

A BOOK ABOUT A COURAGEOUS SURGEON, PHYSICIAN, AND SAINT OF THE COMMUNIST YOKE IN RUSSIA

ARCHIMANDRITE NECTARIOS ANTONOPOULOS. *Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Λουκᾶς: Ἀρχιεπ. Λουκᾶς Βόϊνο-Γιασενέτσκι ἕνας ἅγιος ποιμένας καὶ γιατρός χειρουργός (1877-1961)* (Archbishop Luke: Archbp. Luke Voyno-Yasenetsky[,] a holy shepherd and physician and surgeon [1877-1961]). Athens, Greece: Ekdoseis Akritas, 2010. Twentieth edition. Pp. 447.

Archimandrite Father Nectarios (Antonopoulos), a graduate of the theological school of the University of Thessalonike, is Ab-



bot of the Holy Monastery of Sagmata (dedicated to the Holy Transfiguration) near Thebes, in Boeotia, a venerable institution founded in the twelfth century. His veneration of Archbishop Luke of Simferopol (a city in Southern Ukraine, located on the Salgir River as it flows down from the Crimean Mountains) led him to write this popular and excellently inspiring book on an Orthodox Saint (see *at left*) of the modern age, a celebrated physician and surgeon and

a dedicated Archpastor whose martyric life was filled with lessons in patience and faith and with harrowing tribulations. Father Nectarios has sponsored and led pilgrimages to the grave of St. Luke by faithful from Greece, increasing knowledge of this holy man both in that country and in other Orthodox lands.

Archbishop Luke, whose secular name was Valentine Felixovitch Voyno-Yasenetsky (Валентин Феликсович Войно-Ясенецкий),* was born in the city of Kerch in Eastern Crimea. He was of Lithuanian and Polish ancestry, and his family, though it had lost its prominence and become impoverished by the time that he was born, was known in history and served in positions of note in the courts of the royal families of both countries. He was reared an Orthodox believer by his mother, and his father, though a Roman Catholic, was a pious man, and, in the Saint's own words, "went regularly to...church and prayed many hours at home" (p. 2). An excellent student, Valentine Felixovitch first studied the fine arts. But rather than pursuing a career in art, he decided to attend medical school at the St. Vladimir University in Kiev, from which

he graduated *cum laude* in 1903 (p. 38). In 1916, he completed a Ph.D. in medicine with distinction (p. 59), after more than a decade of medical practice as a renowned surgeon and researcher. His later fame, as the founder of purulent surgery in Russia and the author of numerous influential articles and books on anatomy and surgery, earned him a significant place in the history of modern Russian medicine.

In 1904, a year after graduating from medical school, St. Luke was assigned to the position of chief of medicine and a surgeon at the regional hospital in Pereslavl-Zalessky, an ancient Russian city north of Moscow. It was there that he met and married his wife, Anna Vasilievna, a nurse. They subsequently had four children (pp. 57-59 *pass.*). The Saint's family life was happy and fulfilling, though, because as a physician he treated the poor without taking money from them, he and his wife and children lived in great poverty. To this hardship was added tragedy when, his children still in their early youth, his beloved Anna died at a young age (p. 71). His wife's sisters having declined to look after the children, there appeared a widow, Sophia Sergievna, who, like a "Guardian Angel," dedicated the rest of her life to their care and rearing (p. 73).

Further tragedies for Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky, which included repeated arrests by the Communists and long periods of prison and exile on trumped-up charges stemming from his religious beliefs and his opposition to both the Communist system and the Soviet-sponsored "Living Church,"** brought to light the providential rôle of Sophia Sergievna (whom, like Archbishop Luke's wife, the author of this book identifies with her patronymic, instead of her family name) in the punishing life of the future priest and Archbishop. Likewise, though many of his colleagues thought that the loss of his wife prompted it, he saw his increased interest in the Orthodox Church in the light of Divine Economy (p. 83). Because of his deep faith, the exemplary death of his wife and the service of Sophia Sergievna, who lived into old age under the patronage of the Saint's son, had convinced him that he was beholding the hand of God in his life. So it was that, sure that he was responding to the Divine Will, he became a Priest in 1921, bravely answering the need for sincere clergy as the Communist authorities enacted more and more laws to limit and to control the spiritual life of the Orthodox Church in Russia and Ukraine.

In a very short time, Father Valentine was clandestinely tonsured a monk, taking the name "Luke," by Archbishop Andrew of

Ufa—the former Prince Alexander Alexeyevich Ukhtomsky and a spiritual son, at the Moscow Theological Academy, of its Rector, Metropolitan (then Archimandrite) Anthony (Khrapovitsky), the first Chief Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—a fierce opponent of the Communist régime, which imprisoned and eventually martyred him (he was shot to death in the Yaroslavl prison). Vladyka Andrew had been given a blessing to consecrate secret Bishops by Patriarch Tikhon, who saw the coming corruption of the “official” Church, and St. Luke was among the forty-two that he consecrated or ordered to be consecrated. Thus in May of 1923, Father Valentine was consecrated a Bishop by two exiled Hierarchs enlisted by the Archbishop for this purpose, and was assigned to the See of Tashkent. Though arrested shortly after his Consecration (pp. 110-113), he held that See until 1942, enduring years of imprisonment and persecution (pp. 116-160). He was later appointed Archbishop of Krasnoyarsk, where he served from 1942 to 1944, then Archbishop of Tambov from 1944 to 1946, and finally Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea, in which See he served from 1946—despite total blindness from diabetes, after 1955 (p. 361)—to his death in 1961, a year after celebrating his last Liturgy (p. 388).

The most amazing characteristic of St. Luke was that, though living in circumstances that called for an exercise of immense spiritual discretion and “*oikonomia*,” he understood that the externals of Orthodox tradition were as essential to the proper functioning of the Church as the maintenance of the external fitness of the body is to the healthy functioning of its internal organs. He insisted on being called by his religious name, even as a physician, and wore his cassock at all times—even in the operating room, under his “scrubs,” when permitted, where he also demanded that an Icon be hung on the wall. This observance of discipline he imposed on all of his clergy, austere chastising those who, out of what he saw as sinful weakness in their clerical commitment, failed to wear their cassocks at all times (i.e., in and out of Church) and who shaved and groomed themselves according to the prevailing style (see p. 322). He also *strongly condemned* the practice, which he attributed to Roman Catholic influence, of sprinkling or pouring, instead of full immersion and proper Baptism (p. 32), which is a serious deviation from tradition seen throughout Orthodoxy to this day.

There are those who have unreasonably accused St. Luke of collaboration for having ultimately remained in communion with

the Moscow Patriarchate, forgetting, as Father Nectarios' book avers, that he courageously opposed the Living Church movement, flatly rejected Sergianism (Patriarch Sergius' tragic policy of compromise with the Soviet authorities), spent years in prison and exile, and was even accused of counter-revolutionary sentiments. The Soviets helped create this accusation, in order to diminish the Saint's spiritual influence. In this vein, as Father Nectarios notes (see p. 380), an entry about the Archbishop in the Soviet *Encyclopedia of Medicine*, published in Moscow in 1958, makes no mention of his religious vocation: "Valentine Voino-Yasenetsky, son of Felix, Soviet surgeon, physician, winner of the USSR State Prize [for medicine] in 1946," followed by a history of his service as a director and professor at various medical clinics and institutions, as well as a description of his writings. Like the Saint's pious colleague, Ivan Pavlov (see pp. 161f.), whom Soviet propaganda successfully turned into an atheist—a success that is reinforced in Western encyclopedic sources—the holy Archbishop Luke became a victim of the Soviet Union's enduring legacy even in post-Communist times: the lies of *tailored* history.

Nonetheless, just as figures like the late Father Georges Florovsky have provided personal testimony disputing the lie about Pavlov and his supposed atheism,*** they have also vindicated St. Luke of charges that he sympathized or collaborated with the Soviets. By the Saint's own admission, while he was suspicious of the Moscow Patriarchate's revival under Joseph Stalin, he did not feel that he could work effectively and with full faith within the various catacomb groups in Russia. Yet, he clearly told correspondents in the West of his support for the free Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile (Abroad), though at the same time warning his correspondents against what he saw as extremist voices in the exile community and, significantly, about the dangers of thinking that the legacy of the Soviet experience could be easily or quickly removed from the Moscow Patriarchate. Undoubtedly, he did not anticipate the fall of Communism, but his latter warning was significant. I might only add that a flurry of rumors about his contacts with the American C.I.A.—once more, probably spread by the Soviets further to downplay his influence as a spiritual leader—have never been supported by even a shred of plausible evidence.

This book is handsomely printed, contains some wonderful historical photographs of St. Luke, of his family, and of the places where he lived and worked. It is written in a literate, polytonic form

of modern Greek and is pious and inspiring. I heartily recommend it to anyone who can read Greek and hope that one day it will appear in English translation. The life of this Saint, the object of great veneration in Orthodox countries, should be more widely known throughout the world.

* The unfortunate habit of Orthodox monastics (and especially those of prominent background) using their family names in modern times—as one sees throughout the present book—de-emphasizes the commitment of a devout monk or nun to the Church and to a new life and identity. Archbishop Luke himself, *even as a non-monastic Priest before his tonsure*, declared that, “From now on, Valentine Felixovitch no longer exists, but only ‘Father Valentine.’” He is, in fact, quoted as saying such by the author of this volume (p. 94). After his monastic tonsure, and later in his service in the Episcopacy, Archbishop Luke was absolutely meticulous in his observance of Church tradition and never used his family name, but inevitably referred to himself by his See, as tradition dictates.

** The “Живая Церковь,” or “Living Church,” movement (which flourished from 1922 to the early 1940s) was a modernist movement favoring many of the reforms (including the abandonment of the Church Calendar and many of the other ancient traditions of the Church) that were also supported by the Oecumenical Patriarchate, during this period, and which are on the agenda of the so-called eighth “oecumenical synod” for which today’s modernist Orthodox are clamoring. It was undoubtedly inspired and supported by the Soviet régime to weaken the Orthodox Church of Russia by division, innovation, and schism. Stalin abandoned this tactic by reestablishing the Russian Patriarchate under strict control by, and collaboration with, the Communist authorities, who used its existence to argue that religious freedom—after the murder of countless clergy and faithful by the atheist state—was a feature of the viciously anti-religious U.S.S.R.

*** See my discussion of Pavlov’s religious views in “The Dog Delusion: Some Remarks About Professor Richard Dawkins’ Mordant Best-Seller, *The God Delusion: His Naïve Empiricism, Atheism, and Blasphemy in Context*,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, p. 7, note 10.

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