

Letters of Spiritual Counsel

Bishop German, imprisoned during the 1930s, died as a martyr in exile. A few of his letters, dated 1934-1936 and addressed to one of his spiritual children (Mother Olimpiada), were recently published in the Vestnik RSKhD (No. 107, 1973, pp. 72-90). Some extracts are printed below.

(p. 73) . . . no one can live through life without his Gethsemane or his Golgotha. Perhaps your Gethsemane has now come. . . . "The way of God," says Isaac Sirin, "is the daily cross. No one ascends to heaven if his life is lukewarm. A man realizes that he is under God's Providence when God ceaselessly sends sorrow upon him."

God's sons are distinguished from ordinary people because they walk through the valley of the shadow while the world takes pride in its luxury and ease . . . In all things God grants them a victory (*podvig*) according to their strength and enables them to travail in prayer. Thus God allows his saints to be tempted by every kind of sorrow, so that they may come to know his help by experience, and to know how much he provides for them, for it is through temptation that one acquires wisdom (Isaac Sirin). This is why you have been given your present cramped conditions, constant visitors, your importunate inspector, your "spoiler of the flesh", and the enforced contact with worldly people. Sometimes in impatience you say, or ask Him: "Why did you send me this cross?" And the cross itself answers with your lips: "It was sent to me for this: to show me my shortcomings, so that I might understand what is concealed in me. I thought that I loved God and my neighbour, but now I see that there is no such love in me. . . ."

(p. 77) . . . We are clearly told that in this world where we now live we shall experience suffering. The Holy Fathers say that suffering is the seal of election. If we were holy people then we should meet and endure the suffering we find not only without confusion, and even more without despondency, and grumbling, but with joy. We are always despondent and sad that we do not have a calm and sorrowless life. I don't know about you, but I always think that such peace is the same as everyday security: a small flat, firewood, food, and so on. The Fathers say of this peace that it is the chief and most perfidious enemy of a monk. The hope of peace at all times (says Isaac Sirin) forced people to forget the great blessing and the virtues. If a man neglects the Kingdom of God, he will do so most quickly by hoping for a little comfort here.

You grieve because your life has been, is and is turning out not as you would have wanted it. . . . But we must, even at the eleventh hour of our life on earth, learn to live according to the wise proverb of the people: "Live not as you want, but as God commands." Don't wish, says Avva Dorofei, that everything should happen as you want, but wish that it be as it is (that is, as God arranges), and thus you will be at peace with all. To explain to God "You must save me like this and like that" is impossible, because salvation, as a gift of God, is above human comprehension. God leads man to his spiritual goals by paths which from outside have an unpleasant and unhappy character. . . .

(p. 83) May God help you to be a Martha for those who work and a Mary for your own soul and salvation. When I was in Central Asia, I did not only establish a church for my people and bear the worries of it, but I very often helped them with everyday things: I used to go to the bazaar, I bought food, fuel and so on. However, this fuss for others, being in the name of love, meant that I nearly always felt an unusual spiritual lightness, an inner peace, a warmth in my heart and an emotion in my prayers. I suppose that this is the reward for everyone who remembers and, according to his strength, performs the commandment of the Lord . . .

(p. 86) . . . what are all our virtues without humility? Nothing more than dust, carried away by the first breath of pride (Metropolitan Filaret). Our misfortune is this, that we teach others and know that everything ought to begin with humility, everything ought to be protected by it. It is the "salt" which must flavour everything brought by us to God, but we ourselves scarcely feel its beneficial influence in us, because we are far away from all which nurtures it . . . (p. 87) It is just as you write, "Every day I feel more and more⁴ my own utter worthlessness". This means that in our conscience has begun faintly to shine the Light which no sinful darkness will be able to overcome, once we ourselves sincerely wish to be free of it . . .

(p. 88) . . . Faith which all the time, like the Israelites in the wilderness, tempts God and tests Him, is a bad faith. Only faith kindled by a warm love for the Lord and His truth, only this faith is strong, steadfast and courageous.

The Case of Yevgeni Barabanov

Last year a search began in a Moscow flat at 9 p.m. on 24 August. It ended seven hours later. Yevgeni Barabanov, who lived in this flat, was accused of sending "anti-Soviet" literature abroad. Much of this literature was of a religious nature, for Barabanov, as an Orthodox Christian, wished to share the spiritual experience of his country with others through the publication of this material. Below we print Barabanov's press statement made on 15 September, 1973.

In the night of 24-25 August, the Orël section of the KGB carried out a search in my flat. They were looking for anti-Soviet literature, but did not find any. Instead, they took away a bagful of theological books that had been published abroad. On 27 August the interrogations began with investigator O. F. Ilin. "The preliminary investigation has conclusively proved that you sent anti-Soviet materials to the West. Where did you get so many émigré books from? We know that you regularly supplied the editor of the journal *Herald of the Russian Student Christian Movement (Vestnik RSKhD)* . . . Don't smile, this is a serious matter . . ."

In the course of the interrogations there emerged words that had been spoken behind closed doors, friends were named. It became clear that over several months my every day had been X-rayed, examined, spied upon. I felt like the victim of a police round-up: "You are surrounded, so surrender!" My wife was summoned to one of the interrogations. "Your husband's guilt is proved," they told her, "so an open confession would help his fate." But I thought: just what is my guilt supposed to consist of? Why do my actions turn