatized from God and thereby deprived themselves of God's aid.

6) *Theoretically, could there be other Gospels?*

There are only four authentic Gospels. But there can be any number of false gospels. Originally the Gospels were not written as "busy work," but for the needs of the Orthodox Church (do not forget that the Church was founded by Christ Himself). Hence, the Church has always known who wrote which Gospels and at what time.

7) *If all men are equal before God, why does the Church stand between them? Why must man connect with God in this manner?*

Firstly, people are equal before God only in the sense that each will answer at God's Judgment. In all other respects there is no equality whatsoever. Some are given certain gifts and others are given other gifts, as the Heavenly Father willed. Secondly, the Church does not stand between man and God. In the church **no one** prays **instead of** us: the priest only prays **together** with us. As for whether a mediary is needed to communicate with God, let me remind you that man himself is simply incapable of connecting with God (in the sense not merely of prayer, but of encounter). For this encounter a true Mediary is necessary, One Who is both God and Man. This sole Mediary is Jesus Christ; priests are just His tools. Christ Himself serves the Liturgy through the priest; Christ Himself baptizes, receives a person's confession, and forgives sins through the priest, whom

He Himself appointed to this ministry. And wherever an encounter with God as such is considered impossible, there we find no mediaries or intercessors (as in Islam, for example). Wherever there are no cell phone networks, there we find no cell phones. In the same way, where there is no connection with God, there we find no mediaries. But this is nothing to be proud of—it is the sign of a failed religion.

February 2, 2007

Catholicism

76. To an Orthodox Christian about whether Catholics are Christians in the full sense of the word.

Only members of the apostolic Church are Christians. Roman Catholics were our own until 1054. At present they are heretics, but if they return to the Church and confess the Orthodox faith they will become Christians again. One ought not to take the name given us by God Himself and give it to others, replacing it with one given by man. May God aid you.

February 21, 2007

77. To a Ukrainian who asked whether one may commemorate Roman Catholics at an Orthodox panykhida (memorial service), and also whether the sacrament of confession is valid among the Uniate Catholics.

1. There are no grounds for commemorating Roman Catholics at a panikhida, as this is a form of church prayer. Commemoration at a panikhida is the equivalent of joint prayer in church with the deceased, which is unlawful.

2. In schism and heresy there is no forgiveness of sins, and so it is necessary to repeat the confession of those sins of which a person repented at a Uniate confession.

March 3, 2008

78. To an Orthodox woman who thought that the judicial understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as redemption was borrowed from Catholicism.

The concept of redemption (in fact, of payment) is inherent in the Bible, and hence in both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. It is simply an inalienable part of Revelation. This is described in minute detail in the epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews; reread them in their entirety. But the easiest thing for any Orthodox Christian is to remember Christ's words: "I came to give my life for a ransom for many" (see Mt. 20:28).

There are theological distortions in Catholic teaching, but they are clearly discernible: they include the incorrect teaching about the Holy Spirit, about the pope's place in the Church, about original sin (as the loss of constraining grace), and the concept of works of supererogation.* Juridicism as such is obviously present in the New Testament, and to separate the Bible from the concept of God as righteous Judge (which is the root of juridicism) is fundamentally impossible.

God needed payment for sin. A life is the the price

* A Roman Catholic concept, denoting works performed beyond what God requires. -*Trans.*

of a life, and only in this way could man have been ransomed from the tyranny of death. Our relationship with God is very concrete, and in it both mercy and righteousness are present. Yes, such is the actual God of the Bible, and one need not invent some other god that does not actually exist.

May God preserve you.

May 14, 2008

79. To an Orthodox Christian who asked about miracles worked by icons of the Mother of God belonging to the Catholics.

Just as the Ark of the Covenant was holy and worked miracles even when in possession of the pagans, so also icons continue to bear witness to God even in possession of the Catholics. Examples of wonderworking icons that came to us from the Catholic world include the Kozelshchansk and Kaluga icons of the Theotokos. We know of the miracle of the Pochaev icon, when the Theotokos drove away the Tatar horde from a then-Uniate monastery.

June 1, 2008

Protestantism

80. To an Orthodox Christian who asked whether Protestants can be saved.

They can be, if they accept Orthodoxy. Otherwise, they do not receive Communion, they do not believe in the regenerative power of holy baptism, they do not have fellowship with the apostles because they reject the apostolic Church, they have no contact with the Church triumphant in the heavens. Reread the New Testament, and you will see that to such the Lord did not promise salvation. Their separation from us is already the mortal sin of heresy (Gal. 5).

January 24, 2006

81. To a Protestant who asked why it is said that he will perish, if he believes in Christ just as the Orthodox do.

If I say I believe in Christ, but at the same time I worship an idol of Zeus, then I do not believe in Christ. If I say that I believe in the apostolic Church, but am not within her visible bounds—most importantly, in the fellowship of Communion—then I do not believe in the

Church. Remember that in Acts and in the epistles the Church had clear boundaries. Nothing has changed since that time (at least, that is what Christ promised—Mt. 16:18). Why then do you not commune with us? Why do you divide the Body of Christ? Can there really be two uncommunicating chalices of Communion? Is Christ divided? Why perform the works of the flesh and commit the sin of division (Gal. 5)? Especially since you claim to believe as we do. Come to us, then. As David said, how good it is for brethren to dwell together!

February 14, 2006

82. To the same Protestant who asked why he considers the Orthodox Church alone to be the true Church.

Yes, I am certain that the Orthodox Church is the one path to God, and that he who has no part with her cannot be saved. Why? The New Testament gives the answer. Christ left behind not a Book, and not a set of doctrines, but the Church, the visible Church, with clear boundaries, defined by one faith, one baptism, joint communion of His Body and Blood (and not by symbols, as those of your confession believe), governed on earth by the successors of the apostles—the bishops and presbyters, elevated to that rank by the Holy Spirit Himself through ordination. Apostolic succession itself is not a formal standard, but an ontological condition of our connection with the historical Pentacost and Golgotha.

To the historical Church Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against it, and to her it

is promised that Christ will remain with her every day until the end of time. For this reason alone Protestantism has no right to call itself Christianity. It arose only in the 16th century, and has lost all connection with the apostles. The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies, and so on have the same claim to authenticity as the Protestants.

Theoretically, in addition to the Orthodox Church we could talk about the apostolicity of the Roman Catholic and monophysite churches. But here we run up against the fact that doctrine has been corrupted (denial of the divine incarnation among the monophysites, and distortion of the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit and headship in the Church among the Roman Catholics). That is if we take the approach of negative proof.

But most importantly, to this day sanctity flourishes and the Holy Spirit is at work in the Orthodox Church. This may be obscured from the intellect, but clear to the impartial heart.

Among the Protestants one finds no saints to compare with Fr. John Krestyankin or Ven. Justin Popovic. I myself have encountered none, but neither are they to be found in Protestant publications. The most Protestantism can do is produce a decent person. But this is not enough. By works no flesh will be saved. Grace, not enthusiasm, is needed.

We do not believe that the Comforter makes mistakes or contradicts Himself. God does not desire that Christians should be divided; hence, schism itself is the work of the devil. From this, I think, it is clear that any action toward withdrawing from the unity of the Church is a grave sin. The apostle Paul thinks the same (see

Gal. 5—a list of works of the flesh, including heresy and schism). I think, therefore, that you need to join the apostolic Church in order to obtain salvation from God.

May God aid you.

March 23, 2006

83. To a young man who wished to join the Pentacostals.

Dear N.,

It seems to me that in choosing a creed one must begin by examining the creed itself. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18). A church that was not built by Christ Himself cannot be authentic (for either Christ was mistaken, in which case He is not God, or else He was not mistaken, and the true Church has existed continuously since the time of the apostles). The apostolic Church of Christ is the Orthodox Church. The Pentacostals appeared in the 20th century; they are a modern construct and a counterfeit. Worst of all, the inspiration they receive is not from God. For this reason with the Pentacostals you will destroy your soul for eternity.

Remember how Christ said that He would build only one Church against which the gates of hell would not prevail. This is the Orthodox Church. The Protestants are outside the Body of Christ, and unless they repent they will perish for all time.

As for infidelity, in religious Orthodox families this occurs just as rarely as among the Protestants. Among those who are Christians in name only it occurs fre-

quently everywhere. On the other hand, by joining the Pentacostal sect you will not receive God's special gift for establishing a family, which is given in Holy Matrimony. You will have to do everything by your own efforts, and there is a distinct possibility that you will overtax yourself.

84. To a Protestant who wished to learn why the Orthodox call priests "fathers," when Christ commanded that we call no one our father but God.

Dear N.,

I never call myself "father" (except in conversation with my daughters). But others do indeed call me by that name. The reason for this is that in the sacrament of baptism a person is born of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5), and the priest is the person through whom this spiritual birth is accomplished. True fatherhood belongs to God alone, but it is accomplished through baptism and the Christian's life thereafter (the same applies to physical birth, for life is given by the Lord, not by the parents). In the Church a person is gradually born for eternity, becoming a godlike being, and in this he is aided by his spiritual father—the priest. For this reason in the Bible the apostle Paul says, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). It is this mystery of adoption in Christ through the cooperation of the apostles and their successors that is denoted by the term "Father so-and-so."

Christ's words actually mean that no one has the authority to usurp the place of God; no one has the right to demand worship befitting to God. Everyone must remember that the source of life, wisdom, and knowledge is none other than God the Father. These words are violated by those who follow false prophets and false teachers, who equate the words of corrupt man to the words of the Supreme God. If a priest demands that people obey him as they would God, he is violating this commandment.

But if we understand these words to mean that we may not apply the term *father* to anyone other than God, we find that Christ Himself violated His own commandment (see Mk. 7:9–13, Lk. 15:11–32, 16:24), which is absurd.

May God help you!

85. To an Orthodox Christian woman who asked for help responding to the objection of a Protestant acquaintance who refused to wear a baptismal cross, stating that it is merely a symbol and really a fairly recent custom, one unknown to Christians in the early centuries, and who also did not believe that the Cross of Christ was actually found in the 14th century, many years after Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans.

Peace be unto you! My answer will be somewhat in the form of a thesis.

1. The cross worn around one's neck is a symbol. Naturally, even without it a Christian remains a Christian (for example, if one's cross is torn off in prison). But to deliberately refuse to wear the cross shows a lack of

love for Him Who was crucified upon it. A ring on one's finger is also a symbol, but if a spouse removes it when headed to a resort on vacation, that spouse is probably planning to cheat.

2. For Christians the symbol is not just a memento, but a real link with what is symbolized. We are not afraid of accusations of sorcery; we know that there are special sacred objects that possess real power with which they are imbued. These can be either evil objects (a sorcerer's staff, for example) or objects of God. A great many of the latter examples are described in the Bible. These include the Ark of the Covenant, by touching which one man perished, and the rod of Moses with which the latter worked miracles, and the rod of Aaron that budded, and the mantle of Elijah the prophet, and the handkerchiefs of the apostle Paul, and the garment of Christ. Even the symbol to which Christ Himself referred as a prefiguration of the Cross—the brass serpent—by God's power did it not heal all who gazed upon it with faith? How much more holy is the cross upon which Jesus Christ offered Himself in sacrifice! It is a great altar, and of its prefiguration the Old Testament (in Exodus) says that he who touches it will be sanctified. Whatever your acquaintance may say, by the power of the Holy Spirit the baptismal cross heals illnesses, actually drives away demons, and actually helps us to overcome sins.

3. As to when Christians began to honor the cross, the answer is this: since the time of the apostles. Literally one month ago depictions of the cross were found in Jerusalem in a first-century grave, with the words: "Save me, Lord Jesus Christ." Anyone can see similar depictions

dating to A.D. 250 with their own eyes in Nazareth and in Tel Megiddo. In Inkerman, Crimea, to this day there is a depiction of a cross made by St. Clement, pope of Rome, in about the year 100. Let me remind you that Clement is mentioned in the New Testament (Phil.). Depictions of the Cross are also found in Pompei (A.D. 79) and in the catacombs. This is also described in numerous historical literary works (beginning with the *Didache*, which mentions the sign of the cross). These include the lives of the apostles (very early ones—the apostles Andrew in the 2nd century, Thomas in the 2nd century, and Peter and Paul in the 2nd century) and a vast quantity of the writings of early Christians (for example, Hippolytus of Rome in about A.D. 220 and Saint Justin the Philosopher).

The practice of wearing a baptismal cross is also encountered very early on. The first mention of this is found in a Syrian life of the apostle Jehohanan (John the Theologian), which explicitly asserts that the apostle wore a wooden cross upon his breast. The life of the martyr Orestes (early 3rd century) says the same.

4. As for the finding of the cross by St. Constantine, once again I am baffled by this skepticism. According to the Talmud, an instrument of execution must be cast into the ground. Small wonder that the Cross of Christ likewise was cast into a cistern beyond Golgotha. What does conquering have to do with it? Would conquerors be likely to go digging through a trash heap? When the cross was discovered, the sign with the inscription from the Gospel in three languages was also found (it is preserved to this day in Rome). But most importantly, a tremendous number of miracles have confirmed the authenticity of

the cross. These include the healing of one mortally ill, and the resurrection of a dead man, and countless miracles thereafter. I do not know about the Protestants, but for Christians the witness of God is more important than that of man. And so the vain lies that your acquaintance is heaping upon Saint Constantine and his holy mother Helen simply miss the mark.

Thus, those who do not wear a cross are behaving rather as enemies of the Cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), and their end is destruction. When God comes to pass judgment, before His face the Cross will shine. What a disgrace this will be for the Protestants!

May God help you.

February 5, 2007

86. To a Protestant woman who had converted while baptized in the Orthodox Church—concerning Protestantism, Orthodox mission, and “salvation by faith alone.”

I am glad you have emerged from the impasse that is atheism. But Protestantism likewise is unable to resolve the chief tragedy of man: his sinfulness, corruptibility, and mortality. Yes, it is good that Protestants sing about God and read the Bible. But do they really have solid criteria for understanding it? For the Bible does not explain itself; otherwise there would not be hundreds of different sects.

Christ gave the key to understanding Scripture to the apostles after Pascha (Lk. 24), and to this day the Orthodox Church, which has existed continuously since

the time of the apostles, has preserved Christ's understanding of Scripture. But the Bible alone is not enough: the Bible itself says that one must adhere to apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). And this is not by chance: one cannot write life into a book. One needs fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Who descended upon twelve specific apostles on the day of Pentecost, and through them poured Himself out upon all those who believed apostolically.

Only the Church that has preserved succession from the apostles has a right to the Bible. Only in it does the Holy Spirit live and accomplish the sacraments. For without genuine Communion of the true Body and Blood of the historic Jesus Christ the Son of God (not of symbols, not of figures, but of the actual Body and Blood), corruption and death cannot be driven out of us. Without the grace of the apostles we will not have the unimaginable gift of forgiveness of sins (see Jn. 20). Your apostasy from your faith has not yet been forgiven you, and if you do not repent of it in the Church before a successor of the apostles—a priest—you will answer for it at the Judgment of God.

Protestants have no succession from the apostles. Protestantism is a self-made religion with a Bible in hand, but God's gifts cannot be made with one's own hands. Your pastor is wrong concerning mission. I know many people whom Orthodox Christians have converted from godlessness and other faiths.

He is also wrong on the question of salvation by faith. We are saved by the grace of God, His uncreated power, which is given through baptism and Communion. But the condition for the efficacy of grace is right faith

(faith that corresponds exactly to that of the apostles): through faith we are given power unto eternal life. But this power must also be manifested through the keeping of the commandments. Otherwise the whole Gospel is pointless and empty. If you have believed and been saved, then why did Christ say, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not in thy name done many wonderful works? And I will say unto them, depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:22–23)?

I advise both you and all your acquaintances to abandon Protestantism and return to the Orthodox Apostolic Church. Find a church where you will be listened to attentively (for example, the metochion of Optina Hermitage on Obvodny Canal), repent of your sins, and live with God.

Greetings with the approaching Nativity of Christ!

December 25, 2007

87. To an Orthodox Christian who asked whether he could commemorate the departed soul of a Protestant acquaintance at the liturgy.

Dear N.,

You cannot pray for one who rejects both the apostolic Church and the very possibility of praying for those who have died. The Protestants are an attempt at a self-made religion based on their own understanding of the Bible. The Protestants reject the reality of the Eucharist, and all the sacraments as a means of communion with God, and fellowship with the saints, and prayers for the dead, and unity with the celestial Church. How can they

be saved if they have not been cleansed by the Blood of the Lord and do not commune?

But in your prayers at home ask God that his lot may be mitigated.

May God preserve you.

November 4, 2008

88. To an adherent of Protestantism who asked why God needs us to bow down and worship Him physically.

I propose that we first examine the degree to which physical service to God is necessary (bows, icons, candles, incense, etc.). God created us as hybrid beings. We are spirits in a body. Hence, both our spirit and our body need to be sanctified. If we reject this, it means we believe that our body was given to us by someone other than God. But in that case we must admit that since Christ accepted a genuine body, He is not God, nor is the Bible given by God.

Now let us proceed in order. Did God command that we worship Him physically? Yes, He did. Remember that the Old Testament contains everything that you dislike about Orthodox Christians (icons of angels, incense, bowing down in worship, the temple). But if we turn to the New Testament, in it also we see the same exact thing. Not only did Christ Himself pray in the temple (along with His apostles), where all these things were present, but also in personal prayer He employed bows, fasting, and material items for healing (clay for the man who was born blind, the hem of His garment for the woman with

an issue of blood). It was He who established material sacraments—baptism by immersion in water (Jn. 3:5, Mt. 28:19–21), Communion through partaking of the form of bread and wine, ordination through the laying on of hands. Consequently, from God’s point of view we have need of these external things. Are we really better than the Creator? Do we know what we need and what we do not?

89. To a Protestant who asked about baptism of infants and about why Father Daniel proselytized Protestants when they are Christians just like the Orthodox.

To your objections I will reply as follows:

1. Do Protestants—Baptists or evangelicals—recognize infant baptism? In what have I erred? If you do not like biblical argumentation, let us discuss the matter. After all, our Orthodox Church has been baptizing children since Pentecost, when it was established by God. And it is unlikely that its original practice is in conflict with Scripture, which was given specifically to it, and not to some religious organization that originated in the 17th century.

2. Do the Protestants, who have distorted the teaching on salvation, who teach wrongly about baptism, the Eucharist, and the Church, and some of whom preach unconditional predetermination—do they rightly glorify God (that is, are they Orthodox)?

No. Hence, according to Gal. 5, they are heretics,

and consequently are at risk of perishing eternally. Is this something about which I am happy? No. I sincerely wish salvation to you and to all my Protestant brethren. But is this division normal, when people who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, are not within the One Body of Christ, in the Church that He Himself established, and furthermore are themselves divided into hundreds and thousands of warring sects? Is this really observing the Gospel words—"that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:21)?

Just as the Lord came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, so also we first address you, our brethren, enjoining you to return home.

May God help you.

March 26, 2009

90. To a person who inquired concerning how Protestants allegedly drive out demons at their assemblies.

Only God in His Church drives out demons. No other organizations can be of any help in this affair. At the same time, the demons themselves may lead a person away from Christ into a sect or a false faith. And in order to keep him there they are willing to withdraw for a time. But the essence is the same: eternal destruction.

May 14, 2009

91. To a Baptist concerning Protestantism and Orthodoxy.

Dear N.,

If you remain with the Baptists, you will destroy your soul. Heretics do not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). If you enter the Church, however, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things.

Our Church is more ancient than the text of the New Testament. It has existed continuously since the time of Christ. To it, and not to any other confessions, the Lord promised indestructibility by the gates of hell (Mt. 16:18). What is Protestantism? It is a thing self-made. "We will take the Bible and build the Church the way we like it." But God did not give people this right. He Himself created the Church, He preserves it, to it He entrusted the Scriptures, and He Himself explains how the Bible is to be understood. Hence, spiritual growth is only possible in the Church, and not in the heresy of the Baptists.

Return to God, into His Church, and He will receive you with joy.

October 9, 2009

Schisms

92. To a resident of Ukraine who wondered whether the harmfulness of schism in schismatic churches affects ordinary parishioners who do not know the difference between the authentic and schismatic churches.

Dear N.,

The question of schism has long ago been resolved by the Church. The very first canon of St. Basil the Great states that the streams of grace cease to flow for schismatics and their sacraments are devoid of the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, all who have received false sacraments in schismatic communities have received nothing.

How is a believer to proceed? He must seek out the only lawful temples of the canonical Church—the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. These are easily determined. In these, Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev is commemorated. This is the Church that is recognized by the fullness of world Orthodoxy. Other “churches” are part of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the “Patriarchate of Kiev” founded by suspended or defrocked bishops and imposters. Furthermore, contrary to the resolution of the Council of Constantinople of 1872, all of them have fallen into the

heresy of phyletism, as they have introduced nationalism into the Church. Beware of them.

May God preserve you.

August 19, 2005

93. To a man who cited the claim of the "Catcomb Church" schismatics alleging that the Russian Orthodox Church lost apostolic succession because during the Soviet era the KGB exercised influence on the election of its hierarchs.

Regarding apostolic succession, I beg your pardon, but the KGB has never consecrated anyone a bishop. This is false and foolish. Bishops did the consecrating. The KGB put pressure on the appointees and weeded out those who were unsuitable, but this is by no means what is referenced in the 30th canon of the holy apostles. This canon prohibits pursuing ordination with the aid of the government. It refers specifically to a form of simony, and not to government influence on an election.

Remember, the selection of bishops has been influenced by the emperor, the sultan, and the prince. The apostle himself says that a candidate must have "a good report of them which are without" (1 Tim. 3:7).

Apostolic succession is only broken if a bishop is found guilty by a lawful council, or in the event of "self-consecration" (for example, ordination by a single bishop of dubious succession, as with the "Gennadievtsey" sect). It is no accident that even the monophysite churches and the Donatists were acknowledged to have apostolic succession (see the canons of the Council in Nicea, the

95th canon of the Council of Trullo, the resolutions of the Council of Carthage, etc.).

May God grant you aid, and please pardon my delay in replying.

March 25, 2007

94. To an Orthodox Christian who was troubled by propoganda from the schismatic Oleg Molenko.

I do not understand the point of your question. Oleg Molenko is a typical embittered schismatic. His statements contain no particular arguments. If you have specific questions about the Church, please write.

What would you have me say?

That the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is not the Whore of Babylon? No, it is not the Whore of Babylon.

That “anti-grace” does not descend upon one who attends Orthodox churches? No, it does not.

That all the ravings of this website are mere sacrilege and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Yes, they are.

That the followers of Oleg Molenko will not be saved because of their schism and hatred? Yes, this is so.

The Lord said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:35). Are there many indications of love for one’s neighbor on the website of Oleg Molenko? No, nothing but hatred. This is a sign of Satan at work. We do not treat the Protestants or the Muslims the way he treats the Orthodox.

Read the fathers of the Church and the Bible, and

ignore such tommyrot. Otherwise your whole life will be insufficient to find your path in the gloom of Satan, and then when will you work out your salvation, may I ask?

May God help you.

March 7, 2007

95. To a married "bishop" of the schismatic "Celtic Orthodox Christian Church" (USA), who in response to Father Daniel's invitation to come into the canonical Church wrote that this was not happening because their "church" was troubled by agreements of the Patriarchate of Constantinople with heretics, and also because during negotiations with the Orthodox Church concerning their unification they were told that their Celtic rite could be used only for special feasts, while ordinarily the liturgy must be celebrated according to the Greek rite.

Christ is Risen!

Peace be unto you in Christ our Lord. I am glad that you have responded so quickly to my call to Christian unity. I ask your forgiveness for being so long in responding myself. My Lenten affairs have prevented me from going online. I hope that the power of Christ's resurrection may help us to overcome the hateful discord of this world.

Now, regarding the problems that divide us. I and the Church to which I belong (the Moscow Patriarchate) condemn all forms of religious syncretism. In 2000 the Bishop's Council in Moscow comprised of 134 fathers

unanimously adopted the “Fundamental principles of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and heterodoxy.”

This document explicitly states that: “1.1. The Orthodox Church is the true Church of Christ, established by our Lord and Savior Himself, the Church established by and filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church of which the Savior Himself said, ‘I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Mt. 16:18). It is the one, holy, conciliar (catholic), and apostolic Church, the keeper and bestower of the Holy Mysteries throughout the world, ‘the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15)...

“1.2. The Church of Christ is one and unique (St. Cyprian of Carthage, ‘On the Unity of the Church’)...

“1.18. The Orthodox Church is the true Church, in which Holy Tradition and the fullness of the saving grace of God are preserved inviolate. It has preserved the sacred legacy of the apostles and the holy fathers entire and unsullied. It acknowledges that its teaching, theological structure, and spiritual practice are identical to the apostolic preaching and the Tradition of the ancient Church.

“1.19. Orthodoxy is not a ‘natural and cultural feature’ of the Eastern Church. Orthodoxy is an inner quality of the Church, the preservation of credal truth, liturgical and hierarchal structure, and the principles of spiritual life, unbroken and invariably abiding in the Church since the time of the apostles.”

Our Church condemns the errors of Roman Catholicism (the philioque, papal infallibility, Purgatory, the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, etc.), and to this

day receives members of this church through the Rite of Unification (as it receives monophysites and Nestorians). It should not therefore be thought that there is intercommunion between us. Regarding this, the Bishops' Council of 2000 writes the following: "2.12. The oneness of the Church is first and foremost oneness and communion in the Sacraments. But authentic communion in the Sacraments has nothing in common with the practice of so-called 'intercommunion.' Oneness is possible only in an identical experience of grace and identical life, in the faith of the Church, in the fullness of mystical life in the Holy Spirit."

Nevertheless, it is the Church's conviction that Orthodox Christians must not reject dialogue with heretics. For the sole purpose of this is to convert them to the faith of Christ. To reject this interaction is a violation of the will of God, Who desires for all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (see 1 Tim. 2:4). But just like you, we condemn the idea that all religions are equal and indifferent with regard to salvation. No one who confesses a heresy, let alone a different creed, will be saved unless he repents.

Here we must note one extremely important point: nowhere in Scripture or in the church canons does it say that one church can be responsible for the errors of another. If a bishop of Constantinople is violating a certain canon, it by no means follows that those who maintain eucharistic communion with him are automatically doing the same.

Each person and each church answers for itself before God. And the Church itself will pass sentence in

lawful conciliar court if the sinner does not repent. But it is better for the matter never to go to court, and for the sinner to mend his ways. Hence, one should not cite wrongful actions as an excuse to separate himself from world Orthodoxy. For, as the Bishops' Council rightly says: "1.10. Only through connection with a specific community does every member of the Church have communion with the whole Church. In violating the canonical union with his local church, the Christian thereby harms his grace-filled unity with the whole church body and is severed from it."

As for controversial and even outright un-Orthodox documents (the Chambésy union, the Balamand union, etc.), not one of these was approved by our councils. On the contrary, the Moscow Council of 1994 declared that the Chambésy agreement to union with the monophysites was contrary to Orthodox christology.

Incidentally, it should be remembered that the practice of married bishops that you maintain is also prohibited by the ecumenical councils (the 37th canon of the Council of Trullo in 692, ratified by the 1st canon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council), and therefore we must all wrestle with our sins without looking for motes in the eyes of others. We need only preserve the faith of Christ in inviolate purity and abide in oneness of Holy Communion with the fullness of the Orthodox Church.

Now, as to the Celtic rite and its applicability in the Church. Back on June 16, 1936, our Church (Synodal Resolution 75) blessed the use of the Western rite, on condition that it be true to Orthodox teaching (the Symbol of Faith without the filioque, the epiclesis and leavened bread at the Liturgy,

baptism by immersion). I do not think, therefore, that there will be any difficulty with recognizing a Celtic rite that meets these requirements, for the entire church year.

I hope that I have at least partially answered your questions, and I eagerly await your practical proposals for resolving all the issues. I hope that the day will come when you and I together may approach the holy Chalice.

I greet you with the feast of holy Pascha and the recent commemoration of Saint Patrick, apostle to Ireland. Peace be unto you in Christ our Lord!

April 3, 2007

96. To an archbishop of the schismatic "Holy Orthodox and Catholic Apostolic Church of America" (USA), who in response to Father Daniel's exhortation wrote that he together with his whole "Western rite" diocese wished to enter the Russian Orthodox Church, and that five years previously he had already applied to one Russian bishop, but had received a refusal from his secretary.

Christ is Risen!

I am glad that you have preserved a clear canonical consciousness and that you understand the necessity of full canonical communion with world Orthodoxy. For despite the decision of the civil courts, which, as you say, recognize your canonicity, for the time being we are sadly unable to approach the holy Chalice. May God grant that this unfortunate situation be resolved with all possible speed.

Let us pray and strive for your desire to enter into eucharistic communion with the Moscow Patriarchate to be accomplished. For my own part, I will attempt to make every effort to resolve the matter, especially since in 2007 the situation is somewhat different from what it was 5 years ago.

As for the Western rite, you are of course aware that it was officially approved by the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate (Resolution 75). I do not think, therefore, that there could be any complications in the matter of unification. I myself am a confirmed supporter of the Western rite, and I believe that it can help overcome the heretical fallings away of our fellow Christians who have wandered far from their Father's House.

If your desire to establish canonical unity with world Orthodoxy remains firm, I ask that you write down your proposals, so that I might present them to the ecclesiastical authorities in Moscow.

April 2, 2007

97. To a woman who was troubled by Old Believer propaganda and asked five questions on the subject.

Dear N.,

Unfortunately, you have fallen victim to the influence of Old Believer propaganda. No one has ever said that the essence of Christianity lies in how the sign of the cross is made. The essence of the faith is outlined in the Symbol of Faith and in the Gospel. The sign of the cross is merely a visible sign of the confession of that faith. Now, as to your questions:

1. "Prior to Patriarch Nikon, all Orthodox Christians adhered to the Old Rite—that is, they signed the Cross with two fingers, the index finger and middle finger, while saying the Jesus prayer, since it was the Son of God Who endured death on the cross for the redemption of our sins, and through Christ we are saved."

Prior to Patriarch Nikon, only a few Christians in Muscovite Rus made the sign of the cross with two fingers. All the other churches of the world (the Churches of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia, and others) made the sign of the cross with three fingers, placing their hope of salvation in the Holy Trinity, for Christ saved us by the will of His Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Since the faith in the Muscovite part of the Church was the same as in the whole Church, communion was not broken with it. Patriarch Nikon merely introduced to Muscovite Rus the common practice of the rest of the Church.

2. "The Orthodox always feared to veer from the testaments by so much as a single word. Consequently, the two-finger cross was ratified by the first Ecumenical Councils, if not by Christ Himself."

The Ecumenical Councils ratified the faith, not the form of the ritual. This is precisely why that part of the Russian Church that introduced the two-finger cross in the 14th–15th centuries was not condemned by the fullness of Orthodoxy. All talk of the two-finger cross having been introduced by Christ is mere fiction. The two-finger cross is first mentioned by the Nestorian heretics in the 12th century. In the first thousand years of Christianity the sign of the cross was made both with

three fingers (as we make it today) and with one finger (as a sign of monotheism).

3. "What moved Patriarch Nikon to introduce these changes?"

Patriarch Nikon introduced in Russia the same rites as in the whole Orthodox world because he learned that the Russians' Symbol of Faith had become distorted in the early 17th century and had veered from the resolutions of the Ecumenical Councils. This grave canonical violation was put right by Patriarch Nikon, and simultaneously he took steps to more closely align our other rites to those of the Greeks, the Serbs, the Bulgarians, etc.

4. "It turns out that all the saints who lived prior to the 17th century were Old Believers and made the sign of the cross not in the name of the Holy Trinity, but with a petition to Christ to have mercy on us sinners."

All the saints prior to the 17th century were Orthodox and had nothing to do with the Old Rite. They preserved the Orthodox faith—the same that we also preserve. And they were saved not by the way in which they made the sign of the cross, but by faith and the grace of Christ. They firmly believed and hoped in the Trinity as a whole. The opinion that one must hope in the Son of God alone, and not in the entire Trinity, they considered a repugnant and pernicious heresy.

5. "The people who refused to change their faith during the reforms, and who suffered a martyric death, including the monks of Solovki, are holy martyrs for the faith and for Christ."

The people who in the 17th century revolted against the Church and the tsar—the rebels of Solovki, the suicides

of Siberia and the Volga Region, and other schismatics—are great sinners who destroyed their own souls. Today they dwell in hell together with the devil, for it was he who during their lifetime filled them with hatred for the Church of Christ and for all non-Russian Christians.

Read Sts. Demetrius of Rostov, Seraphim of Sarov, Paisius Velichkovsky, Ignatius Brianchaninov. And adhere more firmly to the Orthodox faith. May God preserve you.

December 16, 2007

98. To an Orthodox Christian who asked why the Symbol of Faith of the Old Believers reads "in the Holy Spirit, the true Giver of life," and not "in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life."

The Old Believers adhere to a distorted Symbol of Faith. This distortion was introduced by ignorant copyists. In the Greek original, the word *kyrion* is used—literally, “exercising lordship” or “reigning.” In no dictionary can this word be understood in any other way. Patriarch Nikon corrected the texts and made them as close as possible to the Greek original, while the Old Believer texts are riddled with errors. Most importantly, however, Patriarch Nikon preserved the Russian Church from falling under condemnation for adding to the Symbol of Faith.

Thus, the reforms of Patriarch Nikon were wholly justified. Perhaps they ought to have been conducted more leniently, but this cannot concern the Symbol of Faith.

April 16, 2008

99. To one who asked about the Old Believer schism.

I think the essence of any religious phenomenon must first of all be examined from religious perspectives. Religion is a connection with the spiritual world. And the religion resulting from that connection depends on the spiritual beings with whom that connection is made.

How did the Old Believer schism originate? It was founded on pride, on indignance with Patriarch Nikon for not promoting Avvakum and other zealots. This was further compounded by wrong thinking related to the influence of Kapiton (who was a Manichaeon).

A full-scale spiritual epidemic resulted, similar to the epidemics of witches in Germany or the revolutions in France and Russia. This also engendered the mass paroxysm of ritual suicides (self-immolations) and religious wars. In our country these are usually called popular uprisings (such as those of Razin or Pugachev), although the religious component in them was one of the most important.

Thus, the schism was by no means over old books (especially since in the ROC using them in church has been permitted since 1800), or over Western influence (the favorite catechism of the Old Believers, that of Zizany, was entirely written from Catholic models), but was caused by proud stubbornness and contact with the evil power of the devil.

I am afraid that until we start to realize the influence of spiritual beings upon world history, all our attempts to understand it are doomed to failure. Economics and culture determine much, but they do not comprise the chief pulse of human life.

April 21, 2009

Islam

100. To a Muslim who asked, "How can you call Jesus the son of God? The Almighty is not limited by time or space; He has neither mother, nor father; He is Eternal; all fleshly desires are foreign to him; and no woman could bear God a son. This is absurd."

What you describe is indeed absurd and blasphemous. If anyone believes such things, he is only to be pitied, and must be told that he is far from the truth and certainly not a Christian. The Christian faith is far from such delusion. We believe in One God, Who has His own Word and His own Holy Spirit. One Godhead, one Essence, one Authority, one Power, one Will, known in three Hypostases.

The Word of God is not merely a collection of information, but a Person, Who upon His Incarnation took the name of Jesus, as the Koran also states (4.169[171]). The Word is eternally begotten of the Father, and hence is called His Son (Jn. 1:1). Not because God has a wife (far be such madness from us!), but in an incomprehensible manner, similar to the way in which in our own heads the mind begets the word, which fully expresses it. So also Jesus is preeternally begotten by the Father

without separation or suffering, without anything fleshly or animal, but spiritually, similarly to the way the sun's disc is naturally accompanied by its brilliance. For this reason the Bible calls Jesus Christ the Word of God (Jn. 1:1), His Wisdom and Power (1 Cor. 1:24), the image of the invisible God, begotten before all creation (Col. 1:15), the effulgence of glory and an image of the hypostasis of the Father (Heb. 1:3), true God of true God (1 Jn. 5:20). Do the Muslims really think that God is dumb, like the beasts? And if not, why do they not reverence the true Son of God, begotten in a spiritual manner without a wife?

We likewise believe that the Word of God is not soulless, and that God is not without natural life. And this Life Force is personal and is called the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father (Jn. 15:26) without separation, without suffering, eternally. It is similar to the way in which our rational soul possesses not only the gift of speech, but also the life force to enliven the body. In the same way, God possesses natural Life, with which He enlivens His creation.

We believe that despite the fact that all three Personalities are not comingled into one (just as the soul within us also differs from its natural gift of speech and life force), They are One God, as the Bible says: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 Jn. 5:7). We do not ascribe companions to God, for we know that the Word and the Spirit are eternally with the Father, being of one essence with Him.

2004

101. To a Muslim visitor to the website "Orthodoxy and Islam," who disputed matters of predestination and the divinity of Christ.

Dear N.,

I will answer in order:

1. Concerning divine predestination, the Orthodox Church teaches as follows: "We believe that the All-good God has predestined for glory those whom he chose from eternity; and those whom He has rejected He gave over to condemnation—not because He wished in this way to justify some and to forsake and condemn others without cause; for this is not appropriate to God, 'Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4); but inasmuch as He foresaw that some would employ their free will well, and others poorly, for this reason He determined some for glory, while others He condemned. ...

"But as for what the blaspheming heretics say, supposing that God predestines or condemns with no regard for the deeds of those predestined or condemned—this we hold to be foolishness and impiety. ... God has no part of any evil thing, and desires salvation for all alike. With Him there is no respect of persons. ... We have never said and will never say that eternal punishment and torment is caused by God, Who Himself said that 'joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth' (Lk. 15:7). And those who speak and think thus we commit to eternal anathema and acknowledge the worst of all unbelievers." (Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, 1723.)

As for the Islamic teaching on predestination as you have presented it, it is blasphemous. You write, "If a per-

son decides to commit something untoward and makes an effort to do so, the Almighty will work even this, but that person will answer for it, as for the choice of his own action and application. But it should be remembered that Allah alone is the worker of all things (praise to Him Almighty). If Almighty Allah does not desire it, nothing will be wrought. Yes, it is He that works, but He works in accordance with the choice of the particular actions of his servant.”

But in this case Allah is directly complicit in all the crimes of the world. His role is like that of an assassin who does the will of the person who contracts for the crime. This is a direct rejection of the very concept of God as a good being (let alone the All-good Being). The true Revelation of God says, “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 Jn. 1:5); “*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man*” (Jas. 1:13).

Furthermore, your position is self-contradictory. It claims that “Allah alone is the worker of all things.” Consequently, he is the worker of the act of choice. Yet at the same time it is claimed that Allah “works in accordance with the choice of the particular actions of his servant,” each of which was wrought by Allah himself. Obviously, when we put the question like that, there is no room left for free will whatsoever, and hence Allah is an unjust tyrant who forces people to do evil, then punishes them for it.

On the other hand, your position contradicts the letter of the Koran (for you reject interperation of the Bible, and hence you must not interpret the Koran, either).

According to this book, “If Allah touches you with evil, none but he can remove it” (Surah 11:107).^{*} Consequently, Allah himself works the evil. And Allah is also guilty of committing the gravest sin of all: “Had Allah so willed they would not have associated others with Him in His divinity” (Surah 6:107, Tafheem-ul-Quran). “We have made for every prophet an enemy—devils from mankind and jinn. ... But if your Lord had willed, they would not have done it” (Surah 6:112, Sahih International). Based on the letter of the text ascribed to Allah, we see that good and evil alike are from Allah, and consequently the concept is stripped of any real meaning, since for Christians good is free adherence to the will of God, and evil is free opposition to it.

2. The divinity of Jesus lies in the fact that He is not simply a prophet sent with the Word of God, but the actual Word of God, Who was with God in the beginning and is Himself God (Jn. 1:1–2). Incidentally, even the Koran acknowledges the fact that Jesus is the Word, though it interprets this incorrectly (Surah 3:40[45]). Hence, any likening of Christ to a prophet is misplaced. Jesus is the Only-begotten Son of God (Jn. 1:18), whereas prophets can only be sons by adoption (Jn. 1:12–13).

You ask: “Did the prophet Jesus (peace be unto him) say anywhere in the Gospel that he is God, or, ‘I am the Lord; worship me and offer up prayers unto my mother’?” Jesus Christ Himself said that He is “He who is

* Translation from the Russian. In English, “If Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him” (Sahih International). –*Trans.*

from the beginning” (Jn. 8:25),* “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13). He required faith in Himself as in the Father (Jn. 14:1), and said that “he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him” (Jn. 5:23, and that whoever does not receive Him, their father is the devil (Jn. 8:44). If this is not a testimony of divinity, I simply cannot imagine what testimony is required! The Lord Jesus repeatedly accepted worship (Mt. 28:17, Jn. 10:38), ministry (and ministry not from men, but from angels—Mk. 1:13), and the fact that people called Him Lord (Jn. 10:38), and He Himself called Himself Lord (Mt. 7:21).

We do not of course consider the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary a goddess, but in fulfillment of the prophecy which she spoke (Lk. 1. 48) we call her blessed and we ask her to entreat God on our behalf.

3. As for your words, “For myself, the Koran is sufficient proof,” they show that your faith is blind, and based not on the firm foundation of truth, but on the principle of a vicious circle: “The Koran is right because it says it is!”

2004

102. To an Orthodox reader of the website “Orthodoxy and Islam” who asked, “What are you to do if your beloved (a Muslim) is disdainful of Orthodoxy and considers Islam the supreme confession, and does the Koran say anything condemning disdain of other faiths?”

* Translation from the Slavonic; most English versions contain the equivalent of, “What I have been saying to you from the beginning.” –*Trans.*

Dear N.,

If you are Orthodox, you should know from the Gospel that sometimes one has to choose between Christ and one's nearest and dearest. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10:32-37).

It is this choice that you now face. It would be best if your beloved were to renounce the errors of Islam and become a Christian. Then your relationship could extend into eternity. But if the blasphemy against God the Son continues, and after appropriate exhortation you do not terminate your close relationship with the blasphemer (this does not of course mean starting to quarrel with him), your eternal fate will be lamentable indeed.

When discussing the truths of the faith, do not forget to turn to the Holy Spirit in your prayers, asking Him to soften the heart of your hearer, for as St. John of the Ladder says, "Blasphemy is the work not of man, but of a demon," and it is with him that you must contend. For it is not a man who reviles the Church, but a demon acting through him, as through his unfortunate tool.

Regarding the Koran, it should be noted that on the one hand it states, "Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans—those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness—will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve" (Surah 2, ayat 59[62]), while on the other hand it specifies that "indeed, the disbelievers are ever to you a clear enemy. ... Indeed, Allah has prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment" (Surah 4:101–102).

Hence, the Koran requires that incessant war be waged against infidels (by which it also means Christians, who believe in the Trinity): "So when you meet those who disbelieve, strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds" (Surah 47:4). "And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah* is worse than killing" (Surah 2:191).

Remember that the Koran is filled with contradictions and is eminently cruel, and so it is unlikely that you will find there grounds for peaceful coexistence. I advise you to read the article by N. Grigoriev, "A Conversation of Bogdan Kolostov with the Tatars about Muhammed." It will help you in the work of converting your beloved to the light of the Gospel, which is a thing only to be prayed for. May the Lord help you!

2004

* Temptation, trial, sedition. –*Trans.*

103. To a Muslim who reviled him and threatened him with reprisal ("People like you will have their hands and feet cut off crosswise for your satanic lies").

Why resist the Creator? Better to be reconciled to Him, receive baptism, and become a true Muslim—an obedient son of the Heavenly Father. As for threats, they are made out of impotence.

December 5, 2005

104. To the same Muslim, when he began claiming based on the Koran that God cannot be a Trinity and that Christ was only a prophet.

The Koran is not the word of God the Creator! Even in public debate the Muslims could produce no intelligible evidence to support this. It resulted from the activity of a certain spirit who chokes those who disagree with him (Muhammed on Mount Hira). The Creator would not abuse His creation in this way.

God is Triune—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—but there is one God, not three. Christians, who are God's children, know this. How would you, who are slaves, know what takes place in the recesses of the divine life? Naturally, for you who live far from the Creator, He appears simply as one. But we are beside Him. We are his children, and hence we know His inner life infinitely better than you. If you know God personally, tell us what He is like within Himself.

As for Christ, He is the Eternal Word of the eter-

nal Father, who out of love for His creation became man while remaining God. He is one in two natures—God and man—just as we are a soul plus a body. It is foolish to reject a physician on the grounds that he is befouled with your pus. It is just as foolish to reject the divine incarnation (опечатка) on the grounds of your own weak intellect. Can you really forbid God to become man, or are you really capable of understanding His plans? Repent and believe in the Gospel. Be baptized and become not a slave, but a son of the Creator.

December 25, 2005

105. To another Muslim who reviled him for an article about Islam, and stated that the teaching concerning the Trinity contradicts common sense.

I am amazed at your conviction that “common sense” (as if sense could be common in sinners) can be used to measure the inner life of God. As for the claim that the article shows Islam in a bad light, to some extent I agree. To show that the Koran is false is to reveal the darkness that inspired its author. And so I fear that if you do not reconcile yourself with God, you will not find eternal life, but will pass into eternal darkness, aflame with a fire that gives no light. Rather than hurling curses, examine the true revelation of God, which is the Bible; compare the Koran to it, and receive holy baptism. Then you will become not an insolent and unsubmitive servant, but a beloved son of God Almighty. May God enlighten you.

I wish that you may enter into divine love.

March 11, 2006

106. To a Muslim who asked whether he could pray to Orthodox saints.

From a Christian standpoint, a Muslim may pray to the saints, for God and His saints hear and render aid to every man in his earthly affairs. But I think that if God and His saint do aid you, decency requires that you receive holy baptism.

April 12, 2007

107. To a woman who asked whether God really would not accept the service of the Muslims, their fasts and so forth, when they are so numerous.

God must be served only as it pleases God Himself to be served. You yourself, I imagine, have no use for attentions that you find repugnant. So also God does not save those who reject Christ. As for one's ancestors and one's people, errors plus errors equal only more errors.

October 18, 2005

108. To a Muslim who accused Christians of christianizing the Caucasus by force, of addiction to alcohol and drugs, and of prostitution, and also claimed that Muslims were increasing in number and would soon become the vast majority.

I do not quite understand what it is about Islam that attracts you. You say nothing of God, so apparently He does not interest you; you speak only of national oppo-

sition. I am convinced that all nations must become Orthodox, and that nationality itself must vanish before the face of God.

There is no call to slander the Church. It does nothing but fight against narcotics (whereas Islam manufactures them—80% of heroine is produced by Muslims), alcoholism (we have sobriety groups, while you do not), and prostitution (Islam has the institution of concubinage and temporary marriage for this purpose).

As for christianizing the Caucasus by force, let's not make up facts. Nothing of the sort ever happened. There was only Islamization by force. As for who will soon be in the majority, I will answer very simply: God knows. In the 16th century there were 5 million Russians, and today there are 145, whereas there are as many Caucasian Muslims as there ever were.

But that is really neither here nor there. I would choose the true God even in spite of the whole human race, as it happened in the days of Noah. What matters to God is not numbers, but fidelity to Him and to His word. But Islam is adherence to a deception opposed to God. It is no accident that the Muslims have not been able to prove in a single debate that their faith was divinely revealed. It is no more than a culture, which has not helped the Muslims at present (Islamic countries are among the poorest and least developed) and will not help them after death, when God will punish the Muslims for their evil deeds.

The Muslims have no Savior, whereas we are saved by God incarnate. And this is a fact that can be observed in reality. How then do you plan to justify yourself before Him?

Islam has truly been unable to do what Christianity did when it was in power. Thus, you are choosing barbarians

who do not know the Creator. This is your right and your responsibility before God. He will meet you with no mercy, just as you yourself are merciless.

February 8, 2006

109. To a Muslim woman who disputed a claim in his article and pointed out the Muslim fear of God, and also accused him of intolerance.

Greetings! I did not write that Islam claims to be only for the Arabs. I wrote that the Koran implies this in the words I cited (“The Qur’an is ... in a clear Arabic language” [26:192–195]). This is simply one of Islam’s internal contradictions. The Arabic language is by no means clear for a Tatar or a Russian, but it is claimed that Islam is a universal faith—yet only the Arabic original is the authentic Koran. What about the illiterate, who are unable to learn Arabic? The true word of God—the Bible—is proclaimed in all the languages of the world, and it is not necessary to study the Hebrew or Greek languages in which the revelation was given.

As for fear of God, Satan himself fears God, but this is not imputed to him for good. One must not only fear God, but also love Him. And this is only possible for those who have become sons or daughters of God through baptism. Those who have not received the last Revelation in the appearance on earth not of the corrupt man Mohammed, but of the eternal God Jesus Christ,

remain rebellious servants. To this day they are subject to sin, and hence they cannot receive salvation.

It is apparent that tolerance must be directed not toward religions, but toward men. And delusion merits no respect. I think you will agree with this, and hence there will be peace on earth only when the authority of God becomes apparent to all creation on the Day of Judgment. I wish for you that you may accept Christianity and become a child of God, for then the mercy of God will be with you.

With all due respect to you, but not to your errors,
Priest Daniel Sysoev

July 7, 2006

110. To the same Muslim woman who responded that Christianity was too complicated for her, upbraided monasticism, accused Christians of drunkenness and fornication, and cited a quote from the Koran stating that God cannot have children.

How do you know, may I ask, that God has no children? How do you know that the Koran is the word of God the Creator, when Mohammed himself received it not from God, but from a spirit whom he considered an angel, yet according to the Bible, and even Mohammed's own sensations after the vision on Mount Hira, it was actually Satan? Where are the guarantees that the information was correctly relayed from the messenger to Mohammed? Where are the guarantees that he was not lying?

The Bible warns that Satan takes on the form of an angel of light. This is precisely what happened with Mohammed.

As for complexity, what made you think that reality was simple? Physicists know that the microworld can only be described by extremely complex equations of quantum mechanics, yet you believe the world of God ought to be primitive. What would make you think this? Moses, David, the prophets, and Christ all say that God has His own Son, who is His Word, and His own Spirit; yet you reject this.

Why should you be taken at your word, rather than believing the very word that Mohammed cites? You betray yourself when you say, "I cannot understand your faith in which everything is made complex. Conversely, Islam is an easy religion." But we Christians do not attempt to reject the word of God, and do not attempt to distort it with our weak and sinful intelligence. We hear God and obey. Is your mind really equal to the mind of the Creator? Can you learn your future? And if not, how can you understand the mystery of God, if you have rejected His own testimony concerning Himself? We must not seek complexity or simplicity, but truth.

As for monasticism, it is the most excellent path that leads men up higher than the heavens. I do not understand—why would you feel distaste for a person who has made the knowledge of God his chief goal?

As for drunkenness and infidelity, forgive me, but the Church has always successfully combatted this. Name a single Islamic center that successfully combats alcoholism in Russia: we can name hundreds of Chris-

tian centers where dozens of Muslims are also treated.

Islam attempts to resolve the problem of sin by executing the sinner, but Christianity heals him. Islam responds to any adversity with threats, but Christianity responds with healing power. Where then is the Creator at work? Where in Islam are the indications of His supernatural might? The Church is filled with wonders; she blossoms with repentent sinners; she is adorned with those who have achieved supreme righteousness. But where are your saints? Where are those who know God as He is?

When we hear about Islam, we hear only of murdered innocents or of a dessicated, pointless law that in no way enriches the mind or the heart. What good thing is there in Islam that is missing in Christianity?

There is none. And Christianity has infinitely more than this. In us there dwells life-giving power: we know the joy of forgiveness of sins; we can call God our Father and feel His hand. To what purpose then do you propose that we renounce this?

Without your help we fight against idols; without your help we know that God is one. What new thing then do you have to offer? Where is your evidence? Who was present when Mohammed received the Koran? Where are the signs that he showed in proof of his mission? Where are those whom he raised from the dead? Where are the sick who were healed, the sinners cleansed of their sins, the forgiven harlots? You are proud of your sham righteousness, but God knows your hearts—that they are far from humility.

Repent, rather; receive baptism, and become not a slave, but a daughter of God. And this you will feel with

both your mind and your heart. Why should you believe a book, even one that is well written, and not believe the living word of God?

July 8, 2006

111. To a person who wrote that shahid terrorists allegedly do not confess true Islam, and that there are many good Muslims who do not agree with them.

The Islam that Mohammed preached corresponds exactly to the ideas of the shahid terrorists. Fortunately, ordinary Muslims heed the voice of their conscience far more often than Islamic norms.

December 27, 2006

112. To a woman who wanted to know whether she could marry a Muslim.

Dear N.,

I will attempt to answer your question, but first it is important to know who you are by creed. It is one thing if you are a Christian, if in holy baptism you have joined yourself to God, if in Communion you participate in the divine life and your sins are forgiven. If this is so, I think the answer should be obvious to you: there can be no marriage with one who does not believe in Christ, who is in the power of evil spirits (being unbaptized). You may and must pray for him, that God might bring him to baptism, but to consider sharing a life with one who is not united with God is extremely dangerous.

It is another matter if you are not a Christian. In that case you are in just as serious a state as your acquaintance. All I can do is advise you to reconcile yourself to God through baptism and confession.

In general your illnesses and your restless heart clearly testify that all these thoughts of sharing a life with a Muslim are not from God. Unrest and hysteria are signs of Satan's influence. Banish him through prayer and repentance.

We are human, and so we cannot arrange our own fate. If we desire happiness, only God can give it to us. I advise you to read Christian literature about Islam (see the website "Orthodoxy and Islam"). Pray, read the Gospel, and follow its commandments.

Forgive me if I have written anything improperly. If you have any questions, please write. May God help you!

November 23, 2006

113. To another woman who asked a similar question.

For an Orthodox Christian, a church wedding is indeed essential. A member of the Church cannot marry an unbeliever, and certainly fornication is impermissible.

But if a person converts to Christ while already married, then according to the apostle Paul he need not dissolve the existing marriage, except in instances where the other party insists that he renounce his faith. The reason for this is that "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife" (1 Cor. 7:14).

But marriage to an unbeliever has never been permitted for one who is already in the Church.

May God preserve you.

October 21, 2008

114. To another woman who had married a Muslim, and their marriage had proven an unhappy one.

Dear N.,

Truly the Lord is risen! As far as church law is concerned, your marriage cannot be recognized before God. For you contracted it while already baptized. Consequently, for the Church your divorce cannot even be considered a divorce. If your husband's relatives begin demanding that you renounce Christ, divorce will simply become a necessity.

Alas, I can do nothing to help you to keep your family together. If Askhat does not accept Christianity, there is simply no basis on which to build your relationship. As a result, you will either renounce God (and in so doing you will not keep your family together and will lose your soul), or you will simply ruin both your own life and his.

May God grant you understanding!

May 14, 2007

115. To a Muslim woman who asked the reason for his "anti-Islam" stance, why he considered only Christianity to be the true religion, and why he believed in Jesus as the Son of God.

1. What is the reason for my “anti-Islam stance”? It is that God holds Islam to be false. I have no love for falsehood, although I pity those who are deceived. I thank you for the tafsirs that you cite, but this in no way changes the fact that the Koran contains obvious errors (for example, it considers the Virgin Mary to be Moses’ sister) and contains a number of assertions at which the human conscience rebels. We need not claim therefore that the Koran cannot be translated. Like any other composition, it is translatable, and the accuracy of the translation is determined specifically by one’s understanding. If the literal meaning of the Koran is calumny against Islam, of what worth is this religion? Is Allah truly powerless to correctly convey his revelation in such a way that people other than Arabs can understand it?

2. Why do I consider Christianity the only correct religion? The answer is simple. God revealed Himself in Christ in the most complete form possible, which is surpassed by nothing. God appeared in the flesh. Incidentally, what did Islam contribute that was new, compared to Judaism and Christianity? Jesus Christ Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). This claim of Jesus Christ is backed by His miracles, the resurrection after being three days dead, and the signs that to this day abound in Christianity. When Christianity and Islam debate with each other, it is a debate between rational life and mortal rationalism. We know that our sins are forgiven, we know this not only from the Bible but from experience, but you spend your time theorizing. I think this will be of no help to you on the Day of Judgment, for as God says, “He that believeth not is condemned already” (Jn. 3:18).

3. You ask, “Do you really believe that the mere mortal Jesus, though immaculately conceived, could be God? Do you not see a contradiction in this? A man cannot be God!!!”

Essentially, you are accusing me and all Christians of deliberately deceiving simple folk. But may God Himself call you to account for this accusation on the Last Day. Yes, I believe and I know that the Lord Jesus Christ, immaculately conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the True God, Who manifested Himself in human nature. He is One Person in two natures, both God and Man. I see no contradiction in this. For unlike the Muslims, I do not dare to say that there is anything impossible for God. We Christians know our Heavenly Father too well to foolishly say that there is anything God cannot do. Naturally, we do not say that man became God, but we know that God became a Man without ceasing to be Himself.

4. You say that “the term ‘son of God’ pertains to every person, as we are all God’s creatures.” But then you must correct the Koran, which states that no one comes to Allah except as a slave. Essentially, really, if every creature is a son of God, then the polytheists are right, and Allah has daughters. For the false goddess of the Arabs, Manat, is clearly a creature; consequently, by your logic she is a daughter of Allah. The very fact that you conflate creatures of God with sons of God is absolutely incorrect. Your child assuredly differs from your chair, even if you did make the chair with your own two hands. For the child is a person like yourself; he is of one essence with you. So also the Son of God is not like God’s creatures: He is of the same essence as God the Father.

We Christians can call God our Father only when we are united with His Son and receive adoption to sonship. And I wish you the same: receive holy baptism, and you will learn by experience the fatherhood of God and will understand all the wrongness of Islam.

May God help you.

March 26, 2007

116. To one who asked whether it was true that Islam originated from Judaism.

No. Islam originated from Arabian paganism, which had absorbed several distorted elements of Judaism and Christianity. Muslims revere Abraham, Noah, and other prophets as completely made-up individuals who have very little in common with the actual personages in the Bible. The Koran is not a condensed Bible, but a parody of it. I advise you to read the excellent publication from the Bible Translation Institute: *The Bible and the Koran: Parallel Passages*.

October 21, 2007

117. To a Muslim who asked why he opposed Islam, since it informs people that God is one, and also why he did not acknowledge the Koran.

The essence of religion is not merely to know God, but to establish a connection with Him. God is one, and the path to Him is also one—His living and personal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do not believe in Him will never find God, and after death they will be cast down into hades.

I do not limit the Almighty to Scripture alone, but I do not consider God a schizophrenic. He cannot give two mutually exclusive revelations; He cannot be mistaken. But the Koran radically contradicts the Bible, and furthermore it is littered with historical and scientific errors. I know the history of the Koran's origins, and that is precisely why I am in no way prejudiced concerning its origins. It is not from God, but from His enemy.

Incidentally, I have never fought against the Muslims. I fight against delusions, for the souls of the deluded. And so my advice to you is to read the Gospel without bias, compare it with the Koran, and then at last you will find the one Path to God.

May God help you!

March 3, 2008

118. To a priest who asked how to answer a Muslim who claimed that Jesus was merely a prophet, citing passages from the Gospel where He is called a prophet, as well as passages from the Koran.

I will attempt to respond to this statement by Abdulaziz. All the passages from the Gospel that he cites state only that the Lord Jesus Christ had the status of a prophet. But this says nothing about His nature. A careful reading of the Gospel makes it patently obvious that the divine sonship of Jesus Christ is exclusive. He is called the Only-begotten (that is, the only One Whom God begat) Son of God (Jn. 1:18), which can in no way be explained from the Islamic point of view (which, incidentally, com-

pletely denies the very possibility of man's filial relationship with God). At the same time, none of the people in the Gospel ascribe to themselves such exclusive names, appropriate to God alone, as "the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14:6), "the Resurrection" (Jn. 11:25), "He Who Is from the Beginning" (Jn. 8:25),^{*} and "the Light of the world" (Jn. 9:5). No one ever said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

How can a created being say such things of himself? How can a created being say, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father" (Mt. 11:27)? Who but God could say, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13)? Yet Jesus says all this concerning Himself! His very words "I and My Father are one" (Jn. 10:30) in context clearly show both that the Persons of the Trinity are of one essence and that the Father and the Son are equal in power.

Yes, Christians can be participants in the Trinitarian life. In baptism we are adopted to sonship by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, and hence we have come to know by experienced the mystery of Divine Oneness. But naturally our oneness with God is a mere shadow of the eternal oneness of the Only-begotten One with His Father.

I will not cite here the innumerable examples from the prophets who foretold that the Messiah would be a "mighty God" (Is. 9:6), or of the apostles who said that Christ is He "Who is over all, God" (Rom. 9:5), "the true God, and eternal life" (1 Jn 5:20).

^{*} Translation from the Slavonic; most English versions read the equivalent of, "What I have been saying to you from the beginning."

Here we must be consistent: either Jesus was a liar, in which case He is a false prophet; or else He was not a liar, in which case He is true God, the Son of the true God. The true Gospel in no way allows us (without using scissors) to change the true historical Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into the “servant of Allah, Issah” invented by Mohammed.

One can of course loudly insist that Christians distorted the Gospel, but there is no proof of this, especially since even the Koran refers Muslims to the Injil* for confirmation of its alleged rightness. If the Gospel had not existed in Mohammed’s time, consequently he could not have referenced it. As for citing the Koran, this is completely pointless. For it must be proven that the Koran was given by God before citing it. And to do that one must explain why Allah, if he is almighty, could have permitted the complete distortion of his former Scriptures, which so radically diverge from the poetic compositions of Mohammed, and what guarantee we have that the text of the Koran itself was not distorted in the same way (considering that we do not have copies dating back to Mohammed).

Thus, I can only wish for your worthy inquirer that he might delve attentively into the undistorted text of the Gospel (as the Koran also exhorts), and that upon reading it he might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing he might have life through His name (see Jn. 20:31).

April 4, 2008

* The Arabic name for the Gospel. –*Trans.*

119. To an Orthodox Christian who asked how to explain the mystery of the Eucharist to Muslims.

Nothing should be explained to the Muslims regarding Communion, for this pertains to the mystical teaching of Christians. If however they already know of it, compare Communion to a transfusion of healthy blood and a heart transplant for a sick man.

April 9, 2008

120. To a Muslim woman who said that Orthodoxy cannot control politics, whereas Islam does so successfully in Muslim countries.

When we say that Orthodoxy does not control politics, we are merely asserting that the Church recognizes that government as such is a divinely ordained institution. For this reason no hierarch of the Church can tell the government with whom to wage war and with whom to be friendly. At the same time, the Church can and must declare God's principles to governments that consider themselves Orthodox, and those governments must make these principles the foundation of their politics.

At the same time, our kingdom is not of this world, and here Christians are sojourners and foreigners. And we know full well that there can be no perfect government here.

As for Islam, its attempt to control the entire life of a country is rather a mark against it. Which would you say is greater: heaven or earth? The Church leads men to heaven, making them children of God, while Islam is

purely an earthly ideology. And in this lies its chief defect. After all, man can never be satisfied with the earth. Even from a practical standpoint Orthodoxy can prepare citizens of heaven under any societal structure, whereas Islam is incomplete without shariah standards.

May 14, 2008

121. To the same Muslim woman concerning the Trinity and the death of Christ.

In Christianity there are not three gods, but One God, Who has His own Personal Word and His own Spirit. When Jesus died on the Cross, He died not according to His divine nature, but according to His human nature.

That you might more easily make sense of these questions, I am sending you my work on the fundamentals of the faith. If you are interested, I invite you to read it.

June 1, 2008

122. To the same woman regarding the fate of unbaptized infants.

You are right. In the eyes of God both you and every infant are sinners, and if you do not receive baptism you will go to hades.* The reason is quite simple: just as a

* This is the author's personal view, and not the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Most of the holy fathers who have written on the subject (St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ephraim the Syrian, and others) do not share this position, taking a more optimistic view of the spiritual state and the fate of unbaptized infants. –*Trans.*

person can be born into the mafia, so also a person who is born is already in league with Satan. Only in baptism is this union dissolved, and God enters into a covenant with the person. A member of an impure union cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

But here we must remember that the infant, who has committed no personal sins, will not be subjected to personal punishment, but will merely be in darkness, for he has no eyes with which to see God. But an adult who rejects baptism or simply commits personal iniquities will also be punished for his personal malefactions.

May God preserve you.

June 9, 2008

123. To the same woman concerning Christ's descent into hades, and about why God could not forgive men's sins without the sacrifice on the cross.

Christ the Savior did indeed descend into hades, but not in order to suffer—rather, He descended to free those who during their lives had repented and sought forgiveness of God. Jesus Christ vanquished Satan by His sacrifice and stripped him of his power over men.

As for whether God could have forgiven men without this, my answer is this: He could not have, for He is at once both merciful and just. Consequently, God could not allow evil to go unpunished. It was for this reason that Christ appeared—in order to voluntarily bear our punishment and to cleanse us by His blood. In this the love of the Father and His Son was shown to us—that

the Son of God died for those who had been at enmity with Him by their sins. This is precisely why Christians are certain of their salvation, if they do not renounce the Triune God and do not cease to live according to His commandments, with the help of His power.

But Christ died for you also, and God loves you, and therefore I wish for you that you might answer God's love with your own, accept baptism, and become a daughter of God.

November 13, 2008

124. To an adherent of Islam who asked him why he participated in debates with Muslims.

I pray God with all my heart that there might be peace between Muslims and Christians. The debates themselves as such are necessary so that Muslims might learn to have actual dialogue instead of merely exploding. For us, Christ is dearer than father or mother: He is our God, our Savior, and the purpose of our life. And to reject His divinity, the Cross, and the Resurrection is the worst blasphemy for Christians.

We, however, desiring to save our Muslim brethren, have not reviled them for these extremely impious thoughts, though they are deserving of thousandfold punishment in Gehennah. Regarding Mohammed, you have long known that Christians rejected his claims of being a prophet from the very beginning. And they did so for no other reason than that in him were present all the biblical hallmarks of a false prophet. We are sorry indeed that so many people have been led astray by

Mohammed, for we can call it by no other name. For how can we contradict God, Who gave us clear signs of prophecy and false prophecy? We are sorry indeed that you have wholly given your heart and your love not to the immortal God, but to a mortal man. Is this not what is called idolatry?

I wish for you that you might come to know God's love, just as I wish this for all those Muslims with whom I have debated. It was for the salvation of their souls from eternal perdition that I consented to participate in the affair. May God enlighten you.

June 6, 2008

125. To a Muslim who attempted to disprove Christianity by citing the passages that speak of Christ's humanity, as well as by pointing to the Koran and the words "he is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23 DRA).

According to the Gospel, Christ is at once both God and Man. He died for our sins and was accursed for our transgression, and by His blood we have been healed and received forgiveness from God. Such is the truth that is clearly revealed in Scripture. I will not cite the innumerable passages from the apostolic epistles (Romans, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John). But Christ Himself said that He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). Thus, the doctrine of the redemption is given by Jesus Christ Himself. How one can read the Gospel without noticing that it speaks of the actual death and resurrection of Christ is beyond my comprehension.

If the Koran, written 600 years after the Gospel, contradicts it, then the issue lies with the Koran and its author, and not with the Gospel. All the more so since the Koran recommends consulting the Gospel and the Torah, which in Mohammed's time contained the same text as today. The Koran never even hints that Christians distorted the text of the Gospel: the Muslims invented this argument later, after it turned out that the actual Gospel and the actual Torah disprove Mohammed's claims to being a prophet and show the erroneousness of the Koran's interpretations.

Your letter contains internal contradictions that you fail to notice.

1. You quote Christ's words which He spoke from the Cross, yet you deny His crucifixion. How can this be?

2. You reject original sin, yet you do not provide a single reference to the Gospel. How then does your personal opinion—which contradicts not only the Bible, but the ordinary facts of life for all men, including Muslims—disprove Christianity? What is your logic?

3. You reference the Koran, which contradicts all previous Scriptures, and the author of which did nothing to confirm his status as a messenger, and you think that in so doing you have disproved Christianity. Do you really not know that Christians considered and still consider Mohammed a false prophet, and for this reason they do not acknowledge his revelations? You could have read of this even in the Koran. Why then refer us to the Koran as to a book that is in any way authoritative for us?

June 20, 2008

126. To the same Muslim, who asked how it could be just for the innocent Christ to suffer for the sins of others, accused Father Daniel of pride, and also sent an article which attempts to interpret Deut. 18 as a prophecy concerning Mohammed.

It is just because Christ voluntarily took our punishment upon Himself and died for our transgressions. All who believe in Him and accept His baptism will receive forgiveness. But whoever does not believe will incur just punishment for his sins. It is a pity that you know nothing of the love of God and His Word. For it was on the cross that love and justice were joined together for believers.

As for Mohammed, I did not write that the Koran calls him a false prophet. The Koran says that Jews and Christians have not acknowledged his prophecies (see the suwar "The Cow," "Maryam," and others).

As for myself, I am a sinful man who has received forgiveness from God through Christ. And my pride has nothing to do with it. I know that I and all Orthodox Christians are in the light, and that the Muslims persist in darkness. And I pity you. For you are able to personally come to know God yourselves and receive forgiveness!

As for the file "A Prophet Like Unto Moses," I decided not to analyze it in detail, as I was writing not to its author, but to you. The website "Orthodoxy and Islam" has a detailed analysis of this article.

I will respond in brief that the Bible not only contains a prophecy of the coming of a prophet like unto Moses (Deut. 18), but also says in whom this prophecy will be fulfilled

(Acts 3:22). This Prophet is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, Who became man and proclaimed the final revelation of the Heavenly Father. Hence, all attempts to link this prophecy to Mohammed contradict the Bible. This is especially true since the very concept of a covenant (an agreement between God and men), which is the heart of the Bible, is something of which the Muslims know nothing.

How can we say that Mohammed is in any way like unto Moses when he did not behold Allah face to face, and did not make a covenant with Him, but received all his revelations not from God directly (as did Moses and Christ), but from a created being? May God help you to come to know His love.

Sincerely and with thanks for your letters,
Priest Daniel

June 23, 2008

127. To an Orthodox Christian whom the Muslims had threatened and who asked why the state did not put a stop to Islamization.

I have received more than ten threats in electronic form, and even more verbally. As for the state and its stance on Islam, the reason for their weakness is that only faith, and not unbelief, can conquer faith. Liberalism has crumbled before the face of Islamic aggression, just as it once crumbled before Hitler. All talk of moderate Islam is nothing more than a spy's cover in wartime. But the Muslims are not to be feared. When God is with us, we are afraid of no one.

July 6, 2008

128. To another Orthodox Christian who asked for help in debating with a Muslim over whether the text of the Bible had been distorted.

Regarding the Muslims' objection that our Scriptures are allegedly distorted, you should say that:

1. Mohammed did not consider Scripture distorted; on the contrary, in the Koran (Surah 2) he referred Christians and Jews to their own books for a witness. If Scripture were distorted from his perspective, he could not have referred to them as authoritative. Your opponent himself acknowledges that two centuries before Mohammed was born the text of the Bible was the same as it is today. Consequently, his objections against the Bible are simultaneously objections against the Koran. All talk of later additions is nothing more than his own inventions, for which your opponent will answer to God.

2. If Allah could not preserve his word inviolate, he is not God, for he cannot do all things. We then ask the question: where is the guarantee that the Koran was conveyed to us in inviolate form? For we have no one who witnessed the Koran being relayed to Jibril (what if he got it confused en route, or fibbed?), nor witnesses that the Koran was properly relayed to Mohammed, nor even the text of the Koran as it left Mohammed's hands. Consequently, by your opponent's logic, there is nothing hindering us from supposing that the Koran did not survive at all in undistorted form, and that what we have is merely a version distorted by Osman. And Osman and Zayd are the "evil geniuses of Islam."

As for the apostle Paul, it should be noted that the

Muslims' attack on him misses the mark. All those things that the Muslims dislike in Christianity are found not only in the writings of Paul, but also of John, of Peter, and in the Gospel.

As for your opponents' statements regarding the book of Acts and the apostles Peter and Paul, all this is what is known as slander. In law and in life there is a presumption of innocence, and all these claims that Ananias was murdered are nothing but malicious slander, especially since aside from the book of Acts there are no other sources for this event.

Secular historians consider Luke one of the most accurate historians of the Ancient World, and even the minutiae of his accounts are confirmed by archeology. And so you have no need to disprove these theories. You need only say, "Where is the proof of your lies?" If there is none, you must declare each time: "You, sir, are a liar."

July 8, 2008

129. To a Muslim who said that Christianity cannot be the truth because the Bible is distorted, and also that the Gospel supposedly foretells Mohammed, and that the veneration of icons is idolatry.

The foundation of a religion is not its text, but the being with whom the adherents of that religion have fellowship. The pagans have fellowship with demons; hence their religion is false. Christians have fellowship directly with God; hence their religion is true. Islam does not have fellowship with God personally; even Mohammed him-

self did not see the Creator. Consequently, this religion is false. This is especially true since Mohammed offered no proof of his supposed appointment as a prophet. He did not leave behind a single prophecy that came to pass (though there were several that did not). He raised no one from the dead and healed no one; he merely imposed his faith by force. His commandments are far inferior to those of the Gospel, and even Mohammed himself, who lived with a nine year-old girl, robbed caravans, killed an entire tribe of his enemies, and was not above deceit and contract killings, can hardly serve as a model of righteousness.

The question of whether the sacred texts were preserved is a question of trust in God. If God gave His revelation, will He really not preserve His revelation? And if God lacked the power even to keep His word unharmed through the ages, how can we believe Him? This is to say nothing of the fact that from a historical standpoint the Bible has been better preserved than any written document of antiquity. For example, the Koran was compiled 40 years after the death of Mohammed by his disciples, who destroyed any unsuitable scrolls (see the website "Orthodoxy and Islam" for more details). The most ancient manuscript is dated to 120 years after the death of Mohammed. Whereas the text of the Gospel has survived in fragments dated to fifteen years after it was written.

As for predictions of a new prophet in the Bible, the first question is this: if Scripture is distorted, how can one cite it as a reference? The Bible does indeed contain a prediction concerning Mohammed, but only the following: "There shall arise false Christs, and false proph-

ets” (Mt. 24:24). There was no new Revelation after God Himself became Man, nor can there be (see the epistle to the Hebrews 1). To substantiate his mission, Mohammed cited Christ’s words about the coming of the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit), who indeed appeared in the world fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. But Mohammed is not the Paraclete (the Comforter): he comforted no one, and instead became the cause of tremendous bloodshed. He is of flesh, and not a spirit. Consequently, the words of the Gospel of John (chapters 14–16) do not pertain to him.

As for the veneration of icons, we do not serve them as gods; rather, we render honor to those depicted in them, just as we keep photographs of our loved ones. The Muslims themselves kiss the Kaaba black stone without believing it to be Allah.

May God help you.

October 22, 2008

130. To a Muslim woman who berated him, accusing him of degrading Muslims in his article.

Write and tell me this: how was this article degrading toward Muslims? Was it because Muslims do not heed God the Creator, and instead heed a man who did nothing to affirm his authority as prophet (to say nothing of the fact that his personal life was more of an example of how *not* to behave)?

Instead of becoming groundlessly indignant, write a detailed and substantiated answer to this question: “How can one affirm Mohammed’s office as prophet and, con-

sequently, that the Koran was divinely inspired, if the Bible which Mohammed himself cites states that his prophetic office is not from God?"

I await your sober, unabusive response, in keeping with logic and with the true revelation of God. For the Creator cannot contradict Himself. In matters of religion there is no place for polite lies. It is a matter of our eternal fate, yours and mine.

February 4, 2009

131. To a woman who asked whether an Orthodox woman could become one of the wives of a Muslim, whose religion permits polygamy.

I am convinced that if a Christian woman who is not compelled to do so by circumstances beyond her control (life in Saudi Arabia) lives with a person who takes more wives, she is sinning both against God and against herself.

The canons of the Church are as follows: if a Christian woman marries a man of another faith without being compelled by force to do so (as often happens in the East), her marriage is no marriage at all. It is unlawful cohabitation. And the more quickly it is dissolved, the better.

If she has married while she was effectually not a Christian (did not believe in God, etc.), the rule of the apostle Paul comes into effect (1 Cor. 7): they may live together if the husband does not wish to divorce, if he does not compel her to renounce her faith, and if he does not hinder her from going to church and raising their chil-

dren in Christianity. If even one of these rules is violated, she must flee from him without a backward glance.

May God preserve you.

February 17, 2009

132. To a baptized person who had strayed from the faith into Islam.

I pity you. You have chosen fiery Gehenna instead of true union with the Creator, because you did not believe in the Eternal Word of the Creator—His Son Jesus.

April 6, 2009

133. To a baptized but non-practicing young woman who had become enamored of Islam, but then began considering a return to Orthodoxy.

I have been praying for you. Regarding prayers, you should begin reading the usual morning and evening prayers (these may be found online). Read the New Testament every day. For the essence of Orthodoxy is not in the external rituals, but in passionate love for God and man. Love Christ, and you will be saved.

As for how you can join the Church, it depends on whether or not you have taken part in Islamic rituals. If not, you need only repent at confession; but if you have participated, the rite of reunification must be performed. May God preserve you.

February 25, 2009

134. To an Orthodox Christian on the differences between the Bible and the Koran.

The Bible documents a Covenant (or agreement), and hence it describes not only the conditions of the agreement, but also the history of how it was kept (as with a promissory note, for example). God describes His perspective on the history of the people of the Covenant. And in this lies its distinction from ordinary historical writings.

As for the Koran, Islam does not offer a single logical proof that it was sent down from God. No one saw “Jibril” receive the revelation from Allah. Allah himself never affirmed this to Mohammed, for Mohammed himself never saw God, unlike Christ, who always beheld His Father. No one saw Mohammed receive the revelation from Jibril. People saw only someone tormenting the “prophet,” and then the latter saying something. Mohammed himself, according to Islamic teaching, was illiterate, and consequently could not verify what he himself had dictated. Furthermore, we have no documented corroboration of the text of the Koran over the nearly two hundred years following the death of Mohammed.

The Koran also lacks any internal indications of its divine origin; on the contrary, it contains 225 contradictions, scientific errors (such as the claim that the sun descends into a foul-smelling well in the evening, or that the Virgin Mary was the sister of Moses). Nor does it contain any fulfilled prophecies, unlike the numerous fulfilled prophecies of the Bible.

Consequently, the Muslims’ belief that the Koran was divinely inspired is based on the belief that Moham-

med was sent as a messenger, and the belief that Mohammed was sent as a messenger is based on the belief that the Koran was divinely inspired. It is a vicious circle.

The arguments showing that the Bible was divinely inspired have been examined repeatedly online. They can also be found in my article, "Is the Bible or the Koran the Revelation of God?" They can be briefly summarized as follows: the Bible contains uncommon teachings which suggest that it is not of human origin. This is particularly interesting because the Bible was written over the course of 1600 years in three languages, on three continents, by over 40 terrestrial authors. At the same time, the Bible reads like a unified text, in which hundreds of themes logically develop and progress.

Secondly, unlike the Koran, the Bible sets an extremely high moral bar, which attests that its Author is the source of good and justice. The Bible contains hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, which attests that its Author is outside of time and reigns over world history. Unlike Mohammed, the earthly authors of the Bible worked miracles, even according to the testimony of those who were hostile toward them. Let the Muslims point to even one miracle of Mohammed that the pagans also saw.

Incidentally, Mohammed himself acknowledged the Gospel, the Psalter, and the Pentateuch that existed in his time to be divinely inspired. And all our editions are based on texts written even before the birth of Islam's "prophet."

Now as to the salvation which Christ has given us. He has saved us from sin, the curse, and eternal death.

He was punished in our stead, and now everyone who believes in Him can receive forgiveness of sins and adoption by God to sonship. But those who do not believe in Christ will assuredly perish beneath the weight of their own transgressions.

May God preserve you.

May 16, 2009

135. To a Muslim who accused him of persecuting Islam, which allegedly teaches respect for other religions.

I beg your pardon, but I had not observed any exhortations in the Koran to respect other religions. I have not observed this respect in the history of Islam over the 13 centuries of its existence. Why deceive people? The Bible is more powerful than the Koran, and that is precisely why the Muslims are deathly afraid to read it. I do not understand how I am persecuting Islam. If the truth concerning it is persecution, you ought to consider whether you should persist in this kind of delusion. I am convinced that lies must be shown no respect. If Islam or Christianity is the truth, then I must not merely respect it, but accept it; but if something in this is false, I must disdain the error.

Regarding respect, the Bible and the Church require that we respect not false ideas, but the deceived people themselves. You deserve respect, for God created you in His image, and you can become His son in baptism; but the false conception to which you adhere is not deserving of respect.

Sincerely, and wishing that you might come to God through the sole Path to Him, which is Jesus Christ.

June 15, 2009

136. To another Muslim who disputed with him, claiming among other things that the Bible was distorted.

If our correspondence will produce nothing worthwhile, why bother writing? As for my evaluation of the source of Mohammed's revelation, the answer is simple. We take the Islamic sources (the hadith, Ibn Hisham), we read them, and we test them from the standpoint of previous revelations of God. As a result, we see that we are dealing with something demonic.

The Muslims followed this same path, but when they decided not to acknowledge the obvious—that Mohammed's revelation did not correspond to the actual revelation of the Creator (which revelation they themselves acknowledged)—they decided on an underhanded approach. The Bible contradicts Islam, but the Koran acknowledges the Bible; ergo, they had to invent the story that the Bible was distorted, although the Koran says not a word on the subject. This shows just how deeply those who reasoned thus disdained God and His word. And so the punishment for Muslims will be the flames of Gehenna.

One must not be dishonest and false in matters of faith. God is not pleased by this. Here even your "prophet" is more honest. He simply did not read the true word of God (being illiterate), and so he was deceived, and not

without the influence of his wife. Reread the official life of Mohammed, and you will see that I am right.

Consider for yourself: which was written earlier, the Koran or the Bible? Did God say anything at all prior to Mohammed? And if He did, who hindered Him from preserving His word?

June 22, 2009

137. To a Muslim who asked why Christians eat pork in violation of the Old Testament law.

Christians recognize the Old Testament. Christians do not observe only its ritual aspect, which was changed by God. Instead of many sacrifices we have the one bloodless Sacrifice, and instead of ritual oblations—baptism. But the spiritual significance of all the commandments is absolutely observed.

For example, the prohibition against eating pork was connected with the prohibition against behaving like a pig. In the New Testament we may eat the meat of pigs, for God has made it clean, but we are forbidden to behave like pigs.

The Lord Jesus Christ said to the apostle Peter, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). Circumcision likewise the Lord replaced with circumcision of the heart in baptism, when God cuts off sinful growths from every heart. The holy apostles spoke of this in detail at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), as did the apostle Paul (all the epistles to the Galatians).

June 23, 2009

138. To a Christian who asked about the so-called "Dagestan miracle" of which Muslims were talking, in which inscriptions in Arabic had appeared and disappeared on the body of an infant.

I think this is possible, and that it is obviously the work of Satan. Note that each appearance of an inscription was excruciating for the baby.

October 22, 2009

Eastern Religions and Occultism

139. To a baptized woman living in Sri Lanka who, while married to a Buddhist, converted to Orthodoxy through reading the articles of Father Daniel on his website, and who asked whether she could baptize her daughter and have a church wedding with her husband.

May God preserve you. I do not know that there is a priest who regularly visits Sri Lanka. If one is found in the near future, I will try to give him your email.

Now as to your questions.

You must baptize your daughter immediately, and you may perform a lay baptism yourself. To do so, fill a tub, and add some holy water to it if you have any; if not, you may do without. Read the Symbol of Faith and “Our Father.” Then immerse your daughter in the water three times with the words: The servant of God (daughter’s name) is baptized in the name of the Father, amen (immerse her the first time), and of the Son, amen (immerse her the second time), and of the Holy Spirit, amen

(immerse her the third time). This baptism will be a valid sacrament, and you will then need to find a church so that a priest can chrismate and commune the child. In extreme situations you can likewise baptize any person in this way. Once you have baptized your daughter, write to me, and we will pray for her.

Now, as to the church wedding. The Church does not recognize a marriage concluded between a Christian and a pagan, if it is performed after baptism. Hence, a church wedding is impossible until your husband is baptized. You must try (if you love your husband) to convince him to accept Christianity; otherwise he will perish forever.

Pray to God for the pagans, that He might grant them conversion to Himself. Exhort them to accept Christianity. Study the Bible with them and exhort them to be baptized... If several are found who wish it, I will attempt either to find someone to baptize them or else to come myself. Find out more about the faith and teach it to those around you.

Write to me; I will be glad to hear from you.

July 30, 2007

140. To the same woman, when she asked in her next letter whether, in the absence of an Orthodox Church in that country, she might go to a Catholic church to pray, and also related how a miracle had happened to her son after prayer, and that she had baptized her daughter.

Congratulations on the baptism of your daughter. We will pray for the newly baptized Ekaterina.

Regarding attending a Catholic church, I strongly advise you not to do so. The church canons forbid joining heretics for prayer—it is a grave sin, one that cuts a person off from the Church. And the reason here is not “prejudice,” but the fact that false teaching engenders false spirituality. The very atmosphere of a Catholic church is completely different from a house of God. It is not by accident that in your neighbor India there are Catholic monasteries that practice yoga. In the West the situation is the same. In general, Catholicism is wholly based on emotions and sentimentalism. Catholics often perceive prayer itself as meditation, and not as living communion with God. I think for you no good will come of attending a Catholic church.

It is another matter that with Catholics themselves we should have good personal relationships. We hate the sin of heresy, but we love the sinners and desire that they might return to God. A love that has forgotten the truth is not God’s love.

View your situation as involuntary spiritual seclusion: pray to God more often (especially since you see the results of prayer), read the Bible each day, and always read the holy fathers’ explanation of what you have read (all this is available online). Tell both the pagans and the Catholics about what you have heard. Exhort them to accept Orthodoxy.

Write to me. May God help you. And may God grant you wisdom.

August 15, 2007

141. To a person who asked why the practice of yoga is unacceptable for Orthodox Christians.

The chief goal of yoga is to alter the consciousness and make contact with the Divinity by one's own efforts. This results in the disintegration of the person (which is essentially what the techniques of yoga are designed to do) and the development of pridefulness, which is a mortal sin. This is to say nothing of the fact that yoga is inseparably linked with satanic paganism.

February 4, 2006

142. To an Orthodox Christian who wrote concerning the incompatibility of the principles of Buddhism and Christianity.

I think your answer was correct. You could however have taken a simpler path. The four noble truths are incompatible with the teaching of the existence of a particular soul, with faith in the resurrection of the flesh, and with the assertion that Christ is life (whereas for Buddhists life is suffering, from which one must be delivered).

In addition, it should be noted that Buddhism is more of a philosophical and meditative practice, and not a religion. Christianity is unacceptable to it because it paints a picture of the world that does not allow for attaining the goal which the Buddhist expects to achieve.

May 16, 2009

143. In answer to a question about reincarnation (the migration of souls after death)

The Bible says that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Conse-

quently, the teaching of the migration of souls is false and spawned of demons, who want to deprive man of salvation by claiming that if you do not repent now, there will be another chance.

One who believes in reincarnation rejects the resurrection of the flesh, and hence may not receive Communion.

May God preserve you.

July 3, 2009

144. To a woman who wished to know whether Eastern medicine that is allegedly based on redistributing energies in a person's body is permissible from an Orthodox viewpoint.

Regarding energy channels, their actual material component has yet to be discovered. The fathers of the Church spoke of spiritual powers and of the properties of the body. But as for so-called energies (except for the known energies—electromagnetic and so forth), they are more likely connected with Satan's influence on the body. He has his own power (for example, kundalini, which the fathers of the 14th century describe as the passion of fornication, located at the base of the spine).

As for acupuncture, it is merely reflexotherapy. There is nothing special about it.

October 22, 2009

145. To a Christian woman who asked whether it were permissible to use the "Sytyin method" for treatment.

The method of Mr. Sytin which you wish to employ is unacceptable for Christians. It is ordinary sorcery (incantation).^{*} We are not able to heal our own selves, especially not by resorting to incantations.

The Church has always held methods like this to be sorcery, and severely punished their use. You are right in noting deepset pride in this, which drives away from us the action of God. Stay far away—we have already had Sytin's victims come to us for help.

May God help you.

August 30, 2006

146. To a woman who asked why divination is sometimes accurate.

Divination only works when you believe in it. It is the devil who makes it effective.

May God save you.

May 14, 2009

147. To a man who asked whether a Christian can practice Kabbalah.

No. Kabbalah is an extremely dangerous form of magic, a diabolical art. One who studies Kabbalah falls away from God and may not commune.

August 7, 2009

* Georgy Nikolaevich Sytin (1921–2016), who taught a method of self-healing involving the use of spiritual healing affirmations and moods. —*Trans.*

Letters

to Priests

148. To a young priest who asked how best to organize Sunday school classes for adults.

May God help you in your labors. I think you should start by studying the fundamentals of the faith with the adults, and then move on to a systematic study of Holy Scripture. Scripture should be explained in order, applying the text to modern life as you go. I am sending you a template for catechetical homilies, as well as an example of how to explain Scripture.

I suggest that you use my outline for a two-hour talk—one hour of the Old Testament (one chapter) and one hour of the New Testament. Find Yuri Maksimov's library online; there you can select patristic explanations of all the texts. For we can only explain Scripture based on the holy fathers. I also recommend that after the talks you arrange to have tea, and for the attendees to bring the refreshments themselves as a group. This helps greatly to bring people together. Try to hold the talks in the form of a dialogue, not a lecture.

The explanations of the fathers must be woven into your explanation, and not merely recited. At the same time, try to modernize the translated patristic texts. For example, instead of "jousting yard," say "track" or "stadi-

um.” Otherwise the flood of unfamiliar words will weary their hearing and their attention will dull.

You can also follow the example of St. Nicholas of Japan and study the catechism of St. Philaret in detail. You must start with the fundamentals of the faith. If these are lacking, everything else will be wasted. Whenever possible, use examples from the lives of the saints and from life in general.

If I can be of any assistance, I shall. Write to me.

June 1, 2008

149. To another priest who asked how he arranged his talks on the Bible.

Greetings, Father!

We study Holy Scripture book by book—one chapter of the Old and one of the New Testaments. We go through all the books, including the non-canonical ones (the only ones I do not wish to study are 2 and 3 Esdras, due to their highly dubious status. For example, 3 Esdras is not mentioned in a single canon).

September 5, 2008

150. To a priest who accused Father Daniel of using “Baptist methods” in his missionary work.

I do not quite understand to what Baptist methods you are referring. There was an idea of organizing an “Orthodox stunde”—that is, at Orthodox businesses the Orthodox owners were to hold obligatory courses in Christianity for their non-Christian workers. But so far nothing has come of it.

As far as my missionary projects, they are all based on Orthodox principles. We do not employ any Protestant materials. We have trained street preachers who guard people against sectarianism, talk about God with those who wish it, and invite them to the church for services. The basic text for these street conversations is the catechism of Met. Philaret. Similar forays have been made into the marketplace and into Baptist assemblies. At church we hold Thursday talks on the Bible (based on the teachings of the fathers of the Church) and Friday catechetical talks, the text of which you have read.

When I travel to another city, I generally have to hold talks at the local cultural center, educational institutions, etc. Rarely am I able to break away to preach on the streets or at sectarian assemblies. Consequently, there would appear to be nothing particularly Baptist in my activities.

May God save you.

June 11, 2008

151. To a priest who asked about the rites published on his website for reunification from various false doctrines.

Practically all the rites of reunification are taken from prerevolutionary editions of the Rites (excluding pagans, Jehovah's Witnesses, charasmatics, and Adventists). All of these were published in their time with the blessing of the Synod. As for those rites not taken from prerevolutionary editions, the only new elements they contain are the questions concerning heresies. Everything else is taken from the prerevolutionary texts (including the confession of faith and all the prayers). These

rites may be employed by bishops or by priests to whom they have entrusted this. Should any widespread error arise in his diocese, a bishop may permit all presbyters to employ these rites (see the synodal decree of 02.20.1840).

Composing new Rites is indeed a grassroots initiative, but in actuality they have already been employed—for example, by Archbp. Arseny. I think that their authoritative adoption is indeed necessary, and for this purpose there exists either a diocesan structure (each bishop can approve such rites in his own diocese) or a missionary department.

If there is no such adoption in the diocese, similar rites may be employed from the Book of Rites (these include the prerevolutionary rite of reunification for Baptists and the rites of reunification for Armenians, Nestorians, Lutherans, and pagans (see Bulgakov for old questions).

Regarding schismatics, the usual practice for receiving them is chrismation (concerning which there was a series of prerevolutionary synodal decrees), and with regard to the members of the UAOC and the Vitalyites I think this is reasonable. But with regard to the “Catacomb Church” it is another matter entirely. We have no guarantee that their baptisms were properly performed (especially with Raphael). They are simply an appalling collection of religious opportunists with completely outlandish ideas about the faith.

I think that the majority of those in the “Catacomb Church” should be received through baptism, preceded by their renunciation of their errors. In general, in all such complicated cases one should obtain the written resolution of the bishop (which it would be good to subsequently publish, so as to establish a system of precedents).

October 2, 2008

152. To a priest who inquired as to how he had managed to introduce congregational singing in his church and what the outcome had been.

Greetings, Father!

It was quite simple. We purchased one hundred copies of *The Divine Liturgy for Choir* and printed the primary hymns of the all-night vigil on a printer. We appointed an officer who distributes the texts to the parishoners at the proper time. And we appointed a choir director who only sings obikhod and Znamenny chant (the Cherubic Hymn and the Anaphora are in Znamenny, and never vary). Then I gave several energetic sermons, and the people enthusiastically began singing.

Today they tell me that previously they had stood in church like an audience, not understanding a single word, but that now they understand, even though like everyone else we serve in Church Slavonic. Of course, twice a year I give talks about the meaning of the divine services.

There is a downside: some Orthodox accuse our church of sectarianism ("You can understand everything they're saying—just like the sectarians!") But no matter. The vast majority of the people are pleased. May God help you. The more so since His Holiness has long since given his blessing for congregational singing (Moscow Diocesan Councils of 1993 and 1994).

Asking your prayers,
Priest Daniel

February 26, 2008

A Sense of Sojourn

Appendix (entry in Fr. Daniel's Live Journal dated 09.02.2009)

I think a sense of celestial citizenship is inherent in practically every person who is not utterly depraved. Are there really people who have never felt that all the pleasures of earth are somehow too feeble, that they are unreal and ephemeral? Gazing up into the lofty vault of heaven, has a person never had the sense that there is a mystery there surpassing all the enigmas of the world? Is there really anyone who has not suddenly grown weary of all earthly vanities—all politics, concerns, and business affairs—and has not wished to find an indistructible Kingdom?

“By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth” (Song of Sol. 3:1–2).

We are cramped here; the world has become too contaminated by death and corruption. There is too much falsehood and unrighteousness in everything to which

the soul is attached on earth. This world poisons the soul with the deadly poison of passion—a sweet poison which then becomes foul and enslaving. The world clouds our vision with the sludge of human and diabolical ideas, the purpose of which is to shackle us to the earth.

But there is a crystal fountain beyond the borders of the world. In it the soul washes away this impure contagion, and it washes away the filth from our spiritual eyes. And the soul that has tasted so much as a drop from this fountain—will it not say, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? Why should I wander once again over the dusty crossroads of human thoughts?”

I do not wish to adhere to the opinions of men; I wish to adhere only to the will of my Lord. I do not wish to deceive and to be deceived: I wish to live in the Truth, to partake of the Truth as of fragrant wine, to delight in it as in a honeycomb.

We are strangers and sojourners here, O Christians. And the Chief of all strangers is He Who had no place where to lay His head, Who was even buried in the tomb of another. But we have a Homeland, a true Fatherland, for which our hearts long. There lies the city of the saints and of our friends, both angels and men. There we will learn to see God as He is, and our heavenly Father will gather us together.