



## **St John's Church News No 81: June 2016**

**ЦЕРКОВЬ СВТ. ИОАННА ШАНХАЙСКОГО  
ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
Military Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 2AN**

His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias  
Most Rev. Metropolitan Hilarion, First Hierarch of the Church Outside Russia  
Very Rev. Mark, Archbishop of the British Isles and Ireland

**For this newsletter in electronic form:** [www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm](http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm)

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### **Расписание богослужений / Timetable of Services**

#### **Saturday 4 June**

5.30: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

#### **Sunday 5 June: Sunday of the Man Born Blind / Неделя о слепом**

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

#### **Wednesday 8 June**

5.30 pm: Vigil for the Ascension/ Всенощное бдение накануне праздника Вознесения Господня

#### **Thursday 9 June: Ascension Day / Вознесение Господне**

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

#### **Saturday 11 June**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

#### **Sunday 12 June: The Holy Fathers of the First Universal Council / Свв. отцов I - ого Вселенского Собора**

10.00: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

#### **Saturday 18 June**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

**Sunday 19 June: Pentecost – Whitsun – The Feast of the Holy Trinity / Пятидесятница – День Св. Троицы - Сошествие Св. Духа на апостолов**

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy. Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers / Часы и Божественная Литургия. Вечерня с коленопреклонными молитвами

**Saturday 25 June**

5.30: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

**Sunday 26 June: All Saints / Всех святых**

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

**Monday 27 June: Beginning of the Apostles' Fast / Начало Петрова поста**

**Patronal Feast: Saturday 2 July**

**Престольный праздник: Суббота 2 июля**

**Baptisms in May:**

7 May: Anastasia Mocanu

7 May: Sophia Reynolds

14 May: Florin Romanul

14 May: David Romanul

14 May: Marian Azamfirei

14 May: Elizabeth Andrews

28 May: Nicolas Procopenko

28 May: Bogdan Simionica

**CHURCH NEWS**

**Palm Sunday and Easter**

Palm Sunday services were attended by about 250 people and there were about 500 on Easter Night. Next year we will need two parking attendants for the Church car park. The Church will provide hi-viz jackets. Any volunteers, please inform Fr Andrew.

**Prospora and Holy Water**

Please remember to take your prospora home, especially on Easter Night. Eleven were left this year. We apologize for running out of holy water. 60 litres were taken on Easter Night, however Fr Andrew blessed another 120 litres during Bright Week, which should last us a couple of months. Please can you bring any empty, sterilized jars and bottles for holy water; we constantly run out, as people forget to bring their own.

**Sisterhood**

The ladies (and some men!) have decided to set up a formal sisterhood for the needs of the Church. It has been dedicated to St Helena. Thank you very much for your cleaning on Bright Wednesday and providing food for the lovely meal on Thomas Sunday.

### **Children's Choir**

We have decided not to launch the children's choir in May, but in September, This is because it would interfere with the Sunday School programme for 2015-16.

### **Boys' Building Club**

Following the interest in the girls' sewing club, Martina wanted, with Fr Andrew's blessing, to start a boys' club. The first activity was den-building on 15 May – Martina and Marian collected the wood for this. We are thinking of model-making as an activity for the winter months.

### **Norwich**

The builders started work on the premises for the new church on Monday 9 May. Building work will take up all of May and internal walls are being knocked down on 25 May, and we hope that all will go ahead now, without any further bureaucratic delays.

### **New Vestments**

On Monday 16 May, Fr Andrew went to the Ukraine and collected 8 new vestments, 4 green and 4 violet, for the altar servers, also buying over 100 books and 40 icons of St John for the Church shop.

### **Fr Patrick Ramsey**

Fr Patrick, who is from New Zealand, is for the moment serving with us on Sundays, but is hoping to return to Ireland to help our parishes there later. Please make him welcome during his stay with us.

### **Anniversary**

In July our senior reader, Jack Sardo, will celebrate his fortieth anniversary of being tonsured reader. Congratulations are in order!

### **Spasimir**

In May one of our altar-servers, Spasimir Ivanov, returned to Bulgaria to take the final examinations for his five-year long studies at the Theological Faculty in Sofia. Please remember him in your prayers.

### **An Award**

It is now 35 years since Fr Andrew was tonsured reader in January 1981 and on 16 April Fr Andrew was awarded a second jewelled cross, four years after the first one.

## **100-ЛЕТНИЙ ИГУМЕН ИЕРЕМИЯ НАЗВАЛ УСЛОВИЯ ДЛЯ УСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ МИРА В УКРАИНЕ**

*Афон, 11 апреля 2016 г.*

Жить по Евангелию, молиться Богу и помогать людям, не разделяя окружающих на своих и чужих, – вот что поможет скорейшему установлению мира на украинской земле. Об этом заявил 100-летний игумен Русского на Афоне Пантелеимонова

монастыря схиархимандрит Иеремия (Алехин) в беседе с архиепископом Запорожским и Мелитопольским Лукой, сообщает [портал «Православная жизнь»](#) со ссылкой на [Hram.zp.ua](#).



«Паломники из Украины часто спрашивают нас: «За что нам это и когда наступит мир?» Ответ очень прост: формальное отношение к вере, постоянная критика и клевета на Церковь, уклонение некоторых в раскол, поклонение благополучию, деньгам и развлечениям – вот причины нестроений в Украине, которые попустил совершиться Бог.

Часто от нас ждут пророчества, но пророчество дается для покаяния, нашего возвращения к Богу, а не организации нашей личной жизни или самоуспокоенности. Человек должен извлекать духовную пользу из слов, которые он услышал от афонитов, а для этого ему необходимо обладать ясным умом, чтобы интерпретировать события, когда они произойдут, то есть в состоянии судить о них естественно и в Духе. Это значит, что способность к рассуждению дают трезвение, молитва и любовь, а не погружение в информационный поток.

Для скорейшего установления мира на украинской земле необходимо жить благочестиво и кротко, на деле быть исполнителями Христовых заповедей. Мы должны обратить усердное внимание на свою собственную духовную жизнь, стараться жить по Евангелию. Но это невозможно без искреннего покаяния Богу, регулярного посещения богослужений в храме и причастия святых Христовых Таин, молитвы к Богу и помощи людям, любви к Церкви, уважения окружающих, при этом не разделять их на «своих и чужих, патриотов или сепаратистов, русскоговорящих или украиноговорящих», ведь мы все объединены Телом и Кровью Христа.

Откройте Евангелие и посмотрите на себя в свете слова Божия, вот что поможет нам избежать риска впасть в заблуждение и прелесть. Нам кажется, что Бог забыл про нас, но Он любит нас и очень хочет нашего спасения, но даже Он не может нас спасти без нашего собственного на то произволения и деятельного участия. Имея греховное и неисправимое состояние, мы сопротивляемся своему спасению, поэтому Господь вынужден применять к нам горькие и болезненные лекарства», – сказал схиархимандрит Иеремия.

В ответ на просьбу владыки Луки о молитвах об Украине, старец отметил, что в Пантелеимоновом монастыре постоянно возносится молитва об Украинской Православной Церкви и Блаженнейшем Митрополите Онуфрии с паствой, за независимую Украину и украинский народ, который страдает от военных действий и церковного раскола. Говоря о Предстоятеле УПЦ схиархимандрит Иеремия отметил, что «Бог наделил его многими духовными качествами, которых не хватает нам».

Старец пожелал украинцам стоять в истине, не смешивать грешное с праведным – политику с верой, руководствоваться только Евангелием и учением Церкви, держаться своего Предстоятеля – Блаженнейшего Митрополита Онуфрия, любить свою родину и ближних Христовой любовью – жертвенной.

«Уверен, Божья Матерь всегда будет покровительницей и заступницей всем православным христианам, в том числе, на благословенной земле Украины», – заключил схиархимандрит Иеремия (Алехин).

Встреча архиепископа Луки с игуменом Пантелеимонова монастыря состоялась в рамках автопробега Запорожье-Афон, инициированного Запорожской епархией в связи с общецерковным празднованием 1000-летия присутствия русского монашества на Святой Горе. Следуя по маршруту, паломники посетили Болгарию, Грецию, Румынию. На Афоне запорожцы также посещали монастырь Ксенофонт.

*11 апреля 2016 г.*

## **"ZHENYA'S CROSS HAS BEEN IN SYRIA, IN DONBASS, IN CRIMEA ..."**

### **A conversation with Lyubov Vasilievna Rodionova—the mother of soldier-martyr Evgeny Rodionov**

*Nikita Filatov, Lyubov Vasilievna Rodionova*

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*Twenty years ago a martyr's death for the faith claimed a soldier of the Russian border guards, Evgeny Rodionov: he was killed on May 23, 1996 by militants near the village of Bamut in Chechnya for refusing to remove his cross and convert to Islam. And before that he had endured a long captivity and cruel tortures ...*

*On the anniversary of the murder of Evgeny the Warrior, remembering him and his mother's search for her son, we spoke with her about responsibility, the indifference of the local officials, military honor, and remembrances of him.*

—Lyubov Vasilievna, the heroic death of your son has united hundreds of thousands of people from around the world ...

—Yes, and quite strangely, you will agree ... Unless someone was expecting it? In the NATO army a service was composed and twice a year they commemorate him.<sup>[1]</sup> How did this spread? I myself have had nothing to do with it. My spiritual father from St. John the Theologian monastery told me it's all in the will of God. If this was all just made up then the memory of Zhenya<sup>[2]</sup> would have died quickly. And now for twenty years I am amazed at how it is happening. On his anniversary a thousand people came. They weren't ordered to come. Rostov, Ukraine, Kiev ... A Liturgy was served at Zhenya's grave. The people confessed and communed.



—Tell us please, how was your son as a child?

—Actually he was just a simple guy! There was only one unusual thing about him—he was never like an open book ... He was an observer. He never initiated contact himself, but rather would stand back and examine a person. Only then, when he was short about him would he make a step forward.

He was very responsible. We were divorced, but Zhenya knew it wasn't my fault. He was such a support in my life, that I never needed anyone else. He was a real man from seven years old. He took all the responsibility upon himself. I can't even say that I raised him—life itself raised him—his environment. It was his first good teacher. He also had two wonderful grandmothers, both named Maria. He loved them very much. It's them who lead him to God.

—His grandmothers spoke with him about God?

—His grandmothers, not me. And now I feel guilty about it. They baptized him when he was eleven. He came home with a cross on a string, and then he crossed himself. He took up casting and molding, making coins, figurines, and crosses.



—How did you feel when you received the telegram that he had gone AWOL?

—My world collapsed. My world collapsed because I immediately knew that it was impossible. Some disaster had occurred. Zhenya's friends, our neighbors—no one believed it, that it was even possible. If I hadn't gone to look for him, I don't know how things would have turned out. Probably he would lie in the ground with the stigma of a "deserter."

—As I was preparing for the interview, I noticed these words: "Betrayed as they were by politicians and surrounded as they were by the mockery of the glamorous press, the First Chechen campaign was much more arduous for the soldiers than for those of the Great Patriotic War."

—It's true. Here is a totally different story. Here they slurped filth and blood, there they fattened themselves. In the film of C. Govorukhin, a very good man, "The Damned and Forgotten," everything is shown very honestly. Here they suffered, and there the dogs are licking caviar sandwiches. Here was a crazy feast during a plague. Some of the guys were in a totally different position. There was a very clear division.

—Besides mothers, family members and friends, no one especially thought about them ...

—No one. The whole of the press was against them. Everyone was against them. They were barefoot and undressed. They didn't have normal weapons. We weren't prepared for any war. Especially terrible is that everyone was against them. Only the lazy didn't spurn them. It was so offensive and hurtful. It forced me to break my oath, given to those bandits, and to speak the whole truth, because it was impossible to endure it. I knew what was happening there.

—Before we talk about your son's podvig, I would like to remember your motherly podvig ...

—Is it really a **podvig**? My dears, I didn't carry out any podvig. I fulfilled my motherly duty, and that's it—no need to turn me into a hero.

—But Lyubov Vasilievna, for the sake of this duty you walked into Chechnya through the minefields ...

—And what mother wouldn't? Show me the mother who wouldn't go there!

—A rebel broke your spine ...

—That's true. Now complications have arisen over the years, and they also smashed my head. But is that what we're speaking of? The matter is something else. **Hope** carried me. I hoped, and I walked through the minefields when we had to exhume my son. I already had nothing to lose; it was all the same to me.

—And you are still faced with the indifference of the local officials ...

—It was terrible and now it's the same. I will tell you just as a fact: none of the officials all these years have been to Zhenya's grave. Now Dima Sablin<sup>[3]</sup> comes, the "Brothers in Arms" come, the border guards, internal troops and paratroopers, and yet from the local authorities no one ever, although Zhenya is an honorary citizen of the Podolsk region, and a cavalier of the Order of Bravery.

But probably amongst the politicians there are good people. But for some reason I have no luck with them. I've had more luck with the military, but not with the officials.

—The military is different?

—Yes, they are different. They've looked death in the face. They understand it. There was a time when there were many not very good people among them, but all the same they were in the minority. A military man serves. A public official doesn't serve, but works, for himself. It's a sad story. It's unjust ... Some Special Forces guys came here and said: "And what about the local authorities?!" I told them: "Guys, we can't make them come here."

If a person has love and compassion and the desire to help, to support, he will share it. And if not, he's an unlucky and unhappy person. Mother's day, birthday ... I never receive even a single flower. And they are still trying to blame me: it's not what is said, but what isn't said.

—There are many more people who do understand everything.

—Yes, there are more. I've met such priests over the years!—Fr. Dimitry Smirnov, Fr. Vladislav Provotorov. I go to the church at Pavlovskaya Sloboda. We have an inextinguishable candle always standing there. We have a list for the Maikop Brigade, Sixth Company, "Kursk." That's its own story. Paratroopers from Bear Lake come on the day of the death of the Pskov Company, in full form. They loudly call out the names of everyone who was killed. We serve a Panikhida. It sends shivers down my spine. I go there because there is a military spirit there.

I really love Fr. Michael Vasiliev because he, like me, has jumped with a parachute.

I have unending respect for soldiers. Regardless of where they would like to live, they go there where the Motherland sends them. Therefore I really respect them. They are people of my blood.

—Speaking of the local officials, you washed the floors in the Khankala hospital ...

—No, no no, it wasn't a hospital. It was a hotel.

—A hotel?

—The General's hotel in Khankala. Generals Troshev and Shamanov lived there. I know them all, and they know me. Lebed lived there, with whom I had a clash. It's a hotel just for the generals' staff.

—And you had to do this to earn money to continue your search for your son?

—Yes. With that money I could then drive and not walk. When I arrived I didn't have a single kopek. Nine months ... Is that how long I needed to take money with me, to live for such a long time?! Yes, I worked.





—Do you remember your meeting with the insurgent who told you where the body of your son was?

—It wasn't so easy. To travel to Bamut I had to go see Ruslan Khaikhoroev seventeen times.

—Is he your son's murderer?

—Yes, to arrange the removal my son's body, and whatever other conditions we had to meet. We fulfilled a whole heap of conditions. They released many people from prison. Seventeen times to this dealing I traveled alone, and once Vyacheslav Pelepenko was with me. He was there on the night that we exhumed his body.

—And you yourself began to dig up the bodies of the dead?

—Yes. We met all of his conditions, but all the same to retrieve the bodies we had to act as if we were stealing them. He kept placing different conditions on us. It was already the twenty-third of October and leaves were falling. The next year his grave would have been leveled-out already, and it would have been impossible to find it. They dug them in June.

—Did the rebel himself tell you that your son had been killed?

—Yes, it was no secret. It was said in the presence of representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It already wasn't a secret. The locals told me: "Don't take the men. Let it be a grave." So, it wasn't a secret.

When we gave up [Chechnya](#) for three years there was complete anarchy. Everything was in disarray and complete chaos. And of course, everyone was armed.

—What did this insurgent tell you about what kinds of trials your children endured? I say specifically "children" because you have really become a mother for many soldiers.

—Indeed, they are my children, because I looked for them and I found them. There are four cypresses standing at Zhenya's grave—I mean because there were four of them. I never separate them from each other. They are all mine. It just so happened that only Zhenya was wearing a cross, and they had medallions. But they were all baptized in their blood. There was even the phrase "Evgeny Rodionov and those slain with him." By the way, in Kharkov there was a church built in honor of the podvig of Evgeny Rodionov and those killed with him.

The rebel said that they didn't want to obey. He said: "They didn't want to become our brethren. We either break them or we kill them."



—They ordered him to remove his cross?

—Of course. Then they were interrogated by the FSB. They were all ordered to remove their crosses. Now they talk about [ISIS](#). Then, in 1995, ISIS was already in the Caucasus. Zhenya is a victim of ISIS. They beat them and ran away to Syria.

—In all you made about sixty mission trips to the “hot spots,” taking food, warm clothes for the soldiers ...

—How were they mission trips?! They were trips with gifts of kindness. We all gathered them. I only took them there. I was just trying to be useful. God gave us such opportunities. It was such a joy, such happiness. You’re not barren; you can do something kind for people. In every one of those soldiers I saw the characteristics of my son. So many were involved in this work then, including the churches of Fr. Dimitry Smirnov and of Fr. Alexander Shargunov, and soldiers, and retirees.

For a while Fr. Alexander Shargunov kept Zhenya’s cross. Then I took it because people can to arrive from the war and wanted to venerate it. In the church there are rules. They bring it out only on Sundays, as a relic. I felt it was not quite correct because people were coming from the front, and they needed to see it now. His cross has been in Syria, Donbass, in Crimea, in hospitals.

—You lived with different families in Chechnya, spoke with simple Chechens, with civilians ...

—They are different. If I walked to some devastated village, they would throw sticks at me and belittle me, and they themselves were crying. Their people were also killed. And if the village wasn’t destroyed then they understood me and would give me a cup of tea and a piece of bread. It was through ordinary people that I went to see the ringleader of the rebels. One woman said to me: “We’re not all bad, and we’re not all good.” The elders, oddly enough, treated me very respectfully, and sat me behind the table, which in the Caucasus is a high honor. They saw in me a mother, and maybe they were taught by 1944.

—What do you think when you see boys and girls who have their own problems? What advice do you give when you meet with them?

—I speak with many young people. I want only one thing: that with every step we would bear responsibility. Don't think about yourself, but think about your mother. Your mother gave birth to you and raised you. What turns out well for the child lies with the mother. We should be responsible for all of our actions, first and foremost.

*[Nikita Filatov](#) spoke with Lyubov Vasilevna Rodionova  
Translated by [Jesse Dominick](#)*

*[Pravoslavie.ru](#)*

*23 / 05 / 2016*

[1] In May 2011, Evgeny Rodionov was included as “New Martyr Evgeny the Warrior” in a military Panikida, recommended by a United States Orthodox army chaplain for the commemoration of fallen soldiers on the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner, and Demetrius Saturday.

[2] An affectionate, diminutive form of the name “Evgeny.”

[3] A Russian politician and public figure, and the first deputy chairman of the All-Russian public organization for veterans “Brothers in Arms.”

## **THE “MODEL OF MEEKNESS”, AND SLAPPING ARIUS Orthodox Pastors on Zeal for God**

*[Anna Erakhtina](#)*

*When contemplating how they should oppose enemies of the Church, Orthodox Christians often recall St. Nicholas, who slapped Arius in the face. Several Russian Orthodox clergymen talk with us about the saint's “intolerant” deed.*

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St. Nicholas slaps Arius on the face. Fragment of an icon, 17th c.

“Arius was stricken to the heart by thy learned voice.”

—Let's begin with the question as to the reality of this event. First of all, was St. Nicholas present at the First Ecumenical Council?

We still have a list of names of those who participated in the First Ecumenical Council. St. Nicholas is not among them. Nevertheless, as researchers themselves acknowledge, these lists are far from complete[1]. There is no unanimous opinion even about the number of fathers. Some consider that there were 270, others 318 according to the number of Abraham's slaves who came after him to free Lot. Taking into consideration that some left

and others came before the end of the council, anything is possible. Even some of the most significant bishops are not in the list, never mind the modest bishop of Myra and Lycia, which could have disappeared from the list.

But they will tell you that according to his Life, St. Nicholas had debates with Arius. That means that these debates should have been recorded in the protocols. I have to disappoint the reader—we do not have the protocols from the First Ecumenical Council. It is unlikely that they were even recorded—otherwise various Orthodox apologists would have cited them, such as St. Athanasius of Alexandria and others. Only some documents have miraculously been handed down to our time: A speech by Emperor Constantine, the Nicean Creed, and the Rules of the council. If other things have not survived then even less so would have survived any record of St. Nicholas's debates with Arius.

There is witness of St. Nicholas's arrival at the Council in early Lives, including the Life written by Archimandrite Michael. And although this relates to the year 800, its compiler was most likely a compiler of ancient stories about St. Nicholas rather than an independent author. In the ancient hymns dedicated to the saint there is information on how St. Nicholas debated with Arius and won. Let's take for example the ancient beatitudes dated to the early eighth century:

Arius was stricken to the heart  
by thy learned voice  
and Eunomius was caught  
in thy theological nets.  
The unoriginate Trinity—  
Father, Word  
and Spirit One in essence—  
thou didst thoroughly preach  
and by this condemned  
to profound silence  
those who equate the Creator  
with the creation.

The origin of this troparion is clear: it is the 159th epistle of St. Basil the Great. "For the Father is holy by nature and the Son is holy by nature, and we accept neither those who divide and separate the divine and blessed Trinity, nor those who lightly consider the Son created."<sup>[2]</sup> The hymn's testimony is also supported by more prosaic sources. We cite for example the *economia* of [St. Andrew of Crete](#): "With the sword of inspired faith you felled at the root the separation of Arius together with Sabelius's comingling."<sup>[3]</sup> We find a similar thought in the Life by Archimandrite Michael: "He cast down the defiled empty talk of the godless Arians and Sabelians."<sup>[4]</sup>

Neither in the ancient hymns nor in the ancient Lives is there anything written about St. Nicholas physically slapping Arius; however it is more than sufficiently stated that he did this morally and verbally. There are examples from the *Octoechos*—the canons written by St. Joseph the hymnographer (+880) in honor of St. Nicholas. In the rest of the six canons of the *Octoechos* we hear a magnificent sermon about St. Nicholas's struggle against Arius and Arianism:

Thou wast a sharp spiritual sword, O wise one, cutting down the deceitful tares of the heretics and making straight the saving paths of the virtues, O Father Nicholas (canon, 3rd tone, ode 3, troparion 1).

With thy divine eloquence, O Nicholas, thou didst visibly stop the lawless open mouths and saved many from Arius's destruction... (canon 4th tone, ode 8, trop. 1).

By God's power, O most blessed one, thou didst trample down the heretic forces, and save thy flock from their deceit, O Nicholas (canon 6th tone, ode 7, trop. 1).

[And others.]

Based on these hymns in the post-Byzantine period, the concept that St. Nicholas struck Arius not verbally but physically was formed. But if we think about it, then what difference is there between a verbal or physical slap in the face? The heretic who rends Christ's robes and

destroys the Church of God is basically worthy of both. There are also cases in which “God is betrayed by our silence,” and as the wise saying goes, “Do not be silent when something needs to be said.” The word “tolerance” in medical terminology means, insensitivity to pain. Woe to us if our personal spiritual organism remains insensitive to the pain that heresy brings to the Church. Let us remember that the Arians are the spiritual fathers of modern Jehovah’s Witnesses, who consider the Son of God to be a creature, something along the lines of [Archangel Michael](#). And if St. Nicholas struck down the false teacher, he performed his pastoral duty—to lay down his life for his flock and preach the truth.

“We should definitely have mercy, but there should also be the whip of faith and spirit”

—St. Nicholas shows us a great example of resolving life situations—choosing how we act in accordance with our Orthodox conscience. We all know that in seeking options we almost always discover a real and deceitful ambiguity. On the one hand there is trueness of faith and spirit, and on the other hand there is man-pleasing, and to some extent, demon-pleasing. A whole series of good wishes, good prospects, and doubts all line up together... What should we do?

We have to act according to our Orthodox conscience. However, our conscience is by no means an omnivorous and unprincipled “freedom of conscience”. Conscience is con-science, cooperation with science, or knowledge. For us, the Orthodox, it is co-Gospel, which means co-Christ. The Gospel tells us how the Lord Jesus Christ forgives the obviously sinful woman, but just the same He whips the moneychangers out of the Temple without any compromise or tolerance. It is the same with St. Nicholas, who with love helps the Muslim in his personal tragedy, but shows steadfastness and strength in his defense of the Orthodox faith. He does this even now. We recall the incident of [Zoya’s standing](#) in 1956.

Yes, we should definitely have mercy, but we must also have the whip of faith and spirit. The great Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin wrote a whole book about this entitled, *On opposing evil with force*. St. Philaret of Moscow in his homily on the nineteenth week after Pentecost commands us, “Disdain God’s enemies, conquer the Fatherland’s enemies, and love your enemies.” Orthodox love encompasses everyone and everything, but it is by no means spineless. Through the prayers and deeds of St. Nicholas and all the saints it teaches us to hate sin and not the sinner, to have tolerance for the heterodox but not for heterodoxy, not to confuse politics with theology, not to bind falsehood with truth. This touches all levels of our Church’s existence and each one of us. This is the commandment that St. Nicholas has given us, and in these antichristian times it is more important than ever.

“We have to have the purity of life and faith of the saints in order to have their boldness.”

—In the Life of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra and Lycia there is one episode that we would now call, “ambiguous”: At the First Ecumenical Council St. Nicholas slapped the mad Arius, who with the poison of his brazen and blasphemous speech poisoned the souls of the faithful. By the way, this slap in the face of “mad” Arius met no sympathy or support from the majority of those present at the Council of Bishops; and, as we know, the saint was even dismissed from the Council and put in prison under guard. But soon at a special divine revelation he was freed and declared innocent.

I think that it is all a matter of the saint’s seeing the extraordinary danger coming from the mad Arius’s speech; and Archbishop Nicholas’s deed came out of his extreme compassion for those he wanted to protect from the heretical poison that might have destroyed the labors of many generations of preachers in the Church, poisoning not just the barrel but a whole sea of blessed honey.<sup>[5]</sup> We know, incidentally, that that is precisely what later happened, and nearly the entire East was infected with the Arian heresy for many decades. So, in order to evaluate St. Nicholas’s act we have to consider the magnitude of his spirit, the magnitude and significance of his very personality, and then also the magnitude of spiritual danger coming from the lips of the heresiarch Arius.

But what can we glean from this story? Today we also see much iniquity and many attacks against the true faith and Church. How can we stand up against this swelling flood of evil? Can we stop evil only with prayer and faith, or also with deeds, even deeds involving force?

Of course, life is so complex and multi-faceted that it is simply impossible to write out all our acts, and even if they were all written out we would still not act precisely according to the notes but according to the circumstances and, mainly, according to our soul's inclination. This seems to be the key concept: our soul's inclination should be, without a doubt, Orthodox; and this means not only strictly following all the rules and regulations, but also our communion with the Spirit of Christ, and our unity with Him; because it is the Holy Spirit that helps us make the right and often spontaneous decision that they may simply be no time to take. It is unlikely that St. Nicholas thought for even a minute before slapping Arius that he would in fact slap him! But apparently there was a moment when the speech of the mad heretic surpassed, if we might put it this way, all patience by its degree of error and went beyond the limits, off the scales, and became blasphemous and audacious to the highest degree. And then the saint out of the zeal nagging at him struck Arius. This was most likely a spontaneous act, but not an accidental one, of course. Only a man with burning faith, enlightened with grace and gifted with sharp spiritual vision, would be capable of this.

In general, such an example may be rare but it is by no means unique. We know of cases when the Lord cast the moneychangers out of the temple because they turned the temple of God into a "den of thieves". And the apostle Peter, as we recall, gave a couple who "lied against the Holy Spirit" over to death. And [St. John Chrysostom](#) says somewhere that if someone blasphemes the name of the Lord in your presence you should sanctify your hand with a blow. That is, in any case, standing up for God's truth does not exclude anything that is not passive, pacifistic behavior. However... One probably has to have the purity of life and faith of the saints in order to have their boldness. So, before you "sanctify your hand with blows" it would be good to at least for a moment to look at yourself in all seriousness and honesty and answer the question: Do I have anything myself that might merit a "pious" punch in the mouth?

It seems to me that the problem lies also in the fact that in our times, there has been an increase in radical tendencies in all different spheres and there is a temptation to lean towards "Orthodox-crusader" radicalism. Incidentally, this already exists, but it seems to me that this is an alien spirit... at times going beyond the boundaries of Christianity. After all, the Lord cast out the moneychangers from the temple only once; He didn't conduct regular raids, and about St. Nicholas we only know of one such extreme episode, quite out of the ordinary, let's say. That is, the norm itself should be something else: a holy and good life—sincere, amiable, and filled with compassion for people, with the resolve to stand up against sin. This should be the norm; but if demonstration of force evolves into a regular method, then Orthodoxy itself is discredited.

If we talk about methods of standing up for our faith, then the more acute problems do not consist in there not being any Orthodox Christians without "teeth", ready to fight for the truth unto the spilling of their own and others' blood, but in the fact that we, the Orthodox, to some extent do not know how to manifest the amazing beauty and spiritual height of Orthodoxy, which would be so attractive and convincing that people looking at us would change their whole lives. And if we look attentively at the life of St. Nicholas we will see that it is for this that everyone loves him and venerates him—because he is so close and compassionate to every soul, and ready to help at every call. This is what we should learn from him.

"Communication in the spirit of meekness and love can more readily bring a person to repentance than criticism and reproach."

—Zeal for God is very good and even necessary. But this zeal should be directed first of all at ourselves. Zeal for God's righteousness should move a person, first of all, to uproot the sins in himself. When sanctity and love of God make us struggle with passions and vices, that is wonderful.

Nevertheless, in our times so rich in spiritual illnesses, this zeal often leads a person to fight not with his own flesh and lusts but with other peoples' sins. Such a person might pull out his sword of rebuke and start slashing everything right and left without noticing the beam in his own eye. And this temptation particularly flourishes in those people who as if believe in God

but don't go to church. We also find it of course in people to do go to church but to a lesser degree, because the latter often hear the teaching about not judging.

To what extent can we allow ourselves to criticize and reproach other people? If we are talking about open blasphemy, sacrilege, and such things as this, then of course we have to reign in and stop the blasphemer. Sometimes this is not possible to do. Then we have to follow the advice of the apostle Paul: *A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject* (Titus 3:10).

In the holy fathers we see that for all their perfection and great zeal they always tried to treat with meekness those who sin out of weakness. However, the holy fathers would at times be very tough with those who had evil intentions, who intentionally opposed God, and were obstinate in their wickedness. We all know about St. Nicholas's slap in Arius's face. Many historians argue that this never happened, but I think that it could really have happened.

I will cite several examples from the Life of only one saint—holy hierarch Epiphanius of Cyprus. At the prayers of St. Epiphanius a wizard went numb, and at the same saint's word the impious deacon Karin died. In order to tame the greed and wrath of a Jerusalem bishop, St. Epiphanius breathed on him and he went blind. Once some con artists wanted to ask the saint for his cloak, and one of them pretended to be dead. Epiphanius covered him with his cloak and read the prayers for the dead, and the con artists in fact died. After St. Epiphanius's death, one curious boatman wanted to uncover his body, and the dead hierarch kicked him so hard that he flew several meters off, fell down, and died. Nevertheless, all these deeds and others like them that Epiphanius and other saints did were done exclusively for to bring the impious to their senses. Those sinners who came to repentance were later healed and even came back to life. And we should not be guided into action by what these God-bearing fathers, who were enlightened from above, dared to do. After all, even in the Lives of the holy fathers there are very few such acts.

We have to remember that communication in the spirit of meekness and love can more readily bring a person to repentance than can criticism and reproach. Let's remember how St. Macarius the Great with a few kind words converted the idolatrous priest. Let this be our constant example. And in especial cases where a word of love has no effect, before using any other words we have to teach ourselves to raise our thoughts to God and ask Him to give us wisdom as to how to act and what to say.

“We must not timidly keep silent if the Truth is being trampled. Especially on the internet.”  
—St. Nicholas the Wonderworker is a saint in whom is combined amazing mercy for his neighbor and fervent faithfulness to God. And faithfulness to God is not simply the following of moral rules but also pure confession of faith; it is the readiness to actively stand up for the faith and stand against falsehood.

From the saint's Life we know that according to modern standards he acted with total intolerance: He uprooted idolatry in his diocese, destroyed pagan temples, in part he ordered the destruction of a temple dedicated to Artemis, which was probably considered an architectural, and for the pagans, a religious and cultural treasure. We recall that this was a breaking point—the turn of the third to fourth centuries when paganism was still the significant majority religion but no longer satisfied people's souls, and Christianity was attracting more and people. Thus, idols were binding people's souls to the old ways, and therefore this external uprooting was important also in the spiritual sense, because when there is no external reminder there is also no inner motivation to return to paganism. That is, St. Nicholas's decisive measures were dictated by his zeal for the true faith and in fact his mercy for human souls. So his zeal for the faith and mercy for his neighbor manifested themselves, strange as it seems, in his tough stance against Arius's false teaching. We recall that Arianism was the first large-scale heresy, which threatened the very existence of Christianity. Arianism destroyed faith in the Trinity One in Essence. Arianism drew in many bishops, priests, and tempted large numbers of laypeople. There had been nothing like this before Arianism. The slap in the face was a stern warning to Arius; St. Nicholas was as if saying, “Come to your senses. What are you doing? You have stretched out your hands to

steal what is the most sacred!” St. Nicholas acted in the same way as the Lord when He wants to deter people from something wicked; after all, the Lord sends punishments of fate in order to bring a person to his sense and lead him away from something bad.

The tradition about St. Nicholas’s slap is described in his Life by St. Dimitry of Rostov, who collected testimony from ancient sources. Furthermore, this tradition existed in the Nicean Church, described by the famous holy lands traveller and religious writer A. N. Muraviev; even Muslim Turks in Nicea showed him St. Nicholas’s prison. The saint was imprisoned for slapping Arius. This tradition is supported also by the iconography of St. Nicholas on which the Lord presents a Holy Gospel to the saint, and the Mother of God an omophorion. That was the vision that the bishops of the First Ecumenical Council saw—the Lord and the Mother of God restored St. Nicholas his episcopal rank. Of course, we are not of the same spiritual level as St. Nicholas, and that means we cannot imitate his zeal for the true faith to the full extent. We just don’t have the same boldness before God. Nevertheless, the saint gives us all an example of how we should relate to false teachings. If we hear in some auditorium that the truth is being mocked, that someone is attacking Orthodoxy, we should not be timidly silent and ashamed to express our objection in a dignified manner. It is particularly important to do this on the internet, in all our contacts and other internet resources. It is important for us to have inner faithfulness to God, which will help us in a decisive moment to confess the faith and not concur with a lie. What need is there for us to physically touch someone if in our age of technology we can capably do our work with words. The Lord Jesus Christ said—and these words apply to every true Christian—*I will give you wisdom that no man can gainsay or resist* (Lk. 21:15). That is, we mustn’t fear but confess the truth within all possible frameworks available to us. The Lord will definitely help us; but of course under the condition that we ourselves are with Christ.

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[1] Archpriest Vladislav Tsy-pin, “The First Ecumenical Council”, *Orthodox Encyclopedia*, 1:571-580

[2] Basilius Caesariensis, Epistula, 159.2.30. See *Saint Basile. Lettres*, / ed. Y. Courtonne, vol. 2 .Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1961. P. 230.

[3] Andreas Cretensis, *Encomium in sanctum Nicolaum*, PG 97 Col 1200.

[4] Anrich p. 126.

[5] This is a reference to the Russian saying, “A spoonful of pitch ruins a barrel of honey.