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On the Fast After Pentecost and its Significance

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME

Since the Apostles' Day Till Now Self-Restraint is the Best Defence Against the Devil's Assaults

TODAY'S festival, dearly-beloved, hallowed by the descent of the Holy Spirit, is followed, as you know by a solemn fast, which being a salutary institution for the healing of soul and body, we must keep with devout observance. For when the Apostles had been filled with the promised power, and the Spirit of Truth had entered their hearts, we doubt not that among the other mysteries of heavenly doctrine this discipline of spiritual self-restraint was first thought of at the prompting of the Paraclete in order that minds sanctified by fasting might be fitter for the chrism to be bestowed on them. The disciples of Christ had the protection of the Almighty aid, and the chiefs of the infant Church were guarded by the whole Godhead of the Father and the Son through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But against the threatened attacks of persecutors, against the terrifying shouts of the ungodly, they could not fight with bodily strength or pampered flesh, since that which delights the outer does most harm to the inner man, and the more one's fleshly substance is kept in subjection, the more purified is the reasoning soul.

The Tempter is Foiled in Attacks Upon Those Who Have Learnt These Tactics

And so those teachers, who have instructed all the Church's sons by their examples and their traditions, began the rudiments of Christian

warfare with holy fasts, that, having to fight against spiritual wickednesses, they might take the armour of abstinence, wherewith to slay the incentives to vice. For invisible foes and incorporeal enemies will have no strength against us, if we be not entangled in any lusts of the flesh. The desire to hurt us is indeed ever active in the tempter, but he will be disarmed and powerless, if he find no vantage around within us from which to attack us. But who, encompassed with this frail flesh, and placed in this body of death, even one who has made much decided progress, can be so sure of his safety now, as to believe himself free from the peril of all allurements? Although Divine Grace gives daily victory to His saints, yet He does not remove the occasion for fighting, because this very fact is part of our Protector's mercy, Who has always designed that something should remain for our ever-changing nature to win, lest it should boast itself on the ending of the battle.

And So This Fast Comes Very Opportunely After the Feast of Pentecost

Therefore, after the days of holy gladness, which we have devoted to the honour of the Lord rising from the dead and then ascending into heaven, and after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, a fast is ordained as a wholesome and needful practice, so that, if perchance through neglect or disorder even amid the joys of the festival any undue licence has broken out, it may be corrected by the remedy of strict abstinence, which must be the more scrupulously carried out in order that what was on this day Divinely bestowed on the Church may abide in us. For being made the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and watered with a greater supply than ever of the Divine Stream, we ought not to be conquered by any lusts nor held in possession by any vices in order that the habitation of Divine power may be stained with no pollution.

And by Proper Use of It We Shall Win God's Favour

And this assuredly it is possible for all to obtain, God helping and guiding us, if by the purification of fasting and by merciful liberality, we take pains to be set free from the filth of sins, and to be rich in the fruits of love. For whatever is spent in feeding the poor, in healing the sick, in ransoming prisoners, or in any other deeds of piety, is not lessened but increased, nor will that ever be lost in the sight of God which the loving-kindness of the faithful has expended, seeing that whatever a man gives in relief, he lays up for his own reward. For "blessed are the merciful, since God shall have mercy on them;" nor will short-

comings be remembered, where the presence of true religion has been attested. On Wednesday and Friday, so let us fast, and on Saturday let us keep vigil in the presence of the most blessed Apostle Peter, by whose prayers we surely trust to be set free both from spiritual foes and bodily enemies; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.



Regarding the Church's Veneration of Archbishop Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky)

This article deals with the matter headed above, but in fact it touches on wider issues, many of them relevant to the situation of the Church today in the Orthodox diaspora, where attention-seeking manipulators abound, and is therefore very instructive.

With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Photii of Triaditza, Reader Constantine Todorov (later Bishop Victor of Nicopol d.2021) responds to the issue regarding the veneration of Archbishop Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky). The text is compiled from talks by His Eminence to the faithful in 2016 during his pastoral rounds of the Bulgarian Orthodox Old Calendar churches in Varna, Sliven & Stamboliyski.

How should we regard the official glorification of Archbishop Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky) by the Moscow Patriarchate (MP)?

First of all, our Church (the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria) must consider how Archbishop Luke is regarded by our Sister Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA - i.e. that now under Metropolitan Agafangel). He was not among the martyrs and confessors glorified by the ROCA in 1981. Likewise, he is not included in our menology and we do not treat him as an Orthodox saint. The basis for the ROCA's decision was that Archbishop Luke was undoubtedly involved with the church policies of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodskiy, d.1944), implemented to satisfy the Soviet authorities. It is important to explain why the ROCA desisted from glorifying clergy involved with Sergianism.

We know, from the history of the Church of Russia in the period after the 1917 revolution, that the Soviet secret police frequently attempted to initiate schisms in the Church in order to destroy her. At first, the aim of the Bolshevik powers was to uproot all faith in God, to erase the name of God altogether. This ultimate goal was very explicit and was laid out officially in their party programme. The Bolsheviks

commenced their war against the Church with ruthless repression against the clergy and the faithful.

However, they soon realised that this approach would not achieve the desired outcome of severing people from the Faith. Instead, the repressions forged new confessors and martyrs, from among the clergy and laity, whom the faithful honoured for their struggle for piety, thus increasing the spiritual authority of the Church. The persecution, therefore, did not achieve its objective but rather the opposite.

Consequently, the Bolsheviks tried to infiltrate the Church hierarchy by promoting collaborators to positions within the Church administration. The secret police instigated the so-called 'Renovationist' schism by utilising a movement already in existence in the Russian Church before the revolution. This Renovationist movement consisted of people with liberal views who were in favour of married bishops, permitting priests to marry a second time, the weakening of the fasts and so on. These impious innovations were, however, rejected by the Church's faithful. Only a small minority supported the movement. With the help of the authorities, the Renovationists seized control of two-thirds of the churches in Russia, but the faithful would not attend their services, and would only attend churches served by priests loyal to Patriarch Tikhon. This schism did not succeed, although many priests and bishops did submit to the Renovationist hierarchy from fear of persecution.

The Church became even stronger during this trial, because the weak, fainthearted or liberal-minded transferred to the Renovationists and the Body of the Church shook off those members who would have caused greater decay from within. As the schism was developing, Patriarch Tikhon was arrested and held under strict house arrest for a year. Following his release, and First Exhortation to the Faithful, priests who had submitted out of fear began to return to the Patriarchal Church *en masse* and the Renovationist leadership was weakened.

Subsequently, the GPU tried to harm the Church in various ways by instigating schismatic movements, such as the Gregorian schism (an attempt to introduce the New Calendar into the Church of Russia). These, however, met with failure because the Church hierarchy, which the Soviet authorities appointed and legally registered, did not receive the backing and recognition of the Church's faithful.

The Orthodox flock rejected the Renovationists simply because the latter unhesitatingly endorsed and collaborated with the openly atheistic Soviet government. Any faithful member of the Church

naturally could not consent to be led by pastors who were collaborators with the secret police (who in turn were endeavouring to destroy the Church).

Of course, bishops and priests who did not wish to submit to the Renovationist leadership, being unable to appeal openly to the government, reasoned thus: “we cannot accept the Renovationists because they are uncanonical and unlawful in the eyes of the Church.” However, on their part, the Bolsheviks simply changed tactics to achieve their goal. Eugene Tuchkov, head of the GPU department concerned with the destruction of the Church, announced the following: “Very well, I will give you your own canonical first hierarch, but after that there will be no mercy for those who don’t submit to him.” The Bolsheviks understood that it wasn’t enough simply to impose an agreeable ecclesiastical leadership that they could control; these leaders would have to be canonical in order for the faithful to accept them.

Patriarch Tikhon reposed in 1925. For the next two years, the government tried, without success, to break the will of those hierarchs who stood at the forefront of the Church’s leadership, or who had a canonical claim to receive the primacy. These were Metropolitan Peter (Polyansky) d.1937, Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) d.1937, Metropolitan Agathangel (Preobrazhensky) d.1928, Archbishop Seraphim (Samoylovich) d.1937 and Metropolitan Cyril (Smirnov) d.1937. These hierarchs were removed, sent into exile, imprisoned or placed under house-arrest.

Eventually, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodskiy) accepted the GPU’s conditions and in the summer of 1927 he published his notorious Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet government on behalf of the Church. He instigated a new ecclesiastical policy of collaboration with the Bolsheviks. This Church position and policy is known after him as “Sergianism.” It is vital to understand what Sergianism is because, together with ecumenism, it is the main reason for our separation from official Orthodoxy. I will give an example to show the level of treachery by this new project of the GPU.

When Tuchkov was trying to corrupt the Metropolitan of Kazan, Cyril, he told him the following: “I will give you a list of people with whom you will form a Synod. However, you are to cooperate with us in everything. Then we will allow you to exist legally. And what do we mean by ‘cooperation’? If a certain hierarch is unacceptable to us, we will inform you and you must remove him from his see.” But the “unacceptable” ones were the genuine hierarchs, the real shepherds, who defended the Faith and were supported by the faithful. Metro-

politan Cyril responded: "Very well, and what am I to do in such an instance? Do I summon him and tell him: 'Brother, I don't have anything against you, but the authorities don't like you, they don't want you, so I have to replace you.'" Tuchkov exclaimed: "Not like that! You have to find your own ecclesiastical grounds and remove him discretely, as if it were your own idea." Metropolitan Cyril replied as following: "Eugene Alexandrovich, you are not the cannon and I am not the shell with which you'd like to demolish the Church of Russia." For this response he immediately received a further three years of exile in Siberia. Using the Church pastors as a tool to destroy the Church is demonic treachery. It buries the spiritual authority of the hierarchy in the eyes of the populace; the people realise that their pastors are starting to co-operate with the persecutors, having compromised their positions. In fact, such treachery breaks the spiritual moral strength of the faithful and crushes their firm resistance - not by depriving them of their hierarchs by slaughtering them as martyrs or sending them into exile as confessors - but through seeing them morally broken and betraying the Church to please the persecutors. As we can see, compared to Renovationism, Sergianism is a much more deceptive and difficult challenge for the clergy and for the entire flock.

Once it became clear that Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod had agreed to play the rôle the authorities had proposed, the most steadfast hierarchs, clergy and laymen severed communion with him. At one stage, this movement numbered around forty bishops, and these were the best part of the Church of Russia. Even the Sergianists themselves admitted that the highest regarded hierarchs had separated from them. The aim of this resistance was to protect the freedom of the Church, because she is only able to truly prosper when she is free from within and when her leadership is not dictated to by external forces that seek her destruction. Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) blessed the commencement of this movement in Petrograd and his followers become known as "Josephites;" they were also called "Tikhonites" (after Patriarch Tikhon) or "True Orthodox."

However, the majority of hierarchs remained in submission to Metropolitan Sergius for a number of different motives. A large remnant stayed in administrative submission although they did not approve of his actions and protested against them. These "non-commemorators" refused to commemorate the Soviet authorities in church services - something which Sergius had ordered in an Ukaz (decree). Before, the Tsar had been commemorated in the Church services but now the Sergianist hierarchs were demanding the commemoration of the

Soviet government. During the litanies, the faithful would hear the priest praying for the success of the Soviet authorities, who were striving to destroy the Church. Some of the “non-commemorators” would not even commemorate Metropolitan Sergius, but only Metropolitan Peter, the Locum Tenens of Patriarch Tikhon. At that time, the authorities had exiled Metropolitan Peter, and Metropolitan Sergius was acting as his Locum Tenens.

Most of the hierarchs continued in submission to Metropolitan Sergius simply because they could not endure repressions any more. Father Michael Polsky relates the following concerning a bishop of his acquaintance who had lived through years of exile. He related to Fr Michael: “I know very well that all Sergius is doing is abominable, and I can’t stand him, but I’m exhausted and at long last I want to go home.” He had been sent from exile to exile. Some people felt they could not endure the giant wine-press of persecution any longer.

Furthermore, Metropolitan Sergius personally initiated aggressive methods against those who did not accept his authority and who protested against his actions: clergy were prohibited from serving or defrocked, and he even forbade funerals to be served for laity who had separated from him. He did not hesitate to put under ban the most senior hierarchs of the Church of Russia, beginning with Cyril Metropolitan of Kazan, appointed by Patriarch Tikhon in his will as first Locum Tenens. By this action, Sergius declared that those not in communion with him had fallen away from the Church. Of course, for the steadfast confessors, his sanctions and threats had no authority, but the majority of others stumbled: “Are we really going to fall away from the Church? Of course, what he’s doing is outrageous. However, on the other hand, he is lawful and is not violating the dogmas of the Church. Do we have a legitimate reason for separating from him?” Sergius himself insisted, “You can’t accuse us of anything, we are canonical. We are the legitimate Church authority, and moreover we aren’t breaking the Church canons or her dogmas. It is you who are separating yourselves from the Church.”

Meanwhile, the other Eastern Patriarchates, driven by their own ecclesiastical-political interests, recognised the Church authority of Metropolitan Sergius. He presented his question to the confessors as follows: “Who are you with? You are outside the Church! And not just because the Synod and I are your ecclesiastical leadership, but because we are in communion with all of the Eastern Patriarchates - Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch - each of them recognises our ecclesiastical authority.” This proved an enormous

trial for the Russian faithful, demanding the highest level of spiritual discernment in order to navigate through such tempestuous times.

At the same time, Metropolitan Sergius told western journalists: "There is no persecution of the Church in Russia. It is true that many religious figures - hierarchs and laymen - are imprisoned, but these are not being punished for their faith, but for their political rebellion against the authorities." Thus the martyrs for the Faith were declared political criminals. The confessors who separated themselves from Metropolitan Sergius all told him: "You pronounce blasphemies against the confessors and martyrs of the Church. You lay all the blame of persecution on us, on the Church herself, but excuse the Bolsheviks."

Despite this, however, the Metropolitan continued to demand submission, maintaining his position: "The Church canons say that you can only separate yourselves from the church hierarchy if we break the canons and dogmas of the Church, but we haven't broken them." See here what the Sergianists consider "canonical." At the time, Joseph, Metropolitan of Petrograd wrote: "Who is worse, the heretic or the murderer? The heretic thrusts a knife into the very heart of the Church, he surrenders the Church and her freedom into the hands of atheists."

As I have said, the bishops and priests who remained in submission to Sergius had various reasons. Some of them, however, were not simply crushed, broken or confused, but active supporters of Metropolitan Sergius. Unfortunately, Archbishop Luke belongs to this category. He had a very hostile attitude towards the leading martyrs and confessors; in his opinion they were simply "sectarians." After the Second World War, Archbishop Luke became an open supporter of Soviet state policies, and he made a series of public announcements praising Soviet foreign policies as "fair." In current hagiographies these things are passed over in silence. Many incidents which he includes in his autobiography are also not mentioned. For example, he actually renounced his ministry as a hierarch for many years, to be permitted to work as a doctor. We read in hagiographies that he too was in a prison camp, he too was persecuted. It is true that he was sent into exile three times and also declared himself against the Renovationist schism. But afterwards he declared himself against the Josephites and against the Catacomb Church, in support of Sergianism, and collaborated with the persecutors of the confessors.

As I said, in the beginning the Bolsheviks wanted to destroy the entire Church, without trace. They had as much dislike for the Sergianists as for the Renovationists; they had no need of any Church whatsoever. Their policy was to "divide and rule," using either enticing pro-

mises or repressions in order to set one part of the clergy, the Renovationists and the Sergianists, against those prepared to defend the freedom of the Church until the very end. Once the Soviets had dealt with the Josephites (Tikhonites), the Sergianists were next in line. The latter had been hoping that by their submission and collaboration they would receive recognition and be able to exist in a Soviet atheistic state, but those calculations were wrong. Since they no longer had need of the Sergianists, the Bolsheviks submitted them to the same mass oppressions as the genuine Orthodox.

The current Moscow Patriarchate (MP), the direct descendent of the Sergianist Church, today very cunningly erases any distinction, mixing truth with falsehood. It erases the difference between the steadfast and leading confessors and those who suffered as a consequence of communist repressions, whilst remaining under Metropolitan Sergius. The MP has glorified many of the hierarchs who opposed Metropolitan Sergius, ranking them together with Sergianists who suffered persecution. The position of the MP is currently as follows: “Yes, at that time the two sides had their differences, but now, looking back we can say that both one and the other were right: One group took one path, and the other group took a different path; both paths earned them a crown as a confessor for the Orthodox Faith.”

However, when glorifying the New Martyrs in 1981, the ROCA did differentiate between the two categories. She did not glorify those who embraced Sergianism as they had been used by the atheist government to repress the martyrs and confessors who, until their end, championed the freedom of the Church and her innate purity. This is the reason that she did not glorify Archbishop Luke.

Here we need to clarify that the ROCA did not judge Archbishop Luke or proclaim how someone like him stands in the sight of God. God alone knows. By refusing to venerate him as a saint she demonstrated that the Church cannot promote his actions as exemplary for faithful Christians, i.e. he cannot be a rôle model for us. The position of Archbishop Luke is unacceptable in the eyes of the Church. Venerating him together with the saints signifies exactly the opposite: it means that he is offered to Orthodox Christians as an example to follow in our lives.

What about his miracles?

Whenever we consider contemporary testimonies of miracles we must be very careful. Generally speaking, there is a lot of mythology in current hagiography. On reading accounts of miracles, the faithful

are initially easily inclined to trust in them, and psychologically that is understandable and even natural. The very notion that an account of a miracle could be made up seems monstrous to the sincerely believing Christian; this would be a horrible blasphemy and completely unthinkable. But the facts are staring at us; many things have simply been invented and a vast number of these incidents are now well known. In the 1990s, after the collapse of Communism, Orthodox literature began to be published and a multitude of miraculous accounts emerged from the time of the Second World War.

We read how, before the Battle of Kaliningrad, Marshal Zhukov ordered the Kazan icon of the Mother of God to be brought to the army's headquarters and a moleben to be served before it. Subsequently, as the fighting commenced, all the guns on the German side were silenced periodically, and many German war prisoners later testified that they saw the Mother of God in the sky above the attacking Soviet forces. This story, which was publicised very widely throughout the 1990s, turned out to be false from beginning to end.

Another popular legend, regarding Metropolitan Elias of the Antiochian Patriarchate, which was widely disseminated is also now known to be fictitious. Those who have read it will recall the story of how, during the war, Metropolitan Elias secluded himself in a cave, and after having prayed and fasted for three days the ceiling of the cave opened up and the Most holy Theotokos appeared to him. She supposedly ordered him to tell Stalin that he was to reopen all the churches, that he must release from prison and recall from the front line all priests, giving them freedom to serve in the churches. Only with the fulfilment of her stipulations would they be victorious over the Germans. Apparently, Metropolitan Elias managed to deliver the message to Stalin. Stalin put his faith in this directive: his obedience to it and its subsequent fulfilment allegedly resulted in Germany's defeat. Now it is very well known that these and similar stories are fairytales.

In view of this, it behooves us to deal very cautiously with evidence of miracles, especially if we perceive in them some agenda. Having the aforesaid stories in mind, we naturally ask ourselves: why is it necessary to concoct miracles? Who gains from it? Is a particular motive being pursued by the admission and circulation of such legends? It is not hard to see, in my opinion, with these two legends, and a great deal many more like them, that there is an attempt to unify the mind of the Church with Soviet patriotism. Perhaps this is a consciously developed agenda aiming to manipulate the faithful?

To many it may seem conspiratorial to even pose such a question. But let us remind ourselves of a real, documented and proven story from Soviet times about Father Vsevolod Schpillier and his spiritual children, among whom are Archpriest Vladimir Vorobyov, the current rector of the Saint Tikhon university in Moscow, the infamous Muscovite Priest Dimitrii Smirnov, the representative of the department of the Moscow Patriarchate for relations with the armed forces, and other well-known archpriests and hierarchs.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Archpriest Vsevolod Schpillier, and many Muscovite Church intelligentsia and young people with him, entered correspondence by letter with Priestmonk Paul (Troytski). He had suffered a great deal, having endured Soviet camps, prisons and exiles. At this time he was in hiding, about 100km from Moscow. A woman who had been through exile with Fr Paul and who had taken care of him for many years delivered the letters back and forth. The letters from Fr Paul arrived frequently over a period of twenty years until his death at the end of the 1980s, so nearly twenty years. Apparently, he was clairvoyant and in some of his letters he would relate to Fr Vsevolod how he was present in the church in spirit while Fr Vsevolod was celebrating the divine services; he would relate specific incidents, which only a person who was there at the time could know.

Today, many of these then young people hold positions as archpriests and even hierarchs. All of these testify how, through these letters, their elder guided them from a distance, in spiritual and even in practical matters; he counselled them when to accept ordination to the priesthood, what kind of home to buy, whom to marry, with whom to associate, from whom to steer clear. He would also comment on Church affairs and give instructions on the correct attitude towards the Church dissidents of the times such as Fr Dimitri Dudko and others, and political dissidents like the well-known Alexander Solzhenitzyn. His spiritual children, to this day, treasure his letters, many of them having been published, but none of them saw Fr Paul in person. Contact was only made through the aforementioned woman whose name was Agripina. Bishop Panteleimon (Shatov), a spiritual child of Fr Paul, relates what occurred after they were notified of their elder's death by Agripina in 1990. Based on the descriptions the elder had given in his letters, Fr Vladimir Vorobyov and Bishop Panteleimon went to that village in which they deduced that the elder had lived. They did not find anything there: neither the house in which he had lived, nor any registration in the local council, nor a grave, nor anyone who had known a similar person, not even by a different name.

Shortly after this, Agripina announced that Fr Paul had actually reposed before the end of the Second World War. The spiritual children of the “elder” plummeted into deep confusion. They questioned her on many occasions, but until her death in 1991 she stuck to her story. They, however, did want to believe her. They buried her with much ceremony, having held her highly in honour as their eldress.

Later they began uncovering records. Archives were opened in the 1990s and among the camp documents was a record of the death of Priestmonk Paul (Troytski) in 1944; this was a huge shock for the elder’s spiritual children. After some time, however, the spiritual children of the “elder,” particularly Archpriest Vorobyov, started to propose a whole series of events, explaining the confusion, which they defend up until today.

Apparently, Priestmonk Paul had escaped from the concentration camp in 1944 and a different man was buried under his name; no doubt his relatives had bribed the camp administration so that he could be released in secret, or perhaps he was released simply from his sufferings owing to his ill-health, and so on. Archpriest Vladimir Vorobyov, who, by the way, is a member of the MP Canonisations Commission, more than once insisted on the glorification of Priestmonk Paul, but the Commission said that that would not be possible.

The majority of contemporary researchers, among them Abbot Damascene (Orlovsky), a leading figure in the Commission of Canonisation and author of a large volume of *Lives of New Martyrs*, are of the opinion that everything indicates that the entire Priestmonk Paul story was a large-scale operation by the secret police to establish control over the church dissident circles in Moscow during the 1970s and 80s. The letters of the “elder” were written by collaborators with the KGB and through these letters the secret police not only monitored, but directed, to its advantage, the affairs of a very large circle of church figures. Hence, for example, in 1974, Fr Vsevolod Schpilller sharply condemned the renowned author and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn in an interview. (Solzhenitsyn had actually belonged to the parish where Fr Vsevolod served.) The authorities circulated the interview widely, particularly for the benefit of the West. There are also extant letters of the “elder” in which he vehemently and haphazardly attacked those who criticised the shortcomings of the MP, for instance Fr Dimitri Dudko.

Of course, I do not wish to say that the pseudo-miracles are fabricated solely by the secret police. In order to create a legend around a

certain individual, it is necessary, above all else, for there to exist an unhealthy spiritual environment: a hunger for elders, for miracles, for saints. In other words, an inclination towards unhealthy mysticism, as Fr Seraphim (Alexiev) expresses it in his book 'Unhealthy and Healthy Mysticism.' An unhealthy spiritual environment alone, without external influences, spontaneously generates myths and legends. In the presence of such phenomena there will always be found someone who cleverly takes advantage of them.

Among today's official Orthodoxy, we observe the spread of a similar unhealthy spiritual life, unrestrained and uncorrected by the hierarchy. Sadly it is sometimes even encouraged. This, too, has to be considered in the case of Archbishop Luke. Of course, sufficient trustworthy information would be needed for one to evaluate every single witness account. However, on the internet you can see a vast number of videos in which certain people talk about miracles worked through the prayers of Archbishop Luke. I would say that, at first glance, many of these accounts are dubious. It is immediately very clear that we are talking about an entirely unhealthy spirituality. When a person really strongly wants to see something, he will see it. The logic behind superstition and prelest (spiritual deception) is impenetrable.

Again I will give an example from the story of Fr Schpillar and his mythical "elder." When "Fr Paul" gave his blessing for someone to have an operation, and it was successful, this was received as proof of his clairvoyance. But in 1980, the imaginary "Fr Paul" counselled Fr Schpillar to undergo eye surgery with the outcome that he lost his sight. Despite this, as his son testifies, Fr Schpillar undoubtedly and unwaveringly trusted in "Fr Paul" until the very end of his life.

There is one final important point concerning the glorification of Archbishop Luke which needs to be considered, even if only briefly. For a hierarch to be glorified as a saint, it is imperative for his Orthodox faith to be without reproach. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about Archbishop Luke. Now we are no longer on the uncertain territory of hard-to-verify testimonies. Archbishop Luke laid down his theological viewpoints in two of his works: "Spirit, Soul and Body" and "Religion and Science," which are still in print. In 2013, his book "Spirit, Soul and Body" was even translated into Bulgarian. Upon close examination we discover that this book promotes completely un-Orthodox ideas about human nature. The ideas of Archbishop Luke differ substantially from the teachings of the Holy Fathers about human nature - about the spirit, about the soul, about the body, and the relationship

between them. His analysis contains completely worldly and philosophical teachings inspired by the science of his time. These concepts and ideas are totally un-Christian and are not acceptable from a Christian point of view. The credibility with which he treats the testimonies of the miracles worked in the “holy town of Lourdes” is very disturbing. The small town of Lourdes, situated in France near the Spanish border, is a famous pilgrimage centre of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 19th century, in Lourdes, a fourteen-year-old girl called Bernadette Soubirous supposedly received numerous visions of the holy Mother of God. According to her testimony, during a period of several months, the Mother of God appeared to her eighteen times. In contrast we will recall that one of the greatest saints of the Church of Russia, the venerable Seraphim of Sarov, of whom the very Mother of God testifies “this one is of our kind,” throughout his lengthy ascetical life had twelve divine revelations. In Lourdes, there have been over seven thousand witness accounts of miraculous healing but even the Roman Catholic Church disregards almost all of them and accepts only sixty-nine as genuine. Nevertheless, this does not sway the faith that Archbishop Luke has in the miracles which occur in “the holy town of Lourdes.” Perhaps, in this regard, the Archbishop’s background filters through; he was, as he states in his autobiography, of Polish extraction and his father was a devout Roman Catholic. It is also quite disturbing how Archbishop Luke seems to trust the credibility of spiritual sciences (occult practices of various forms), now referred to as ‘pseudoscience,’ which in the late 19th and early 20th century were very fashionable. Archbishop Luke regards mainstream scientists who dabble in the spiritual sciences as having an indisputable authority. But all this is another large topic that would require a more in-depth study.



“GOD did not create us for wrath but for salvation (cf. 1 Thess. 5:9), so that we might enjoy His blessings; and we should therefore be thankful and grateful towards our Benefactor. But our failure to get to know His gifts has made us indolent, and indolence has made us forgetful, with the result that ignorance lords it over us.”

SAINT PETER OF DAMASCUS, + 743 A.D.

THE COMING MONTH

HAVING little space this month we are simply including the complete life of one saint, our **Venerable Father David the Dendrite of Thessalonica** (26th June / 9th July). Our Father of great renown, the earthly angel and heavenly man, was born and reared in the east and came to the illustrious and great city of Thessalonica. Renouncing the world and worldly things, he abandoned friends and relatives, temporal honour and glory, money, possessions, and every other passing joy and even his own life, according to the evangelical exhortation. Following the Master, he took up the Cross from his youth; for his heart was deeply pierced with divine love. He was tonsured and remained in the Monastery of the Holy Martyrs Theodore and Mercurius, which was known as Koukouliaton, and there he struggled in sacred silence in a manner surpassing the limits of human nature. He observed every virtue most diligently; above all, he kept the virtues of temperance and humility, knowing well that satiety of the stomach drives away spiritual vigilance and chastity, and that vain-glory totally obliterates every virtue. Because of this, like a wise man, he was diligent to acquire humility. Reading the Sacred Scriptures by day and by night, the venerable one marvelled at the virtues of the Saints, both those who were before the Law and those who were after the Law. He observed how God glorified them because they obeyed His commandments and were pleasing to Him as was meet. He made Abel wondrous by his sacrifices, Abraham by his faith, Joseph by his chastity, Job by his patience, He showed forth Moses as Lawgiver, and preserved Daniel and the Three Youths unharmed from the fire and lions. Reflecting upon the examples of these men, the marvellous David was diligent to emulate them with his whole heart and strength, so that, together with them, he might become co-heir of the Heavenly Kingdom. While reading the lives of the righteous ones who struggled after the saving Incarnation of the Saviour and who accomplished such marvellous struggles, he marvelled - especially at the life of Simeon of the Wondrous Mountain, and of the other Simeon, with Daniel and Alypius the Stylites, who spent their lives living in the open, without shelter, tormented by the winds, rains, and snows. As he read the lives of these men, he wept and came to such compunction that he decided to undergo a similar life of affliction for as long as he, the ever-memorable one, could, so that he might find rest with the Saints after death. One day, therefore, he became so fervent with zeal and his heart so filled with compunction, that he climbed up an almond tree that

was by the left side of the church. He remained there upon a branch of the tree where he made a small bench as well as he could, and there he struggled in ascetic labours with wondrous patience, tormented by the winds, the rains and the snows, burned by the searing heat of the sun in summer, and suffering many other afflictions. O the fortitude of this much-suffering martyr, that the ever-memorable one should undergo such hardship! The other stylites had some security, for their pillars were constructed and stood fast, and what is more, when they slept or had some other need, the pillars were immobile. But this adamantine man swayed always in the branches of the tree, and never had any repose, but was tormented by the rains and the winds and suffered greatly from the snows. In enduring all these things, the stout-hearted one did not let up in his discipline, neither did he become fainthearted in any way, neither was he overcome by tedium, nor did his angelic face become transformed or changed, but remained as comely as a rose. Indeed, in this thrice-blessed one was there fulfilled that prophetic saying: "The righteous man shall blossom like a palm tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied." For in his deeds he too blossomed forth like a palm tree, and rendered unto God an acceptable fruit sweeter and more beneficial than the almond or the date palm. For a tree gives forth corruptible blossoms and fruit for man's delight and enjoyment; but the righteous one gladdened our good God with the fruits of divine vision and a holy life, and he praised and glorified Him unceasingly. The venerable one had some disciples who were exceedingly pious and Christ-loving, and they laboured and toiled together with him in the monastic discipline. Many times they begged and entreated him to come down from the tree so that they could build him a cell he would like, in some quiet place, so that he could guide them and tend them as his sheep and bring them into the pastures of salvation. But he answered saying, "My brethren and children, I am a sinner and an unworthy man; but Christ the Master, the Good Shepherd Who laid down His life for His sheep, will protect you from the plots of the devil, and as He is supremely good, He will account you worthy of His Eternal Kingdom. But as for me, as the Lord my God Jesus Christ, the Son of God lives, I will not come down from this tree until three years are accomplished, and even then I will come down only by His command; for if it is not His will, I will never come down from here." When they saw that his mind could not be changed, they did not trouble him any longer in this matter. When the three years had passed, a holy angel appeared unto him saying, "David, the Lord has heard your supplication and grants unto you this favour

for which you have asked many times, that is, that you be humble-minded and modest, and that you fear Him and worship Him with proper reverence. Come down, therefore, from the tree and live in sacred silence in your cell, blessing God until you accomplish one other act of love; then shall you find comfort of soul and rest from bodily travail." During the whole time that the Angel spoke with him, the venerable one listened with fear and trembling. When he that appeared disappeared, the venerable one gave thanks unto God, saying, "Blessed is God who has had mercy on me." Then calling together his disciples, he revealed the vision and told them to prepare the cell, as the Master had commanded. Straightway they did as they were told and they informed the most holy Metropolitan Dorotheus also. The Metropolitan rejoiced to hear these tidings and took the more pious clerics with him. Going up to the venerable one, he kissed him and they brought him down from the tree with great reverence. After the Divine Liturgy, they placed him in his cell and celebrated this great feast. Thus they returned rejoicing and the venerable one remained in his cell struggling in sacred silence. Even as before, he perpetually and ceaselessly blessed the Lord Who had granted him such grace, that he put demons to flight, gave sight to the blind and healed every incurable disease by calling upon the name of Christ. Out of many signs which he did we mention only two or three as proof of the others; for the lion is known from his claws and the cloth from its hem. A certain youth had a demon, and one day he came to the cell of the venerable one. Standing, therefore, outside the door, he cried out saying, "Release me, O David, servant of the eternal God, for fire comes forth from thy cell and burns me." Then the venerable one stretched forth his hand from a small window and held the youth and said, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, commands you to go forth from His creature, O unclean spirit!" Saying this, he sealed the youth with the sign of the honourable Cross and immediately the demon went forth from the youth and he became well. On seeing such a marvel, all who were present glorified God Who glorifies those who glorify Him with God-pleasing works. Whoever had any illness would come unto him, and no sooner would the Saint lay his right hand upon the sick man when straightway malady would depart and be dispersed, even as darkness is dispersed by the light. Having performed innumerable miracles, he was glorified by men and was revered by all. After many years, Dorotheus, the Metropolitan of Thessalonica, reposed, and one other, Aristides by name, a man equally virtuous, took his place. At that time, great loss and much confusion was caused by the barbarians in

the whole of Thessaly. So, the eparch of Illyricum wrote to the Metropolitan, asking him to intercede with the Emperor, or to send him to elect an eparch for Thessalonica, because of the confusion caused by the barbarians; for at the time, there was no eparch in Thessalonica, but only a locum tenens who was under the eparch of Sirmium. When the most holy Aristides, the Metropolitan of Thessalonica, had read the letter of the eparch in the presence of the clergy and the nobility of the city, he told them to choose a capable and erudite man to send to the Emperor for this matter. When all, therefore, had gathered in the church, they cried out with one accord that the venerable David should be sent, for the most pious Emperor would reverence him as a virtuous and holy man, and thus would carry out their request. This was done by the dispensation of Divine Providence, that the prophecy of the angel might be fulfilled; for the angel told the venerable one to come down from the tree that he might perform one other act of love also, and then he would depart for the Lord. The bishop, then, took the most pious clergy and the people and went to the righteous one and told him of the matter and entreated him to go to the Emperor with the aforementioned request. At first, the venerable one excused himself, saying that he could not go because of old age. Afterwards, seeing that all constrained him to go, he agreed so that he might not appear disobedient to the bishop and to the Christ-loving people who were urging him. The venerable one then remembered the prophecy of the angel, and said these words to the Metropolitan: "May the Lord's will be done, holy master. Yet, be it known unto you that, through your prayers and with God as my helper, the Emperor will grant me whatever I request of him; but as for David, you will not see him alive again to speak with him. For on my return to you from the palace, when I am yet one-hundred and twenty-six stadia [12 or 13 miles] from my poor cell, I shall depart for my Master." Taking that the venerable one was saying this as an excuse, so that they would not force him to go, the Metropolitan admonished him saying: "Then imitate our Shepherd and Master Who gave Himself over unto death as a man and died for us, give your life for your people that you may receive thanksgiving from men and glory and boundless praise from Christ the Master, as an emulator of His Passion." Then the thrice-blessed one went forth from his cell and all venerated him; for his countenance was a marvellous sight; the locks of his hair fell down to his belt and his beard down to his feet; his venerable face was handsome and comely, just like Abraham's, and everyone who saw him marvelled. He took with him two of his disciples, Theodore and Demetrius; these men were pious and

virtuous, and were like David, not only in the comeliness of the soul, but also in that of the body. When they reached Byzantium, the report of the venerable one was heard throughout the whole city. At that time, the Emperor was the pious Justinian. Since the Emperor was absent when the Saint arrived, the Empress Theodora sent chamberlains and escorts to welcome him and she received him with much honour and reverence. On beholding his radiant and angelic face and his venerable white beard, she marvelled and venerated him with much humility, and asked for his prayers and his blessing. The Saint, therefore, prayed for the Emperor, the imperial city and every city. The pious Empress received him with such gladness and with such friendly hospitality that I am not able to describe fully the reverence which the ever-memorable one showed him; for she thought that she had received an angel of the Lord and not a man. When the Emperor returned, the august Empress told him of the venerable one, saying, "The supremely-good God has taken compassion on us, Master, and has sent His angel unto your majesty on this day from the city of Thessalonica; and in truth, it seemed to me that I saw Abraham." On the following day, when the whole Senate had gathered, the Emperor gave orders for the venerable one to be brought in. When the Saint entered, he placed live coal and incense in his hands and, together with his disciples, he censured the Emperor and the whole Senate without his hands being burned at all from the fire, even though he took more than an hour censuring, until he had censured all the people. All were astonished as they beheld this wonder. Rising from his throne, the Emperor received him gladly and with much reverence, and he, in turn, received the gifts of the Metropolitan of Thessalonica from the hands of the Saint. The pious and Christ-loving Emperor listened to the Saint's request and voted that the seat of the eparch be changed from Sirmium to Thessalonica. Not only did he fulfil the written requests of the Thessalonians, but with great willingness, he carried out the venerable one's other requests as well, and, in accordance with the custom, signed them in vermilion. With his own hand, he gave them to the venerable one and told him, "Pray for me, venerable Father." Afterwards, he dismissed him and sent him on his way with a great escort, even as it was meet. As soon as the venerable one had fulfilled his mission, he set sail to Thessalonica. But even as he had prophesied, he did not reach the city. When they were passing near a lighthouse he said these words to his disciples: "My children, the time of my end has come. See that you bury my remains in the monastery where I dwelt. Take care for your souls, that you find eternal rest."

Saying these and other edifying words, they arrived at the promontory which is called Emvolos, from where his monastery could be seen. He looked towards it and prayed, and after he had kissed his disciples, the thrice-blessed one surrendered his soul to God (+540 A.D.). When the venerable one reposed a strong wind was blowing; and though they had been sailing most swiftly, at that very moment, the boat stopped for a long time in spite of the wind (O the wonder!) and did not move at all. Furthermore, there came forth a wondrous fragrance as of indescribable incense, and voices were heard in the air melodiously chanting praises to the Lord. After a long time the voices stopped. Immediately the boat began to sail again, but it did not go to the harbour as usual; but rather it sped to the west side of the city, at the place where the impious had cast the holy relics of Saints Theodulus and Agathopodus. When the people heard of the venerable one's repose and arrival, the whole city came forth with the Metropolitan. Carrying his holy relics with much reverence, they came to the monastery, and they made him a coffin of wood in which they placed him and buried him with honour. Afterwards, in accordance with the imperial decree, they changed the seat of the eparch from Sirmium to Thessalonica. As for the venerable one, his memory was celebrated by all the people each year in the aforementioned monastery. After 150 years had passed, the abbot of the monastery was a certain virtuous man, Demetrius by name. He had much reverence for the venerable one. Moved by a desire to take a portion of the Saint's holy relics in order to have them for sanctification, he took men and had them begin digging at the grave. Immediately the slab broke into four pieces. Seeing that the Saint did not wish them to go on, the abbot abandoned his plan. A disciple of this abbot, a man named Sergius who likewise became abbot, and through his virtues, later Metropolitan of Thessalonica, revered the Saint greatly. Many times he besought him in prayer to allow him to take a small portion of his holy relics. When he was informed by God that the Saint agreed to it, he opened the tomb and there came forth a wondrous fragrance. Seeing that the Saint's relics were whole and unharmed he did not dare to take any part except for a few strands of hair from his head and beard. These were kept with care and are kissed on the Saint's feast by the Christ-loving peoples. The feast is celebrated annually on the 26th June with much joy, in praise of the venerable one, and to the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondent: “I have just finished reading the Venerable Bede’s Life of Cuthbert and Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Wilfred, both of which seem to be papal propaganda despite being written in late 600s - early 700s. Was England really still Orthodox at this point? Was the change in the date of Easter (to one based on a lunar cycle based on 19 years) approved by the Orthodox at a Nicaean synod, as Wilfred argued? There does seem to be quite a disagreeable focus on temporal over spiritual matters; land grants and money donations to various Bishops; and the justification of every papal decision simply by reference to Saint Peter as Prince of Apostles with the power to bind and unbind is less than impressive.”

Our reply: Re the lives of Sts Wilfred and Cuthbert. The former is, in fact, much concerned with authority and jurisdiction, but we have to remember that these things, although not of primary importance, do have their place. The Papacy at that time was of course Orthodox, they had not then adopted any heresies. The emphasis on the Prince of the Apostles and the position of the Pope, I suspect derived from two things, and we must be careful not to read back our own prejudices into those times: first the Pope was the Patriarch of the West, and so their devotion to him was perfectly natural, and secondly, whereas in the East there were four Patriarchs, in the West there was only one, and this did in time cause problems because his very singularity became a cause for the Westerners to become more and more Pope-centred. That was (relatively) fine, as long as the Pope remained Orthodox, but of course in time it made it much easier for the whole western world (with a few very minor exceptions) to follow him away from Orthodoxy. The Prince of the Apostles claim grew greater and greater, although Peter was never Bishop of Rome! In much the same way the innocent title Œcumenical Patriarch is now being emphasised more and more, to suggest he is a kind of Eastern Pope, and to draw all Orthodox along with him on his ecumenical path. Ask some people and they suggest that canonicity resides in being in communion with the Œcumenical Patriarch - a very novel and incorrect idea.



NEWS from the Richmond Diocese of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

VISIT OF METROPOLITAN DEMETRIUS OF AMERICA

ON Monday, 12th May, **Metropolitan Demetrius** arrived at Southampton with his attendant, **Nectarius Photopoulos**, and were met by **Deacon Ioan** and **Diaconissa Georgette Turcu**, who, seeing the rather sad state the Brotherhood was in at the time with illnesses, kindly undertook to transport our guests and take them to holy places in England. That same day they were taken to visit Winchester Cathedral, Shaftesbury Abbey and town, and Wherwell, before being brought late in the evening to Brookwood. The next day, they visited Minster-in-Thamet, where the sisters of the Anglican Convent there greeted them, and then to Saint Martin's Church in Canterbury, and the Abbey and the Cathedral there. **Dr Christopher Russell**, a member of our Church, met the pilgrims in Canterbury and helped show them round. They then went on to Rochester where they were joined by **Father Borislav** and **Presbytera Marina Popov** and later they enjoyed supper at their home in Chatham. On the Wednesday His Grace celebrated the Divine Liturgy at Saint Edward's Church here, assisted by Deacon Ioan, and with Priestmonk Sabbas in attendance. He served as a priest rather than as a Bishop, as we were short-staffed, but preached a sermon on the feast. Immediately (in Turcu terms!) after the Parish Breakfast, they set off for Ely, where in the R. C. church, they were able to venerate the hand of Saint Etheldreda, and they visited the Cathedral. They then headed north, and on the next morning visited Lindisfarne and Durham. They arrived back at Brookwood late that night, and at first light in the morning set off for Poole so as to catch the ferry to Cherbourg and then be able to drive to Greece (on the wrong side of the road). Metropolitan Demetrius kindly gave icon prints and a fragment of the sacred relics of St Clarus, the enlightener of Normandy, who actually originally came from Rochester. The monastery of Saint John of San Francisco in Cobleskill, N.Y., where the Metropolitan resides, has the skull and jawbone of the saint. It is hoped that, on his return from

Greece, Metropolitan Demetrius will visit us again and celebrate the Liturgy here on the Sunday of All Saints of Athos.

FUNERAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ON Sunday, 21st April / 4th May, the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, parishioner **Olena Yermolko** reposed at the **Worplesdon View Care Home**. Her loved ones contacted us immediately and **Priestmonk Sabbas** visited the home to read the prayers for the newly departed. He found her daughter, **Inna Onischenko** already there reading the Psalter for her repose. The funeral was held at Saint Edward's Church on Tuesday, 7th / 20th May, with Fr Sabbas and Deacon Ioan serving, and Olena was laid to rest near the family home in the **Shalford Cemetery** near Guildford. After the interment, the Onischenkos held a mercy meal at their home, and the family left offerings of flowers for the church at Brookwood. May Olena find rest with the Saints, and may her loved ones be comforted in their bereavement. Please pray for her and them.

TWO BURIALS AT SAINT EDWARD'S

IN the portion of our cemetery which we reserve for those who have been especially close to us but who were not Orthodox there have been two recent burials. On Monday, 12th May, Fr Sabbas's mother, **Hazel Eades** was laid to rest with her late husband there. She had died at the Greenhill House care home in Cheddar, Somerset, and a funeral service was held for her in the former R.C. Chapel on the North Side of Brookwood Cemetery, conducted by a minister of the United Reformed Church. Those who attended the service were then invited into our church to light candles in her memory, and then they were invited to a meal at the Cricketers on the Green public house in Pirbright, the village where the family had lived for many years previously.

And on Thursday, 15th May, **Robin Haigh** of Abbey Bridge Farmhouse, Chertsey, who had died on 25th April, was laid to rest in that same portion of the cemetery. The burial was a simple one with no religious content, and was attended by family, friends and members of the Brotherhood. For almost 35 years Robin and his wife **Mary** have invited us to use the quay alongside their house on the Abbey River for the Theophany Great Blessing of Waters, and provided our congregation with refreshments afterwards in the medieval barn that

stands on their property. They in fact sought us out to offer this kindness, because formerly we did the blessing on common land further along the river, and they noticed this and invited us to use their place. After Robin's interment, Mary and the family invited many friends to their home for a meal. Please pray that Robin and Hazel find mercy and that the bereaved be comforted.

VISITORS

ON 28th April, **His Grace Bishop Nektarije of London, Great Britain and Ireland**, the newly appointed hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church in this country, visited us accompanied by **Proto-presbyter Stavrophore Milun Kostic**, whom we have known for many years, and a number of other Serbian clergy and pilgrims. Their visit was unexpected but they prayed at the shrine of Saint Edward and then were offered hospitality in the exhibition room, and in turn they kindly left us a plentiful supply of provisions.

ON 9th May, **Jon Leech** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** brought a group of people to see the church and on the 10th **Kim Lowe** brought a second group.

THE MONOVSKI GARDENING GROUP

ON Saturday, 10th May, this group of volunteers, headed and organised by Plamen Monovski spent the greater part of the day working in the kitchen and flower gardens. Besides Plamen, they included Nicolas Socaciu, Noah Seebach, Mark Slater, Andrei Sinclair, David Turcu, Andreea Turcu, Flavia Turcu, Osyth Thompson, Dymphna Thompson, Alexandra Galbeaza and Anastasia Galbeaza. Moses Devenish also worked their independently, and Noah returned later to do another vigorous day's digging there. May God's blessing be upon them all for the help they afford us.



Practical Tip

NEVER ask practical advice of someone able to give it, unless you at least intend to follow it; and certainly don't ask advice of several guides, and then just accept the one that suits you - that will be self-determination and probably ruinous.