

“Did You Get a Blessing From the *Panagia*?”*

A Christian’s zeal must be kept in check
by obedience to and guidance from one’s spiritual Father
and must never lead him into conflict with his Bishop



ONCE, Archbishop Gury of Novgorod and *Locum Tenens* of the Archdiocese of Kaluga, to whose jurisdiction the Optina monastery belonged, gave his blessing for the restoration (cleaning, repairing, and touchup) of the wonder-working Icon of the *Panagia* of Tikhvin, which, according to an ancient tradition, is the work of St. Luke the Evangelist and which is deeply revered by all Russians.

This activity was regarded by some as a “desecration” and caused a serious scandal; one person, indeed, who was “somewhat more zealous and hot-blooded” than the rest did not allow himself to let this event pass unnoticed. He sat down and wrote an acerbic letter to a high-ranking official whom he knew, the “General” of the head office of the Holy Synod, Skvorchov, a man with great authority. He then wrote another letter to Bishop Andronik of Perm, also an acquaintance of his, asking him to deal with the matter.

But before he sent the second letter, to Bishop Andronik, he remembered that a good and zealous Christian must never do anything—and, in particular, anything directly relating to his place in the Church or to his own spiritual life—without seeking the advice of his spiritual Father.

He put the letter in his pocket and went to Elder Barsanouphios of Optina. He read it to him and asked for a blessing to send it to the Bishop and continue his actions.

Having listened with great attention, Elder Barsanouphios asked him:

“**How** did you write that letter? Did you get a blessing from the *Panagia*?”

“**What** did you say, Father?” he asked, disconcerted. “A blessing from the *Panagia*? I can’t understand what....”

“...what I am asking you?” the Elder completed his question in a firm voice. “Did the *Panagia* give you a blessing to take these actions to preserve her Icon?”

“Of course not. The *Panagia* did not directly give me a blessing for my actions. But I think that it is the duty of every good Christian who has some measure of zeal to protect the sacred and holy things of his Faith from every sort of desecration.”

“I agree,” answered Elder Barsanouphios. “But not when it means coming into conflict with a bearer of that supreme authority which the Holy Apostles possessed. Who are you to confront a Bishop in order to dictate to him what he should do as a responsible Shepherd ‘of the diocese’ of the local Church ‘allotted to him,’ which God Himself has entrusted to him? Do you not know that he has the fullness of Episcopal and Apostolic authority? Put aside all thoughts of any kind of action. Leave the matter in the hands of God and of the *Panagia*; let them deal with it as they wish. Be obedient in this matter. And the Lord, who crowns us for our intention when we seek the good, will reward you abundantly for your obedience and for your good intention. But in the Name of God, do not allow yourself to come into conflict with the Bishop for any reason. Otherwise, the *Panagia* will punish you.”

“And what about the letter that I sent to the Synod, to the ‘General’?”

“It is your job to find a way to retract it. Any lay person, even a general, even a person in charge of the offices of the Holy Synod, does not constitute for the Church, for us, an ‘authority from God.’ Never forget such things.”

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