

Inquiries about Canonization/Glorification in the Orthodox Church: The Case of Blessed Archbishop Arseny

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Telephone Interviews: Transcripts, Summaries, and Notes

**The First Interview with Archbishop Seraphim²
July 26, 2014**

Summary

-- Glorification of saints starts from the bottom up NOT like the Catholics with the pope declaring sainthood. Catholic system includes a role for the “devil’s advocate” which doesn’t exist in the Orthodox glorification process. In the Orthodox way,

¹ Research conducted by Priest Andrew for his article, “The Orthodox Church Process of Canonization/Glorification and the Life of Blessed Archbishop Arseny,” *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. X, No. 1, winter 2015, pp. 1-23, <http://www.cjoc.ca/pdf/Vol_X_1_1_Applegate.pdf>

² The ruling bishop of the Canadian Archdiocese of the Orthodox Church in America, 1990-2010; currently Monk Seraphim.

people come to recognize the sanctity of a person, they pray to the person to intercede before the Lord and they do, and then the Lord does something and they say, 'well of course this person is holy.' Sometimes they ask the saint himself to let it be known what is his state. Depending upon what happens next you could say that phenomena occur.

-- The relics don't need to be incorrupt. If they are incorrupt, that can be a confirmation but sometimes incorrupt relics don't mean sanctity; they mean the opposite, it all depends. There have to be other things that indicate. There doesn't have to be miracles, often there are but there doesn't have to be...what comes doesn't have to be spectacular...There are many cases when a saint will remain a local saint and never get on the calendars, but within a diocese that person will be remembered and the memory kept. Criteria for saints are not rules and laws; just strong opinions. So you wade through the strong opinions and just keep going. The arguments that are raised by people like Fr. Oliver about asking questions³ about his [St. Arseny's] sanctity; if he had done that which is being questioned, which he didn't, in his early days, our church is all about repentance. So if you are going to talk about a demand for perfect piety, our calendar would be empty and people like St. Mary of Egypt would not be there, so this is a spurious argument.

-- There have been people who have experienced healing from his prayers too. A man, James Reid in New Zealand was having all sorts of trouble with a hip replacement and was doing quite badly until he prayed to St. Arseny and asked him for help and immediately everything changed with his hip replacement, for the better I mean, about 5 or 6 years ago.

-- Uniates came in and "canonization" came in as part of Catholic terminology instead of "glorification" (the proper Orthodox term). St. Mary's in Nisku⁴ came from the Uniates.

³ Priest Oliver Herbel who launched an investigation into St. Arseny's background, and published information on his website <<https://orthodoxhistory.org/author/froliver/>>.

⁴ St. Mary's parish in Nisku, Alberta, Canada.

-- Archbishop Adam in the 1920's and Archbishop Arseny had much correspondence to bring him (Archbishop Adam) back into the fold as he had become schismatic. Eventually Archbishop Adam was brought back into the fold under the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Second Interview with Archbishop Seraphim

August 22, 2014

There was a period of time before I went out of circulation in which the Synod was thinking about the proposals concerning several persons. One of them who would actually take priority of course is Metropolitan Leonty.⁵ It isn't that he would of course take priority because he was a Metropolitan, but it's because he is far better known in the [United] States. Fr. Hopko,⁶ of course, said about Metropolitan Leonty, "If this man isn't a saint then who is?" But of course, not even Metropolitan Leonty has gotten to the formal consideration stage yet.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, everything kind of stalled out. I realize that there was the timing, the financial thing and then your case and everything else kind of muddied the waters a little bit I guess for proceeding with some things.

Well with St. Arseny, somehow I have affected that but with anything else it has nothing to do with me. The stalling of everything else has to do with preoccupation with other emergency details and things. So the recognition of the sanctity of this or that person has gone onto the back burner for various reasons, I suppose. The most illegitimate opinion about this, I heard was expressed someone is that North America has enough saints. I don't know who was supposed to have said this but

⁵ Metropolitan Leonty (Leontius) – born Leonid Ieronimovich Turkevich (1876-1965), was the ruling bishop of the Orthodox Church in America (1950-1965).

⁶ Father Thomas Hopko (1939-2015), a well-respected American Orthodox Christian theologian and scholar.

I've heard it more than once, that it was said by someone who is in some sort of authority – “we have enough saints.” That's ridiculous, you can never have enough.

Fr. Andrew: But your recollection was that when this was proceeding, that was perfectly fine, if we locally start to venerate him as a saint, like we are not stepping in any particular wrong direction by doing that?

No, we are not. In the whole Orthodox world this is how it has happened. There are plenty of local saints in Russia who have not made it to the national ecclesiastical calendar. But in Russia, in the diocese, their sanctity is unquestioned and they are venerated as saints locally. You don't have to have, absolutely, the permission of the Synod to do this because if the Synod gives permission for this to happen locally, then why are they not putting the person on to the national calendar? So the history of the sanctification of people or at least the recognition of their sanctity has been local, over and over, and when I'm saying Russia, it's not only Russia, it's Greece and other countries, too, have the same thing. There are plenty of people whose bodies have been raised from the ground and they are put into a reliquary in a temple, sometimes their bodies are incorrupt and they still didn't make it to the national calendar for one reason or another but locally they are recognised and probably miracles occur too.

Fr. Andrew: So in those cases, icons and services, and panikhidas or services of some kind, like Akathist... are perfectly normal even in those cases, right?

Sure. Oh, yes.

Fr. Andrew: Well that's what I thought. I have heard other opinions here and there.

Of course there are other opinions. This is the Orthodox Church; there are plenty of other opinions.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, there seems to be all sorts of things floating around. We don't really nail things down too officially that way.

No, I will say that if we are somehow thinking that we are dependant on some sort of official announcement from the Holy Synod or something else about anyone and sanctity, then it says to me that we have gotten some sort of distortion in our perception of ourselves. Historically the bishops declare what the people have recognized for a long time. That's what they do.

Fr. Andrew: So people, individually, in different regions as they come to know this person, then if they are comfortable calling him a saint, then praying and asking his intercessions and what not, that's perfectly normal and acceptable.

Yes, I think if a person is reading the Synaxarion also, it's possible to see there are many cases where, in which a person came to be recognized universally for being a holy person some time after the person was locally recognized as such.

Fr. Andrew: There seems to me to be an awful lot of different paths to being recognized amongst the church and ending up on calendar, it seems like there's no particular "this is how you do it," but it seems like it's a wandering path that converges at that state, I guess.

That's correct. In fact, we have far more saints than end up on the calendar, and the calendar has got thousands and thousands and thousands.

Fr. Andrew: And then, so you venerate him locally and then what ever happens – happens, it's not really a big concern kind of a thing.

That's right, exactly so.

Fr. Andrew: the other thing I have been thinking a little, I mean there's certainly, even in North America, with St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, for example, this didn't happen without controversy.

It certainly didn't. He is another one who is recognized as a saint locally quite a long time before he actually got onto the calendar of the ROCOR and then, after the ROCOR, it took a while for it to get onto the calendar of anyone else, too.

Fr. Andrew: Right, that seems to be quite common as well that one jurisdiction will recognize him. It's kind of an ongoing thing that way with the Tsar Nicholas, and his family and these as well.

That's right. Some people don't agree with the canonization at all of Tsar Nicholas. Then of course, when it comes to St. John of Shanghai, I don't recall so far, maybe because I'm out of touch a bit, I may be wrong but I don't recall any official statement that St. John of Shanghai goes onto the OCA calendar, it just happened.

Fr. Andrew: OK, that's interesting. He would be one of our favourite saints up here I would think.

Oh, certainly, he is highly popular, there are churches and monasteries named after him, in our church, so it may not be officially stated but it's certainly officially enough the case.

Fr. Andrew: The other question I have run into a little bit is that: a saint generally, does he seem to have an advocate quite often, is that a common path? Someone in particular kind of starts this whole process, and kind of helps it move along, like just how organic does it have to be? Does it have to be all sorts of people or can it be kind of a growing awareness? I was thinking of St. Silouan on that one because I don't think anybody really knew him as a saint except for perhaps Sophroniy at the time.⁷

⁷ St. Silouan and Sophrony – St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), a monk and a poet of Russian origins (born Simeon Antonov) at the St. Panteleimon Monastery of Mt. Athos. Elder Sophrony (1896-1993), the disciple and biographer of St. Silouan, a monk of Russian origins (born Sergei Sakharov).

I think people who lived on the Holy Mountain at the time would have recognized his sanctity, certainly, but for them sanctity is just a matter a fact, a normal part of life you know. So the person is a saint, yes, we pray for him, yes, we pray to him, yes, sure, OK. But it doesn't become some sort of "cos celeb." It's a matter a fact, they do it.

Fr. Andrew: Right, and then that it just sort of organically grew from there I think.

Right. Certainly Archimandrite Sophrony, who, himself is probably going to be found on a calendar soon enough. He was aware of the importance of the emphasis that St. Silouan placed on both intercession and forgiveness and the great need that people be reminded of all of that in our day. So that's why he made a big deal of it.

Fr. Andrew: He could be seen very much as an advocate that really kind of spread the awareness of him around the world anyway, I would think.

Yes, in St. Silouan's case certainly Archimandrite Sophrony, St. Sophrony, as many people already call him, in fact, is a big advocate.

Fr. Andrew: That's another I guess criticism maybe that I have heard here and there was that "well, this is really coming from the Archdiocese and wasn't organic from the people so much." I would dispute that, having talked to Fr. John and different people down in the States. There is certainly documentation that people were fond of him over the years but that is a comment that I hear is that this is really driven somehow from...

Me...

Fr. Andrew: Well from you and not just you, but the whole Archdiocese perhaps and Canadians needing a saint and all that kind of thing.

What... [Much laughter]... This is crazy language. We need a saint so we manufacture one.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, I know! I'm just addressing some of the things I have heard. I don't agree with them obviously.

What people don't seem to understand is that Canadians are very soft spoken or even non-spoken about lots of things, so in the course of my pastoral tours around, there are plenty of people who have talked about St. Arseny in the diocese, people who knew him long ago, of course, now they have inconveniently reposed themselves, and I inconveniently didn't take enough notes at the time, because I wasn't paying so much attention. But there are plenty of people who were quite aware of St. Arseny's holiness, add to all of that the simple fact that he himself was almost killed for being an Orthodox Christian during the time of the Revolution. And then he was shot in Saskatchewan, again because he was an Orthodox bishop. People will say it was just politics, but it's not just politics, it has something to do with being a canonical Orthodox bishop. He was shot, he was a confessor even, and so what do you want? They have to kill him and then you argue about why?

Fr. Andrew: I was chatting quite a bit with Fr. Andrew Piasta⁸ and I'm thinking if we would do, well actually do a little fundraising for Fr. Andre; and send him down to Syosset, and send him down to St. Tikhons, because he reads everything (in Russian and Ukrainian) and he's got all the equipment to digitalize everything and he is very keen to do that. But he just has no resources to do that and he's been doing an awful lot of work on all this. He found a bunch of newspaper articles, he was telling me, on an earlier incident, RCMP things I think about 1929, where four people, for the Ukrainians, I guess, it was in that part of the woods, more than the Uniates; that they grabbed him, they beat him up pretty severely, and they were charged, and so he has official records on that but he hasn't been able to dig anything up on the actual shooting. Fr. Matthew⁹ also is

⁸ Father Andrew Piasta – the missionary priest in Canora, Saskatchewan.

⁹ Father Matthew Francis, a missionary priest in Chilliwack, British Columbia.

looking for stuff, he suggested that when I was in Ottawa I might go to the RCMP archives that are in the Library of Archives in Ottawa. I might try to take an extra day when I go to the Assembly and see if I can do a little digging on that. It would be nice to have a little documentation on the actual shooting, because I know Fr. Dan Ressetar¹⁰ mentioned it. He said he was very injured and that's probably the reason he had to leave Canada, I suspect.

That's exactly what we have been told all along was the reason.

Fr. Andrew: It would be nice to have some documentation on that and I don't know if there were charges or whatever happened with that particular one, I think it was about 1935 probably, because it was shortly before he left but there just doesn't seem to be any police report or newspaper thing or anything on the actual shooting. Have you ever run into anything more tangible on that - other than people just know about it?

No, I don't know, concretely, of anything more tangible. It's been talked about so much. If you asked Fr. Alexander Pihach¹¹ he might know something.

Fr. Andrew: It was quite a tragic thing that Fr. Andrew Piasta was telling me. He said about 3 or 4 years ago he was in Sifton,¹² before the church burnt down, and he was photographing it, did about 400 photographs, went inside and he found a big box of correspondence from St. Arseny and everything. He was thinking, at the time, you know I should maybe take this and then he thought well, I better not because I don't really have permission. By the time he thought about it again, the church had burnt down and all those records got burnt. It's a shame. That's the kind of thing that happens as we go on, I guess.

¹⁰ Father Dan Ressetar – Very Reverend Daniel Ressetar, a retired priest in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

¹¹ Archimandrite Alexander (Pihach) (1952-2016), Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Canada (1996-2012), and Dean of the Orthodox church in America's Representation Church of Saint Catherine the Great Martyr in Moscow.

¹² Sifton is a small town in north-central Manitoba, where a historical Orthodox Church building was destroyed by fire in 2010.

Yeah, it's a pity. There's plenty of that in our diocese too, because people, really we don't have any consciousness of our history. You mention about 1929 and his being beaten up?

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, that is a different incident I think. He has that in newspaper articles and I think he even has an RCMP report on that one. There's no shooting involved in that particular incident that was also around Canora,¹³ apparently. I don't think he was very popular around Canora. He was telling me in that part of the country it was such a nationalistic Ukrainian thing going on in those days that they came to really resent the Metropolia Church,¹⁴ and there was a lot of conflict. He is in that country, of course, his take is very much that as long as St. Arseny was around the church was thriving and growing, but it seems like right from the time he left almost there was nobody to really replace him, pretty much until Metropolitan Theodosius and yourself started going around again. There was quite a bleak period after that [St. Arseny], it just sort of deteriorated a little bit.

Of course there was the sudden death of Bishop Antony after him, a kind of a successor.¹⁵ And that really kyboshed the attempts of the Metropolia to do something with Canada that were constructive. Besides that we also have the dire economic situation in the country so even when Vladyka Sylvester¹⁶ came and he wanted to do something; in the first place there was no money, and he was really handicapped about any attempts to travel. He requested of the Holy Synod to send more bilingual English/Ukrainian or English/Russian priests to Canada, and it almost didn't happen. In his case in particular, it was not from wanting something

¹³ Canora – a small town in east-central Saskatchewan, at the border with Manitoba.

¹⁴ The predecessor of the Orthodox Church in America.

¹⁵ Bishop Antony (Tereshchenko), died soon after his appointment in 1947.

¹⁶ Bishop Sylvester – the ruling bishop of the Canadian Archdiocese of the Orthodox Church in America (1963-1981).

to occur, there were just no resources. Somehow things couldn't become possible until later. Yet, you are right, it is bleak.

Fr. Andrew: Just from reading and talking to people about St. Arseny, I suspect part of the reason that things went so well during his time up here was he was so well respected. He was legendary, even in the [United] States, so when he asked for resources, I think he probably got a little bit of help and got their attention quite quickly because he was so connected.

In his day that was certainly the case, yes.

Fr. Andrew: He really stands out as one of the half dozen legendary figures really right from St. Tikhon's time.

Yes. Absolutely.

**Telephone interview with Bishop Irénée
August 26, 2014**

Okay, so what I was saying: usually glorification, canonizations result from the recognition of the people of God of somebody's sanctity. It's not something that we decide to do because we need to have a Canadian saint, which, I have a feeling is what happened last time.

Fr. Andrew: Yes, I've heard that before, there seems to be quite a bit of controversy about him [Blessed Archbishop Arseny].

That's why nothing is happening. There is no devotion of the people of God to him. I haven't seen one person write Archbishop Arseny's name for Proskomedie.

Fr. Andrew: Oh, I have been doing that, maybe I'm the only one.

Maybe you are the only one. Sometimes when you serve panikhidas for families, remember St. Xenia also, we went through that with St. Xenia, St. Herman, the Royal martyrs, and St. John Maximovitch.¹⁷ These people were always commemorated before, in panikhidas and people would get answers to prayers. You pray for their soul and they answer your prayers. Nothing like that is going on. OK, there is a life which was done by Fr. Lawrence. I don't know where it is. I have never seen it. It hasn't been mass reproduced and given out so that people, you know there is certain groundwork which was not done. And so, nothing is happening. And nothing will happen until it comes from the people. Because people have this relationship with the Archbishop, and to call him a saint prematurely is wrong. That's why I never use the term "St. Arseny." You can use "blessed Arseny," "blessed Archbishop Arseny," but you know he has not been glorified.

Fr. Andrew: I thought there was something like that because we are calling it St. Arseny Institute and various things like that.

No, I spoke with Vladyka Seraphim a few years ago and I said exactly what I just told you now, this has not been done well. And he agreed with me that yes it had been done not well, but then the harm was done because you've got these people who really want a local saint, you know, at any cost and they don't care or don't understand what the whole process is. It's a spiritual process. It's not, you know, somebody decreeing; it's not a decree. And this spiritual process has not happened and does not seem to be in the process of happening either.

Fr. Andrew: It seems to be stalled out for sure.

There are objections on the part of ROCOR, the Russian Church Abroad, to this also. So this should be cleared up. And just saying, well it's ROCOR, it's not important is not a solution, it's not an answer because when it came down to St.

¹⁷ St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Herman, they went through the same; when the Metropolia, at the time decided to go ahead with this, with the blessing of Moscow, at the time, ROCOR went ahead and went through the same process simultaneously. You see, when Archbishop John was canonized, everybody recognized it including the Antiochians.¹⁸ In this case it is not the case. There are certain things in his life which we sort of don't look...: I'm sure he was an exceptional person but is that a reason to canonize him? So it was not done well.

Fr. Andrew: That's kind of what I am doing, I think, with this paper, because I am going to St. Arseny's Institute, I thought well I better get to know this guy a little bit better, so I started about a month ago trying to do some research, and phoning everybody. And I got a hold of a number of people that actually still know him down in the States; Fr. John Perich has his will, and his grandfather was Fr. Joseph Pishtey [the executor of Archbishop Arseny's will]; so I have been talking with them and talking with various people and talking to everybody that was on that original committee and trying to get it and reading the Vita. I read through all the trial transcripts that Fr. Oliver was all upset about and everything. I have to say myself: I'm coming up to quite a different conclusion, I'm coming to quite love the man, it might just be me, I don't know.

No, and maybe this work you are doing will be something which has to be done, which will probably shed more light, but people don't know him and you just don't decree saints, it has to come from the people, it has to come from the Church. The Church recognizes the sanctity of somebody and then the official Episcopate sanctions it.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, it doesn't come the other way. I understand that for sure.

And in this case it is an one-way thing. It's Archbishop Seraphim and people around him decided that they wanted a local saint. As I said I'm sure he was an exceptional man. Does that make him a canonizable person?

¹⁸ The Archdiocese of North America of the Church of Antioch.

Fr. Andrew: Right, well that's the question I guess.

You know, I've known many, you know, in my 65 years of life, many, and I have been in this church 50 years, I've known many exceptional people, it doesn't mean that they are canonizable.

Fr. Andrew: They are not on the calendar necessarily.

Yeah.

Fr. Andrew: That's very good to know and I really wanted to get your thoughts.

This is my humble opinion, I may be totally wrong but that's the way I understood it and listen, I mentioned this to the Archbishop shortly before all hell broke over him and so nothing really happened since then, you know, as I said, nothing is, there is no will.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, well that was my impression in digging into all this information, actually I did discover quite a few people that feel very fondly of him, Fr. Gregory and Fr. Matthew and different people like that that kind of got to know him during that time but it seems to me, I agree, there's been very little done, there's tons more that should be done. You know if this is ever going to happen.

You know his photo, not icons; they painted icons and said "saint" which is wrong. The first icon should be revealed at the canonization, when we serve the vigil and then we sing his Megalynarion, and then the icon is unveiled in the middle of the church by the Primate and you know, that's canonization. Then we sing the canon and then we no longer serve panikhidas. Nothing's been done. We just wrote an icon, ordered an icon from the Protodeacon and you know sent it out to everybody, that's wrong, you don't do that. If you want to paint something, an image of him, you don't put a halo and you call him 'blessed,' "blessed Archbishop," and then that

can be given out to people and then people say well, who is this you know, and then they will be surprised and interested in knowing. That's my thoughts. They didn't do that, they just wrote an icon and wrote saint on it and expected it to be done. Well, nothing happened, these icons are uncannonical; they should not be in our churches, and we should be praying for the repose of his soul.

Fr. Andrew: Okay, well I will switch that around, myself, then, I didn't realize. I think there's a lot us just really don't understand a lot of these things.

Exactly, actually that's all it is, it's just ignorance.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, I think so. Like we have icons of him and also blessed Olga,¹⁹ but of course it's blessed Olga rather than St. Olga for the most part everybody calls her.

Yes, she's not canonized and she shouldn't have a halo.

Fr. Andrew: No, but she seems to be quite active, she seems to have a real presence.

Now do you see the difference?

Fr. Andrew: Yeah. Like there are things happening.

Nothings happening for blessed Arseny, Archbishop Arseny, whereas there, there's something coming out of the people. She is involved in the people of God's lives. She is making a difference in these people's lives and its being recognized by the people and so there is something happening there just like happened with the other ones I mentioned, to have objections is good, sometimes called the devil's advocate, usually if there are objections, then you find solutions, you solve those objections, you prove them wrong.

¹⁹ Olga of Alaska – Olga Michael (1916-1979), a priest's wife from Kwethluk, Alaska.

Fr. Andrew: That's right, I have been reading up on quite a bit of this as I'm writing this paper and doing all sorts of research. I had a really good chat with Fr. Michael Oleksa actually because he knows quite a bit about this kind of stuff.

Somebody who has done research on this historically, and who went through the trials, went through and everything in the States, Bishop Peter of ROCOR, he has big objections. You can contact him, mention my name, he knows me very well. He gave me his version, his objections and it would be interesting for you to hear.

Fr. Andrew: Yes, I want to hear everything, the pros and the cons; I know there's quite a bit of stuff I got on the Internet from this Fr. Oliver, who wrote a bunch of stuff.²⁰ I actually, thankfully, he was very good because he, I don't necessarily agree with a lot of things he was saying but nonetheless he was very good, he put all of the trial transcripts on the Internet²¹ so I was able to go through, you know, quite a long thing. Its 420 pages, but you get a real sense of the trial. So that's great I will try to get a hold of Bishop Peter.

That's good because all of this has to be cleared out before any canonization happens. These things exist, just making belief they don't exist and not talking about it will not make these things disappear.

Fr. Andrew: No, no they have to be dealt with. I mean if they are real, I mean they are real and if they are not then they need to be answered. There's always controversy. I know from what I have been reading anyway, even St. Seraphim, for example, just about didn't make it but the Tsar finally put his foot down and said 'hey, this is a saint' and even St. John of San Francisco who everybody just absolutely adores, he may our favourite saint in all of North America but there was a lot of detractors back then. So controversy isn't new, that's for sure.

²⁰ Priest Oliver's "Orthodox History" website < <http://orthodoxhistory.org/2010/04/19/the-archbishop-arseny-trial-transcript/>>

²¹ Ibid.

A lot of objections, a lot objections, and what is interesting is the Metropolitan who did officiate at his glorification was one of the people who brought him to court, Archbishop John. Well he did it against his will but, I mean the glorification, he was not for it but he went along with his Synod and he served it. So it is quite interesting.

Fr. Andrew: Thank you so much, I really wanted to get your perspective on this. If you don't mind I will send you this paper when I am done, it's just for my St. Arseny course.

Sure, it's interesting and maybe this paper is needed to get something started. We don't know and this could be God's way to start manifesting things.

Fr. Andrew: Well, if he is a saint he can certainly let us know.

That's it, that's it and God will reveal his saints, it's not up to us to make them up because we need them. We have local saints, you know, Archbishop Tikhon, the Patriarch, the confessor, he is a local saint, he founded our archdiocese 100 years ago. He's the one who actually went and filled in the papers and founded this archdiocese. So we do have local saints, we don't have to make people up. If God wills to use our sinfulness to reveal his saints, then glory to God, and that's what will happen.

Fr. Andrew: How would you have us refer to him?

I think "Blessed Archbishop," well, that's what he is, that's what you would call him until there is official glorification, then he will become "the holy Hierarch."

Interview with Fr. Michael Oleksa**August 22, 2014**

Fr. Andrew's note: *I Missed recording the first minute of the interview therefore I am paraphrasing [the missed section] from memory: There are as many paths to sainthood as there are saints so it is difficult to come up with formulas. Take St. Jacob for example, no one remembered him until we found his journals...*

Actual Recording

And so we have the journals from all of those years: his [St. Jacob of Alaska] wife dies and his house burns down, and the nephew they were raising as a son dies also and he's all alone and he petitions to retire to a monastery in Russia, and Innocent Veniaminov who is then his bishop says: 'of course Fr. Yakov²² you deserve it, you've put in your twenty years, as soon as I find a replacement.' And then he serves eighteen more years. Eighteen more years out in the Tundra, with the Eskimos, where he is freezing, where he is sick, where he is dying half the time, where Pascha somehow revitalizes, re-energizes and even cures him year after year. And so we didn't know anything about him until we found, we literally stumbled across, there was a priest who went up into the bell tower just to see if there was anything there in this abandoned church on the Yukon River. The people had already built a new church and moved all the furnishings out of the old into the new. So it was just on a whim that the bishop said 'I wonder if anything is up there?' And one of the priests climbed up and said 'no, there is nothing here,' and then tripped over the box. And the bishop said 'well lower it with a sheet down through the hole in the ceiling,' into the bell tower, the porch of the church, the narthex, and we opened it up and here was eighteen years of St. Yakov Netsvetov's journals. It was just like striking gold, like finding a treasure, but he was pretty much forgotten. And this was the late '70's. And then all of these were taken to Kodiak, put in a safe and Lydia Black translated them into English over several years and then they were published by an obscure publisher in Canada actually, in

²² Yakov (in Russian) – Jacob.

Kingston, Ontario. And they were very expensive and very few people bought them to read them because nobody really knew who this guy was so why would you spend \$75 for two books covering the personal, the pastoral career of a man you never heard of? I mean, so it wasn't exactly a bestseller. When I was well into writing *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* it occurred to me that again most people had never heard of Fr. Yakov, but they should, and so I took highlights from those journals, about 1/3 of the book, *Alaska Missionary Spirituality*, is in fact the journals of Fr. Yakov Netsvetov. And people started reading those, including members of the Holy Synod, and what do you know, it took about 10 more years but as those journals became more widely known, and especially as priests and bishops read them, they had the same reaction 'if he's not a saint, there's no chance for the rest of us.' And then at his canonization, I was given the award, it was St. Yakov's glorification, but I got the St. Innocent cross for my work, and I had really done nothing more than republished what Lydia Black had already translated, but I was responsible in a sense, for promulgating those diaries and making his writings and therefore his life known, and once his life was known, his sanctity, his obvious apostolic zeal and the rest, shone through so brilliantly that it became a force of its own. That may be an extraordinary case of a forgotten man who ultimately became canonized.

Matushka Olga is a similar case, twenty years after her death, where no one had paid much attention to her while she was alive; she begins appearing to women and healing them of various maladies and the next thing you know, icons are being written and Akathist's are composed and the veneration continues to spread and the miracles continue to occur. And again, completely off the radar screen, I mean, people in the village knew that she was an extraordinary woman but you know Yup'ik Eskimos weren't about to start a campaign for her canonization, it wouldn't have crossed their mind. It's not their cultural way. In a certain sense, I believe, the church has this attitude, that He reveals His saints to the church, according to His time and His will. God, Himself, had to as it were, allow Matushka Olga to begin appearing to people. I have this sense that there was a generation of really holy Eskimo clergy, husbands and wives, matushki and priests and deacons and so forth, and they look down on earth today and they see their children and great

grandchildren having all this confusion, all this moral and ethical confusion that the modern world introduces into their traditional cultures, just because the modern world is what it is; and you know the other poisons, the drugs and the alcohol and then everything on TV being so violent and profane; and kids in the villages are watching that thinking that that's the way the rest of the world, the world outside their village actually is. All of that becomes acceptable and normal, in a way that it would have never been traditionally, in a sense the worst of the outside culture, poisons the life of the innocent cultures of the world. And so I have this vision, of all those saintly people of Matushka Olga's generation having a little conference up there in paradise and saying 'look what's happening to our people, one of us has got to go down there and help straighten things out.' Amongst themselves they nominated Matushka Olga because it could have been any of maybe a dozen others, she's simply a representative of that generation, and that's also true. Many people will say 'why her and not him, why this one and not that one?' Well, we don't know, but this is the one God has sent us. The last vision that I heard, recently, about Matushka Olga, she didn't come alone, she came with her husband, Fr. Nikolai, and they appeared not just to one person but to three at the same time. Before this, she only appeared to single people, one at a time, in privacy but this time she appeared to a husband, a wife and to their son in the parents' apartment. And they all three of them saw both Matushka Olga and her husband, only the son didn't know who they were because he was younger and had never met them when they were on earth, so he had to ask his parents, 'who were those guys?' And they told him Matushka Olga and Fr. Nikolai Michael. So you see, then the veneration, that's something as it were, veneration sent from God.

Then there's Fr. Juvenaly who was also, you could say, forgotten and maligned and slandered because he was sent off to the mainland of Alaska and disappeared, and a hundred and fifty years later an American historian accepted the fraudulent translation of a diary that never existed, in which Fr. Juvenaly reportedly confessed being seduced by a native Indian woman. Well, of course, if that's the case then he is certainly not a canonizable saint. But it turns out that the whole diary itself was a complete myth, a story that was made up by the translator who wasn't translating, he was fabricating. And then for the true story to come out took

even longer because we had to go back, as it were, like detectives and try to piece together the factual evidence that we did have, finally verified by the native oral tradition. It was a lot of work that took over twenty years, it wasn't like twenty years of intense work; it was twenty years of stumbling over clues and then finally reassembling the jigsaw puzzle. The point here is; there is in fact, no widespread veneration of Fr. Juvenaly and his companion, but the Church does consider anyone who dies for the faith, any martyr who sheds his blood and is killed for the faith automatically a saint so they don't require widespread veneration. So the opposite standard; Juvenaly and his companion are saints by virtue of their deaths. Matushka Olga is not yet canonized because we're still waiting for her veneration to spread more widely but the other saints don't have any veneration particularly, but they're already saints. So there are these multiple standards for, as it were, admitting people to the official list of canonized saints, depending on their lives or circumstances.

Fr. Andrew: Right, yeah, well like Matushka Olga, for example, she seems to be spreading quite widely because she's very active.

That's right, and I think it's because on one hand God thinks it's our women who are being neglected or abused or assaulted and they need encouragement, and on the other hand we have all these guys on the icon of North America and no women. So I think the Lord is trying to bring it back to some kind of balance, who are we to say, but I mean that's just my perception.

Fr. Andrew: Well, it is nice to see your icon with her on there; it's quite refreshing for sure.

And I think everybody who sees her on there is delighted to see her. I've commissioned nine different 'All the saints of North America' icons over the last 5 years. From the same artists, the Gormachelis, in Richfield, Maine, and the last one, they put the Mother of God of Sitka in the middle, and surrounding the icons, there are nine saints on either side.

Fr. Andrew: Oh, you have added a couple since ours, that we have hanging in our narthex.

Yeah, we added on this one, the one we added is Metropolitan Leonty.

Fr. Andrew: Right, he will be very soon, I'm sure.

I think yes, but you know it's kind of disappointing that the bishops are only interested in canonizing other bishops. And when the Matushka Olga issue, question was raised; the response was 'tell us more about her, send us more material.'

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, well she is doing that.

Yeah, I guess she will provide her own, right.

Fr. Andrew: It's nice when it happens directly like that because it's very hard for people to argue with these things.

That's right, and Metropolitan Jonah²³ has visited her grave and celebrated a memorial service which is another story. Twice in Kwethluk; once at Christmas time at her oldest son's house and the second time when Metropolitan Jonah came to Kwethluk. She appeared; her whole face appeared at her son's house, at Fr. Jonah's panikhida, we were outside at her grave and then it was very overcast, very dark, completely gray sky, and no sun whatsoever. We ducked inside the church right at the cemetery to finish the panikhida and the Metropolitan handed me his digital camera to take some pictures. We didn't see it while we were serving the service, but when we looked at the digital pictures, the altar area was filled with a golden light as if sunbeams were hitting one of those brass, Greek, processional crosses, reflecting that kind of golden colour except the sun wasn't shining and there was no possibility of that kind of light appearing naturally. But the altar

²³ Metropolitan Jonah (Paffhausen), the ruling bishop of the Orthodox Church in America (2008-2012); currently a bishop in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.

behind the Metropolitan is filled with that golden light, the light that we depict on the icons as halos, as holiness; it completely filled the altar even though the sun could not have been shining, we were inside because it was drizzling outside and the sky was completely overcast. The same thing happened at Christmas, the golden aura appeared on the wall of the house, not when people were there; they couldn't see it physically but again in the digital pictures, but in this, the golden aura at the house was also Matushka Olga's face. Those were appearances right in Kwethluk, close to her gravesite. And the intense gold inside the altar, when the Metropolitan served, is directly adjacent to her grave.

Fr. Andrew: So, like, for about twenty years though, even in her village, she was kind of known as a very nice, holy lady but it's not like people were venerating her and considered her a saint.

No, because she was part of a generation, there were probably another dozen people similar to her also in the same village or in the same region. In fact, the [re is a] story behind that, going back another decade: I was in K...ness, New Jersey, giving a church school class, I may have told you this story, and one of the elders in the adult class said 'tell us what Alaska is like.' And I paused briefly to think, what am I going to tell them, do they want a geography lesson, ethnography, where the tribes are and what their languages are? No. Matushka Olga had died maybe five years before, so I told the Matushka Olga story, about her life and her humility and her constantly being like a Dorcas, constantly sewing and giving things away and the Matushka baking the Prosphora, making the vestments and the analogia covers and so forth, and then becoming sick and then dying and the remarkable things that happened surrounding her death, and that's as far as it went. And people were crying when I was done with this story, and I said to Fr. John Marbecky 'Why does this story move people so deeply?' And he said, as an elder, 'we all knew people like this when we were kids, and we've made so much progress in our church, building nicer buildings, moving to suburbia, decorating them with much more appropriate iconography, even paying our priests somewhat better; we made all this material progress in our church, but this is what we have lost, and we didn't realize we lost it until you came from Alaska to remind us. And so, when I was writing *Orthodox*

Alaska,²⁴ another ten years later, I thought, to summarize everything that's gone before, I'll include a few pages about Matushka Olga because it seemed to have moved that New Jersey parish so, so deeply. And so that's how it wound up in, it's only three pages, in *Orthodox Alaska* but when the first woman who had the first encounter, the first vision of Matushka Olga had this vision, she wasn't Orthodox, she wasn't Christian and she had no idea who that woman was and then she went to her therapist who happened to be an Orthodox Matushka herself, who just happened to be reading *Orthodox Alaska*, at that time and put her in touch with me. And then I didn't respond either, because I was leaving for Russia the next day. She didn't give up, she wrote to the people in Kwethluk and asked for a photograph of Matushka Olga to make a positive ID and they sent her a picture of her with other women. And she was able to identify her sort of in the lineup, except she said 'when I met her she was younger.' Because, I guess, we go back to our life in our prime, in paradise. We don't go back to the decrepit old age we reached at the end.

And that is kind of what happened to my parents, the day my mother died, her next door neighbour was crying, having just heard the news that my mother had died very unexpectedly, and she looked up and she said my mother was there clear as day, but not as she was, at the age of, close to eighty, when she died; the way she was when she first moved into that house fifty years before and she said to my neighbour, her neighbour, 'don't cry, I am where I want to be.' And then my father, equally fifty years younger, appeared briefly, with her, and then they both disappeared. And that's what got us through my mother's death because it was such a shock to us. So, in other words, there is other evidence of this. Once in a while God lets folks come through from the other side; to bless, to reassure, to comfort us.

Fr. Andrew: Well that's one path that it's pretty much assured that when these things start happening, there's not going to be a lot of controversy.

²⁴ Michael J. Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska: Theology of Mission*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1992.

No, not unless people believe that whoever the witness is, is making it up, if there's any doubt in their truthfulness.

Fr. Andrew: Right, well then, maybe with one witness but when you get a number of them from different, unconnected places it starts to add up.

Right, exactly, and when they know things that there's no way for them to have researched. For example, N says that when Matushka Olga encountered her she treated her as if she was pregnant and as if she was about to give birth and that surprised me, and yet when I mentioned this to my wife she says 'well, of course, Matushka Olga was the village midwife,' but I didn't know that and that is not in the book. So there was no way for her to know that because I didn't know it, so you know you put all these things together and you realize, no, this is something extraordinary, something from God.

Fr. Andrew: the story about St. Yakov is very fascinating because how many years was it, like it would be like a hundred years or more wouldn't it before...

From 1962 it was one hundred and twenty years before anybody ever thought of him.

Fr. Andrew: and so there was no real organic kind of veneration that arose from him even though he was a very holy man up there and it just sort of, it started fresh with the discovery of his journals and everything

Almost, I mean this was one part, one piece of the puzzle that I can't connect. The largest church in the Kuskokwim Delta is named St. Yakov in Napaskiak. It could be that they chose that name posthumously, after he had died, to honour him, I don't know. I don't know why Napaskiak church is named St. Jacob. They call it Jacob, of course, in English, but Yakov and their tropar is "Holy Apostle Yakova," so they clearly named that church in Napaskiak after St. Yakov which may have been to honour Netsvetov, who wasn't a saint so they had to chose his patron saint

sort of like St. Tikhon's Monastery being named for St. Tikhon of Zadonsk even though they were honouring Bishop Tikhon Belavin, the Patriarch.²⁵

Fr. Andrew: Right, although they got the Seminary right a few years later.

Exactly, so I don't know because that church was built in the early twentieth century, nobody, when I came in the 1970's there was alive who could remember why they chose that name for that particular parish but that's the only hint that there may have been a veneration for Yakov Netsvetov in the generation that knew him.

Fr. Andrew: Yeah, but then it would have died from there.

Yes, it absolutely did die, I mean, by the time I came, St. Yakov church was named only for the Apostle James, had no connection, nobody said, 'but we really named it after this missionary who came a hundred fifty years ago,' that memory had completely faded. It may have been there briefly, you know, like a nova, a lot of veneration for St. Yakov, for Fr. Yakov Netsvetov among people who knew him and who he baptized, but certainly a hundred years later there was no recollection of that left whatsoever.

Fr. Andrew: It's interesting because all these many paths to end up on the calendar or even locally venerated. One of the questions I had was, 'is it okay if somebody kind of becomes the advocate for the saint and kind of, you know, reintroduces him. I think you've kind of fulfilled that role – I have been doing all sorts of phone interviews with the original canonization committee and all this stuff and with the Fr. Oliver's stuff, and the stuff that went on there – and I've heard a little criticism by even people within our ranks that; 'oh, well you know there's no organic move... maybe he was right when he was here and everything, but nobody's really doing that now and it's being driven from the top down.'

²⁵ Patriarch St. Tikhon of Russia (1917-1925).

Archbishop Seraphim was promoting Arseny and therefore it's not valid somehow. It just doesn't make sense.

You are talking about Arseny, in your case.

Fr. Andrew: Yes, I'm talking about Arseny, yeah. I'm trying to put all this together, the different pathways. It seems to me that people want to always put something in a box.

I think that, first of all, the first principle is there is no consistent means by which someone is added to the canon of saints. There are all these different paths, the question then is; why bother? Why do we need another saint, we have thousands already? We have plenty; you can't remember all of them for even one day because there is two dozen for everyday if you do all of them from all of the world.

Fr. Andrew: I have actually heard that, about North America 'oh you guys have enough saints over there already'. I mean I have actually heard that.

That's kind of silly to me, now because it is showing that each is unique path to holiness, but it also says that it can happen here. It's not just the martyrs of the second century who were thrown to the lions in Ancient Rome. There are other paths to sanctity besides martyrdom or monasticism. I think it's particularly since our calendar is kind of crowded with martyrs and monks, it's important to glorify and highlight the holiness of lives that didn't necessarily follow either martyrdom or monasticism. Because otherwise, I'm not going to be monk and I don't plan to be martyred and therefore I will never be saint and yet the Scripture demands that you must be holy as I am holy, you must be perfect as I am perfect, you are the people of God called to be saints and so forth, so the continuing canonization of saints, I mean when I did this last icon that now has eighteen saints on it, I said 'that's never going to be done.' You can never say that this is now a finished thing; you can't have all the saints of North America there are and ever will be. That would be renouncing the mission of the Church. The only cut off date is the Parousia, but as long as this world continues in history and in time, there have got

to be people, in all walks of life and circumstances, who are achieving a level of unity with God and therefore of holiness that is unique and has never been accomplished in exactly that way ever before. But it does say, by their personal holiness, their personal lives, that therefore the Christian life, the fulfillment of the Christian life is attainable to all of us. If we have a cut off date, then it's too late for me so why bother. But you see the whole point is that, no, holiness is attainable and you have your own life and if you live according to that, if you develop the talents that God gives you whether it's one, five or ten, if you live according to the gospel and you apply that to your circumstances, your life, then that's your salvation, and many paths may be unnoticed, like Matushka Olga, may be rather ordinary compared to those surrounding them, and I think even if we have thousands or tens of thousands of canonized saints, the message certainly is; if there's this many that the Church has officially recognized, there are infinitely more who have gone unrecognized, because one of the characteristics of holiness is humility. Matushka Olga and Fr. Yakov Netsvetov are two wonderful cases where, in their humility, we would have never even noticed them. It's God who had brought them to our attention.

Fr. Andrew: That's the beauty of the organic nature and the many path natures, there's as many paths as there is people, almost really, if you think of it.

Right, exactly. I think that's the first principle that differentiates us from the Catholics who believe that there is a certain fixed criterion that need to apply to every saint. As far as I know, for example, I don't know of a lot of miracles attributed to St. Innocent Veniaminov, and on the other hand for that matter, even St. Herman had two prophetic, true and prophetic prophecies during his life; the tidal wave with the icon of the forest fire, but the healings that are attributed to him are all posthumous, they all happened to people who had visited his gravesite. So you never know, it ain't over till it's over.

Fr. Andrew: Well probably as soon as we try to define it too much, then I suppose God has to do a different thing just to show us we don't have a handle on it.

I think that maybe that's the key here; holiness is sort of wonderful and in the literal sense, full of wonder. It's not something you analyze, it's not something you can contain, it not something really that you can define, but when you see it you know what it is.

Fr. Andrew: So for a saint you really; you can't just say 'oh he can't be a saint because he didn't follow this path or he didn't follow that path,' that's a totally spurious argument.

No, there isn't any. I mean they need to perform so many miracles?? Well Batushka, St Simeon didn't perform any during his life; the miracles have come only in the century after his repose. Matushka Olga wasn't recognized as a saint particularly, she was a typical pious woman of her generation. And there's St. Yakov whose life is totally unique, nobody else was the first Aleut priest ever ordained, who spent twenty years in the Aleutian Islands, for the first time translating the Gospels into the Aleut language, no one else could have done, and then to be also the first to learn Yup'ik, and begin the evangelization of the Yup'ik Eskimo people, and lived under deplorable conditions of which he survived for thirty-eight years of ministry.

Fr. Andrew: Well, that's great; you've really helped a lot, actually.

Well, I'm glad. I mean if you are looking for a criterion, my answer would be there isn't any, except of course those basic things that Fr. Hopko writes about; all the saints have certain things in common; they prayed, they fasted, they attended church, they received the sacraments, after that they each have their own unique story. And their example inspires the next generation to carry on their work. Our Eskimo people read the journals of St. Yakov and they say 'and we dare to complain when the plane heater isn't working,' you know, when he had to paddle in the kayak or where he had to travel by dog sled and we abandon ship when the furnace isn't keeping the church warm enough for us to have a Liturgy, when he had his in the tent at 30 below zero. And we complain when the mail doesn't come and he got his once a year and not always. That's just it, the people read his diaries

and they said 'we think we have it tough, by comparison, we have it so easy.' Not that the life in rural Alaska is easy, they have to travel maybe by snow machine, but the snow machine goes way faster and they have way better warmer clothes, and they have way better heated houses than the tents, and the dog sleds and the ice jams that Yakov Netsvetov had to deal with. By comparison, like I said, people just read them and said 'this guy has got to be; this is a saint or there is no chance for us.' I think that's probably the most appropriate response to any hagiography, you read their lives and you say, 'yeah, this is really an ideal to be achieved, thank God that they ever passed our way.' And they give us hope that sanctity, holiness is something we can all, unity with God is something we can all, obtain, because they did and they showed the way.

Fr. Andrew: I understand controversy is quite common, like St. John of San Francisco even, I think even though a lot of people knew he was a saint, there seemed to be a lot of controversy swirling around his becoming canonized as well...

Yeah, well there was a lot of jealousy in the Holy Synod; he was really a renegade within in the Synod Abroad. He wasn't very popular with his brother bishops while he was alive and with the other side; being in the Synod Abroad, which was a sectarian schismatic group not in communion with the rest of the Orthodox world. 'Why are we canonizing this guy who is basically a schismatic?' I don't think there is anyone who got unanimous approval. After all, Jesus Christ didn't.

Fr. Andrew: I think Nektarios, if you read his story, he certainly wasn't all that popular with some of the higher figures. It seems like a lot of his criticism seems to come from quite high up sometimes.

Right, and it can be kind of professional jealousy but whatever those passions or temptations are, the Church has somehow overcome them, by popular demand in some cases. There was a lot of opposition to the canonization of Seraphim of Sarov. It was the Tsar who stepped in and said 'the guy is a saint, canonize him.' It was impossible to imagine (the opposition) because he's so popular and the stories

about him are so enriching but no, the Holy Synod was not at all friendly I think it was the Procurator of the Holy Synod, too, was; 'this is just superstition, all of this stuff didn't happen, this is all kind of Medieval piety.' There were those who adamantly said 'no, this is all true and this is what really happened, and the conversation with Motovilov is a play by play account.' And so they had to decide whether it was all hype, fabrication or if it was true and therefore sacred. It took the Emperor to step in and say 'canonize him.' The problem is we don't have any emperors to do that for our saints, we have to fight it out now.

Interview with Fr. Daniel Ressetar **August 13 2014**

In the summer of 1945, as World War II was ending, Fr. Daniel just missed the draft ... and so he ended up at St. Tikhon's at seminary:

Every couple of weeks I would do a shift looking after St. Arseny at his house. He would wake up in the middle of the night and would drag his foot around upstairs ("he was wounded at a parish meeting") and frighten me. He used to ask me to braid his hair before he went to bed. He used to leave his house quite early to go to Vespers and Liturgies as he couldn't move very quickly because of his injury. There were no cars at the seminary to pick him up so he would just struggle and drag himself to church services. He never served, but always attended, and we would always go and get his blessing before serving. He had had a parish at Mayfield [Pennsylvania], but by 1945 could no longer serve and so stayed at St. Tikhon's.

Fr. Daniel remembers his funeral quite well:

Metropolitan Leonty went to give him a farewell kiss and didn't like the way his hands were folded in the casket so he raised them up higher. When Met. Leonty turned away, Archbishop Arseny slowly lowered his hands as if he were still alive. "I remember thinking to myself that you can't tell Archbishop Arseny how to lay,

he'll do it by himself anyway, don't correct him." ...All day during his funeral it was misty and very rainy and cloudy, but when we went outside, all of a sudden the sun came out, shining on his casket. As we went to the cemetery we had lots of sun, it surprised me how nice it was, how the weather turned good when we buried him. I also dug his grave, it took a long time. Fr. John Rosko of blessed memory, he and I took care of digging his grave. It was dug above my head so at least 6 feet deep, they didn't have machines in those days so I had the honour of digging his grave. There were a lot of priests and parishioners from Mayfield [that] came to the funeral.... He was very well respected; we knew he was one of the founders of the monastery; when I was at St. Tikhon's as we had a living founder with us and that was really something. He was very respected by the priests. The people didn't know that much about him except at Mayfield. They knew about him and revered him. To top it off my dad was an Orthodox priest and served for about 7 years at Mayfield.

Interview with V. Rev. John Perich²⁶
August 16, 2014

Fr. John said that both Arseny and Leonty should have been canonized many years ago already. He said the nonsense regarding his supposedly having a child was all complete fabrication and he had proof that he would get to me later, as he knew of a tombstone that conclusively showed the story was false. He also mentioned his Grandfather Fr. Joseph Pishtey was the sole executor of Archbishop Arseny's will, and that he (Fr. John) had a great number of Archbishop Arseny's personal effects – many of which he had donated to the library at St. Tikhon's. He said that Archbishop Arseny was a man of great sanctity and greatly respected by all for his holiness. He mentioned that he knew of three people who were all in their 90's who were still very alert mentally and had very good personal recollections of the Archbishop, one of them being his 96-year old grandmother, and that he would send me their contact information so I

²⁶ Very reverend John J. Perich, a parish priest in Gradyville, Pennsylvania.

could do interviews with them. As he was on holidays at the time and I was caught without my tape recorder when he called, this conversation was not captured but I am hoping to do a follow up recorded interview with Fr. John in the near future.

Interview with Kyrill Holden²⁷

August 13 2014

My mother told us a lot about St. Tikhon living in their house, and [her] throwing rose petals before him at church. I have some pictures of St. Arseny out at Pigeon Lake relaxing. Fr. Korchinsky bought the RCMP building that he then converted into St. Barbara's in 1901. He was at St. Barbara's until about 1907, but he lived at the headquarters – the cathedral in Wostok [Alberta] built on Nemerski's land where the first Orthodox Liturgy [in Canada] was celebrated. Around 1904, there started to be a huge legal conflict over the church at Star over who owned the Church, the Uniates or the Orthodox. It took over 10 years as it went through every court available and finally ended up at the Privy Council in England. It was the longest running court case in the Canadian court system at the time. It was pivotal in having the Church incorporated as St. Tikhon's legal council instructed him that unless the Church was an incorporated entity, there would be no sense in even pursuing the court case as there would be no official incorporated entity to award the church to even if he won. So St. Tikhon first tried to incorporate nationally with the Government of Canada. However, he tried to do so, going to the parliament where he won the vote to incorporate in parliament. But when the bill, which had been passed by parliament, went to the Senate, the Senate which was full of Liberal Catholics from Quebec turned it down. The [Roman] Catholics were violently opposed to allowing the incorporation because the dispute was after all between the [Roman] Catholics and the Orthodox regarding ownership of the Star Church, so they refused to let the bill pass through the Senate. St. Tikhon then

²⁷ Kyrill Holden – a historian of the Orthodox Church in Canada, a parishioner of St. Herman Church, in Edmonton, Alberta.

went and incorporated Province by Province individually starting with the NWT [North Western Territories] where the disputed Church was. So we have a long history of partisan politics in Canada.

Arseny was very flowery in his language. When he wrote anything or gave his sermons, my mother said that people were just awestruck by him. I've read other reports from sort of the competitors, the Uniates themselves. There are some history books that were written by some of the old-timers there, and they said the same thing: they considered him to be a formidable kind of enemy of the great [Roman] Catholic Church, because he was so good at converting people and he had such a talent for oratory. He very much connected with people when he spoke and even the Uniates used to call him the John Chrysostom of Canada. He would talk to the Uniates about their tribulations on coming to Canada, and how they no longer heard the nightingale singing in the forest and really was able to reach the Galician and Bukovina settlers invoking all sorts of memories and then they would convert to the Orthodox Church. He was very good and active in converting these Uniates back to Orthodoxy and he became a force to be reckoned with and this was why he was shot.

[I] have a note that St. Arseny came and served on June 5 1909 for 4 days as they had just finished building the new Church at St. Barbara's and then in 1909 he moved the Canadian headquarters for the Church to Edmonton.

Kyrill shared his grandmother's recollection that St. Arseny spent a lot of time in the Edmonton rural areas. Kyrill's grandfather Theodore Fehr had built a church on his property in Rabbit Hills:

They had about 10 families from the Galician area that attended, the majority of the people would go back and forth between the Uniates and the Orthodox Churches until Arseny came around, that was a real catalyst. Arseny did have the gift of conversion there's no question about that. He travelled a lot into the areas where the Uniates were. The other element in understanding the history of the area that was critical. The big problem in all of these areas was in having clergy

that could serve on a more regular basis. It's just like today, it's no different, how often can clergy go out and serve the rural areas? In those days the rural parishes were not like they are today with 2 or 3 people of even 10, they sometimes had hundreds of people. Alberta was rural, the people and big families didn't settle in the cities, they settled on the farms. Smokey Lake... when they had big celebrations sometimes close to a thousand people ... would show up. There were phenomenal crowds, and there are photographs; so these people wanted and needed clergy to be there on a more regular basis. The first missionaries [priests]²⁸ – they came maybe once a year at first, and then subsequently you had 2 or 3 permanent missionaries like Korchinsky was settled at Wostok and Edmonton was just kind of secondary to him. Then the kids would come into Edmonton to take further schooling and so the Church in Edmonton would be needed by the Slavic children who had moved into the city. Many would work in the mines in the Crowsnest area to supplement their income. They would walk all the way down to the Crowsnest in the winter to work in the mines – especially the Carpathian Russians.

St. Tikhon stayed with Kyrill's grandparents 3 times on his trips and would sometimes babysit his great aunt:

Once St. Tikhon was on a trip to a Parish and was travelling with the horse and wagon and just before they arrived for the celebration the horses bolted and threw him out of wagon and his foot was very badly damaged and it took months to heal. He still managed to walk to the Church and serve. Another time he was travelling by train up from Calgary to Edmonton and when the train went over Black Mud Creek – just north of the present airport, the train fell through the bridge, and he was caught in the train wreck. Another trip all his baggage was lost so he had no vestment to serve with.

Arseny never spent too much time in the area but made a big impact especially on his first tour of duty (1907 -1910). In 1926, the [publication of] *Canadian Orthodox Missionary* was either started by him or was taken over by him as editor. He also

²⁸ Non-resident, visiting priests.

started the Sifton Monastery in 1926.²⁹ When he came in 1926 it was a very confusing time as there were so many competing and acrimonious Orthodox groups, and lawsuits over churches, etc. The Ukrainian nationalistic movement had grown up, the Living Church from the Russian communists, the Seraphimites, the false Presbyterian Independent Greek Orthodox Church, Bishop Adam Philipowsky the Carpathian Russian who claimed to be the legitimate Metropolitan who caused great difficulty at St. Barbara's, launching numerous court cases etc., so the situation in Canada had greatly deteriorated since his [Arseny's] first visit in 1909.

The unfortunate thing about all of the conflict was that it was not spiritual, if people had concentrated on Orthodoxy it wouldn't have mattered so much, it was this ethnic business taken to the extreme. That is what I appreciate about the current OCA situation is that it isn't ethnic but has every ethnic group involved and is based on the English, like St. Tikhon originally was trying to put in place. Although most of the time when St. Tikhon came to Canada he was coming up to put out brush fires and court cases between the Unites or later when the Bishop Seraphim fiasco occurred, and [in the 1920s] all of the many uncannical ordinations were occurring and caused so many problems. When St. Tikhon came up and had to decide what to do with these children who had been baptized by Seraphimites because they had been baptized by a schismatic and completely non-acceptable priest with no credentials or legitimacy to their ordination. He refused to re-baptize them and insisted they could come fully into the Church through Charismation and they should not be re-baptized. This was an important decision because this false Bishop Seraphim had as many as 60,000 followers. Deacon (Now Priest) Andrew wrote an essay on these Seraphimites.

²⁹ Sifton, Manitoba, is about 3 hours north-west of Winnipeg by car.

Interview with Fr. Kaleeg Hainsworth³⁰ **August 15 2014**

General Background

There is a book out there with work from Fr. Kaleeg and Fr. Lawrence but Fr. Kaleeg knows very little about it as he was never part of the process of putting the book together. The Akathist he believes was prepared using much of his work on the Vita history for the veneration process that Fr. Kaleeg was involved in. He started by doing some research on Archbishop Arseny when at St. Vlad's at an oral history class when he took him as a topic as not much had yet been written in about 2001. Fr. Kaleeg went to Syosset and St. Vlad's Seminary and researched what was contained in these archives. He also got some information from Archbishop Seraphim and interviewed a few people. He obtained a manuscript of the trial from Syosset, and it was missing the last few pages, which had been apparently excised from the report. The report had been obtained by Syosset many years earlier, and was missing the pages originally. Fr. Anatoly³¹ then was able to obtain some information from Ukraine that explained a little regarding his time in the Russian Empire. For many years, some in Canada had been venerating Arseny in Canada and considered him saintly and he had had a profound impact on Canadian life and Orthodoxy. The veneration was largely from people who had had a direct experience of St. Arseny when they were young. Fr. Kaleeg wrote and distributed his first paper fairly quickly – before he went to Victoria. Archbishop Seraphim had suggested the name St. Arseny for the Victoria mission but referring to a different St. Arseny (of Konevits) as the approval for our St. Arseny had not yet been approved. However, as Fr. Morbey³² had earlier started the Victoria mission and called it All Saints, when

³⁰ Father John (Kaleeg) Haisworth, a priest in the Orthodox Church of America during the period addressed here, currently on leave of absence.

³¹ Fr. Anatoly of Montreal Sts. Peter and Paul Church, formerly of Winnipeg.

³² Very Reverend Andrew Morbey, currently of St. Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Fr. Kaleeg revitalized it and got it going again they elected to keep the name All Saints of Alaska. They did name a camp after Archbishop Arseny later. There were a couple of miracles associated with St. Arseny which were forwarded to Fr. Kaleeg, one in Australia and one in Canada. All of this activity was during 2002-04. The Metropolitan's office then recruited Fr. Kaleeg to serve on the canonization committee which he did serve on for a number of years. While on this committee Fr. Kaleeg prepared a much larger Vita with many of the documents included and footnoted.

Fr. Kaleeg:

A number of years later – a new young priest and fairly controversial figure – Fr. Oliver Herbal appeared on the scene. I will speak openly and candidly about my personal opinions – these are not sanctified and are only my personal opinions. He was a controversial person who felt that it was his God given right to speak openly and truthfully about everything under the sun. Openly yes, but whether it was truthful or not is a matter of opinion. He started a blog, an Orthodox history blog which was piggybacked on his already controversial involvement in the diocese of the West, Archbishop Job's diocese. He went to Antiochian Churches here and there and spoke quite freely as he had a megaphone called the internet and a blog, so on that he built this Orthodox History website. One of the things that he did was that he contacted me and he said he would like a copy of the court documents. I told him sure, go to Syosset, but he didn't want to go to Syosset as it was too far and too difficult. I said well, ... I have it in a small box and I'm sorry but I'm running a church, an outreach center, a camp, a campus ministry, I'm writing, I'm speaking, and most of all, I'm raising a family and dealing with a number of other issues, and I just don't have the time, or money, or interest in mailing out the entire report. In any case, not too much longer later he published this hatchet job on Archbishop Arseny in which he said that his 'so-called' sanctity had been trumped up, that he was convicted of sexual misconduct or sexual crime, that he had apparently raped a young woman on the way home from Church and that she had delivered his child, or that it was a bit murky whether she had delivered the child or not. And so he kind of conducted it in the most pugnacious way. He really

went in guns blazing and caused quite a stir, at which point the Metropolitan, Herman at the time, was aghast because Herman himself was under such intense speculation, and further to that actually Herman himself did not understand the nature of the Internet and all this bad press, and he didn't want anything to do with it, and so the canonization [committee] freaked out and they dropped it, and his name then just became something that was dangerous to speak about. The truth is however that he [Archbishop Arseny] was acquitted of the crime,³³ she [the young woman in question] recanted as she admitted she had been paid by the Ukrainian Catholic team. They had done this because Archbishop Arseny had actually done quite a lot of work and converted many Ukrainian Catholics to the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is a very interesting set of court documents. You get the sense that it wasn't a fair trial, it wasn't even meant to be. It was a way to try to slow him down, to discredit him and to discredit the Eastern Church as well. Further to that Archbishop Arseny was truly the Canadian Orthodox Chrysostom, but he was just terrible at all things administrative, so there are examples of him not sending money from the Canadian Archdiocese down to Syosset, there was all kinds of confusion, he was trying his best ... he was dealing with tremendous problems within the Metropolitanate of Canada, and really was under a lot of stress. One thing that is for sure though is that he accomplished an astonishing amount of work, and was loved by everyone that he associated within Canada. So much so as I'm sure you have already read, that even when he was in a remote monastery in Serbia having fled Russia, that he was found by the Canadians and petitioned to return home and take on the diocese again. He was loved, he was a very strict man, he set up the order of service to be correctly and beautifully served and that the priests preached well and with clarity and rhetoric and training, and he himself of course was a fiery, poetic, profound, astonishing preacher by all accounts. Even the Czar himself had his transcripts sent to him in Russia from Canada,³⁴ so his reputation was enormous and his work was astonishing, and of course he not only founded St. Tikhon's monastery, in his return he founded St.

³³ Archbishop Arseny was never charged with any crime, it was in fact Archbishop Arseny who filed a libel suit against an Ukrainian language newspaper accusing him of rape.

³⁴ During his initial work in Canada, before World War I.

Tikhon's seminary as well. It really is remarkable and it makes it all the sadder that Fr. Oliver decided that – and I remember at the time being beside myself because I was reading his work and he decided that I was fair game as well – he said that I was afraid of the court documents because they would reveal that we were just trying to push something through and that I didn't want his trial to be revealed, and I remember thinking at the time 'you could not have gotten it more wrong'. In fact, at the time I remember thinking of Malcolm Muggeridge's critique of journalism in which he said, 'journalists have their place, but honestly as a journalist, if a journalist had been reporting from Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, he would have been interviewing Pilot's wife, rather than standing at the foot of the cross.' I remember thinking this of Fr. Oliver. Yes, you can speak loudly and you can say the things that no-one will say but so does the devil, so does everybody, who cares, that's irrelevant. But it is a wise, measured, thoughtful voice that is necessary in dealing with this issue. But you know he got a lot of press from it because scandal sells, and he built it up into a scandal. You know, that's his thing to wear, but nevertheless that's were it pretty much ended for Archbishop Arseny at that point. And then of course, following on the heels of that, the Archdiocese was rocked by what happened with Archbishop Seraphim, and that further buried the issue or the question of his glorification as a saint. God's will is sovereign so certainly we have to accept that this is His will, and perhaps even Archbishop Arseny's by his prayers. But nevertheless, that's a brief overview since 2001 of Archbishop Arseny's journey in the hearts and minds of some of us in the Orthodox Church in Canada. It is what it is, and whatever God's will is, for it has and will be revealed.

It is a topic that is difficult for some people to talk about for several reasons, first of all because he [Archbishop Arseny] was so associated with Archbishop Seraphim, and secondly because of Fr. Oliver's hatchet job. I think that your writing this paper is actually a really wonderful thing because at least it gets it back and gets a discussion going. It would be nice to see it on a few websites if not even on the Archdiocesan website. I was profoundly impacted by my working on St. Arseny's life and his words. Especially his words that he delivered during his homily when he was ordained to the rank of bishop in preparation for returning to Canada, to

begin his work as the bishop in the Metropolitanate of Canada. He gave an astonishing homily – off the cuff I might add – from the Ambo, which was more like an acceptance speech than anything else, and his last words were “I am coming. My heart is ready O my God, my heart is ready.” And those words and many others of his really did impact me a tremendous amount, as did his tireless efforts. He was friends of many of the Orthodox luminaries of the day, he was friends with St. Tikhon, St. Raphael Hawaweeny, he was friends with St. Nikolai Velimirovic. He was associated with many people of distinction and was considered himself to be a person of distinction. There were these clouds in his life and in that way maybe he is a very modern person, it is hard to tell just what was going on in certain regards, but he possessed an enormous amount of sanctity, holiness, prayerfulness, devotion, and I think that really reflected in his preaching. But I think that he was just plagued with administrative difficulties which he found difficult. There are visionaries and there are aristocrats and administrators, there are all types that make the world go round and he certainly was a visionary and struggled with administrative things. I think that what we came up against was fear, the fear of a headline; “Orthodox Church canonizes sexual deviant” or something, probably a headline that Fr. Oliver would have written, so I guess that they were afraid of that, they were afraid of everything. That is really the case in so much of the world anyway, whether it is in the Church or anywhere else, a case of fear, and also vulnerability too. Increasingly I feel that leadership, genuine leadership, visionary leadership, the kind of leadership that people respond to and follow and seek inspiration from, requires a person to be very courageous and vulnerable. Because as soon as you do anything you risk either failure, which is fine because you can’t succeed in anything unless you fail at something and that’s part of doing the work, or you meet with a mountain of criticism, and everything you do becomes spotlighted. So it’s a terrible responsibility to be a visionary or a genuine leader in the Church, because you’re just not going to get through it unscathed. So there really are a lot of issues and so Archbishop Arseny’s case comes up as an example of how so many different aspects of church life, and modern church life as well, as he was subjected to modern fears and the internet and many other things as well. It is a very interesting aspect that probably should be written about now-a-days as well.

Interview with Fr. Lawrence Farley

August 19 2014

I did write a set of services for St. Arseny at Archbishop Seraphim's request a long time ago, when it looked like the OCA canonization of Archbishop Arseny might be more imminent than it's probably going to turn out to be. He said: would you have a look at this material, and the upshot of the whole thing was that I ended up doing an entire service for him, vespers and matins and an akathist too, I think. So then it was, because if you are going to canonize him you are going to eventually need this stuff. I probably could have saved myself the trouble since it is rather unlikely that he is going to be canonized, but anyway it was published, I wrote it and he blessed it for use for anyone who wants to use it. And it was published by Alexander Press and John Hadjinicolaou. What may be of more use to you than my liturgical thing was a really good and thorough biography of St. Arseny, or as he was called then Archbishop Arseny, of his life written by priest John Hainsworth, otherwise known as Kaleeg who did an excellent job on the thing. There are pictures too, so but that might be why my name keeps coming up, not that I am an expert.

How I do an Akathist, because I have done a few of them by now, is to go through the biographical life of the person and start writing. And try to not just throw praise words around, but to incorporate much of the biographic material into the akathist so that when you are finished singing the Akathist, you actually know a little bit of the person's life and it kind of goes chronologically from the beginning to the end.

Part of the difficulty [with the state of the canonization process] is because this thing kind of hangs over Archbishop Arseny. If memory serves he was accused I think in a Uniate newspaper, of sexual impropriety. And I think he sued them for libel and the thing was never resolved, that's the problem, it was kind of settled out of court, as a lot of these things are. So this is kind of a problem because, was it settled out of court because the Archbishop ran out of money, or just didn't want to

fight anymore, or like – that’s the problem. You never know what actually happened. If you are going to, especially in that particular thing, if he was accused of stealing from Wal-Mart that’s not great, but in this particular climate if you are accused of sexual impropriety, clergy accused of sexual crimes, it’s all over the news. Every three months there is something else on CBC about some bishop or priest or deacon in the [Roman] Catholic church being caught doing God knows what, so this is you know, the optics are not unimportant. You know you can say, ‘well that’s unfair.’ Well welcome to the human race, life is unfair. And optics matter. If you are going to preach the Gospel, optics are important. That’s why St. Paul tried to become all things to all men because he said it really matters what people think. That’s why he made a point of working as a tent maker, supporting himself so that the optics wouldn’t look like he was just preaching the Gospel and make a buck out of it. St. Paul didn’t disdain the optics, they are important, and in the same way it’s important for the church not only to do the right thing, but to be seen to do the right thing. So that means in this particular case it’s difficult to say damn the torpedoes, we think he was innocent, so we are going to canonize him anyway. I think before one could sensibly proceed with the canonization, and have a clear conscience about the optics, one has to get it a little bit more resolved than it seems to be at the present time. I don’t know how you would do that. If you could come up with some letters when someone says, “gee I slandered him and libeled him and don’t I feel sorry.’ That would do it. But in the absence of that it seems to be insoluble. And the question is, if she did recant, then you wonder why was it settled out of court, if it was as clear as that, then it wouldn’t be settled out of court, then the judge would say clearly this lady lied, I find on behalf of the plaintiff Archbishop Arseny. You sued them and you win your case. If she did recant, you wonder why that wasn’t the end of it right there. Why was it settled out of court? The fact that it was settled out of court means that there was enough ambiguity to at least bedevil the optics kind of thing.

If one can get it resolved through historical research, that would probably clear the way. Then one could say to the detractors of Archbishop Arseny, look here is the evidence that it was a put up job as it were, but I think one needs to do that. You

can't just say 'well we can't prove it one way or the other but we like him and moreover, we need a Canadian saint.'

Fr. Andrew: I had found in talking with people involved in the canonization committee process so far that they didn't put much stock in Fr. Oliver's analysis of the trial transcripts.

I'm glad you phoned me because I was there throughout the entirety of this on the archdiocesan council, and it seemed to me as if we just simply wanted a Canadian saint. I thought, 'Archbishop Arseny like for what?' I mean it's kind of like everyone has got a saint. You know you got the Americans are canonizing guys; quick, where's one for us? I thought that it was a matter not so much like there is this ground swell of devotion to Archbishop Arseny. I mean people know him yeah, of course people know him, it's not that long ago, comparatively speaking. I mean the rush for, you know it's not like Herman of Alaska where people are talking about him and painting his icons, and there is this ground swell of support. They weren't trying to put the seal on this gusher of devotion that was happening to Archbishop Arseny, the whole project was driven by the Archdiocese. So you know, as opposed for example, I don't know, to devotion to the Czar or something like this, of which I have none whatsoever. I mean there was a martyred Russian soldier who was beheaded, and people are painting his icon and texts are coming out praising him. And there is kind of like a spontaneous ground swell of devotion to him. Fair enough, the church hasn't canonized him yet. Who knows whether or not they will? But people are already doing this. Or for example Matushka Olga you can find her icon now and she has not, to the best of my knowledge, been canonized yet. But there was nothing like that for Archbishop Arseny. What that tells me is that it's driven by diocesan politics, not by 'look at all these guys praising Archbishop Arseny and praying to him and sticking his picture in an icon corner, we've got to do something about that.' Nobody was doing that.

Don't get me wrong I'm not saying that nobody knew him and that they weren't impressed by him. I'm saying that you don't find the same enthusiasm and demand for his canonization that you would find in, be it martyrs or in Matushka

Olga. If you asked people about him, they will tell you ‘I knew him, I sat on his lap, he was so wonderful, yeah, yeah, yeah.’ But you know, but they are not, it is a different sort of, it is a historical reminiscence, not a spontaneous demand that the person be canonized. If you are going to canonize someone you are generally looking for canonization sets the seal on, what the church is more or less already doing anyway.

I would argue, if I can be the devil’s advocate, all sorts of people live saintly lives. But they don’t all need to end up on an icon somewhere. Anyway, that is my take. I think if you ask the question ‘Was he a wonderful person and a saintly person?’ They are going to say yes. But my point is you have to ask the question. Where, as in the case of this martyred young man in Russia, there is a demand that he be canonized, people are already painting his icon, it’s streaming myrrh and stuff like that. Whereas if you don’t have to ask the question, ‘What do you think of this person?’ No, no, they are already more or less petitioning, mothers, grandmothers, young people. There is this ground swell of devotion. I was not aware of it at all until it was brought to archdiocesan council about ‘we should push for the canonization of Archbishop Arseny.’

Interview with Fr. Matthew Francis
August 21 2014

We started doing some research relating to Vladyka Arseny in 2006, 2007, and then more recently in about 2010 or so. I wrote the article that’s on the OrthodoxHistory.org website. And part of that as well was that when I had been serving on the Archdiocesan Council, Archbishop Seraphim had asked me to continue the research that had already been taken quite far by Katya Szalasznyj,³⁵ Kyrill Holden, and Fr. Kaleeg Hainsworth. They had actually done most of the

³⁵ Katya Szalasznyj – an archivist for the Archdiocese of Canada, a member of the St. Arseny Canonization Committee.

initial work. I think Fr. Anthony Estrabrooks³⁶ had also been involved in that as well. They prepared, for instance, the historical chronology and the vita that are published and are available, I think, with *the Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*.³⁷ All that information they really pulled together. And then I didn't find a whole lot of new information. I talked with some of those Archpriests from Pennsylvania that had known Vladyka Arseny and some of the ones that you have spoken with as well, and filled in some of that information a little bit. And then I talked with Fr. John Perich as well, and he had all sorts of information but the most recent research that I had been trying to do, and sort of stalled as well was related to the shooting that took place near Canora, Saskatchewan. As well and unfortunately I have not been able to get very far into that because all of those records are in Ottawa. Because for RCMP records relating to the person who apparently came to a meeting of the clergy, I think it was in 1935, in Canora and did shoot Vladyka Arseny. I understand there was a charge and so I am just searching through that and Fr. Andrew Piasta actually has some material relating to that although he didn't have the name of the individual who was charged, and that's the way that all of the court records are recognized, by the name of the accused. ... In the [files] names of the either the RCMP or the court records so those are now all in Ottawa, and in order to access them you actually have to physically go to the library at Archives Canada. So somebody in Ottawa or somebody would need go there and actually physically go in and access the records, because they are all in archive format now and you can't get them on line or anything. When you are in Ottawa if you have time you should try to find the time to go over. That information, I think, is actually very, very relevant to all of this as well.

I am very convinced of Archbishop Arseny's very significant contributions to the Orthodox faith and the church in North America, but also his legacy of holiness, in several very significant periods throughout his life, both in Canada and the US. I

³⁶ Priest Anthony (Spencer) Estabrooks of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Director of St Arseny Institute.

³⁷ The Canonization Committee, "The Life of Archbishop Arseny," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. I, No. 1 <<http://www.cjoc.ca/pdf/TheLifeofArchbishopArseny.pdf>>

think that incident where he was shot, which affected him later like Fr. Dan Ressetar talks about how he was sort of crippled as a result. And so that is as a result of this incident. And it also relates to how there was sort of ongoing turmoil and conflict that was taking place in North America, and I mean it relates as well to his ministry in Europe as well, in Ukraine and so on, particularly conflict between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics within the early period and in the [19]30's; so the whole incident with the libel trial in Pennsylvania has to be understood in the context of this conflict.

The libel trial is very much certain faction of Greek Catholic individuals who were choosing to bring this against Vladyka Arseny and then later, from what I understand of the shooting in Canora, it was the same situation. We don't have any of the information actually in terms of formal records; I have never seen anything related to the shooting. The newspaper incident is a separate incident. The newspaper article that I am trying to track down for you is related to something that took place in Europe during the civil war [in Russia] in which he was a prisoner of war for a brief period of time. I will try to find the article. I have it somewhere on a hard drive that I can't access anymore. I am going to try to access it, and but the incident in Canora in I think 1935 we don't have records for, I think all of the records would be in Ottawa. I think you can search some local newspapers. So there is a Canora newspaper. You could search through the 1930s for this Canora paper that would have it or maybe the Yorkton [Saskatchewan] papers. They would refer to it. They would usually have criminal trials that were featured. I was surprised not to find too much about it but Fr. Andrew Piasta mentioned that there are records in the RCMP or court records that are now in Ottawa.

I talked with Fr. Oliver Herbal a couple of times. On the one hand he is a very serious historian, so he was looking at, he wanted to find all of the primary sources and that is good. We should try to find all of the primary sources. For instance, he is the one who found the court transcripts.

Fr. Andrew: I think actually Fr. Kaleeg had them already, but Fr. Oliver got them from the court system, I think.

I don't really know, part of the problem, I think was, I'm not sure where he was coming from in terms of his sort of very, very kind of passionate critique of the whole interest in Vladyka Arseny from our Archdiocese. And I think some of it was relating to a sense that there were some people that Fr. Oliver had known, that felt like the canonization or glorification of St. Raphael had happened too quickly. Fr. Oliver's concerns as far as I understood when I talked to him that he felt that because these accusations were out there against Vladyka Arseny we should just be very cautious and take a much longer view. And so his feeling was that it was very premature for our Archdiocese to move ahead with local veneration. So that was his perspective, he was very concerned that there would somehow come out some sort of incontrovertible evidence of Vladyka Arseny being guilty of the accusations or something like that. And our having already proceeded with glorification would bring scandal upon the church. I think that would hopefully be an accurate perspective on where he was coming from. And I can understand that, but it was also at the time of turmoil in the OCA and as well in the Antiochian archdiocese, and Fr. Oliver was sort of right in the middle of all that. He was in the Antiochian diocese at the time but he is now a priest in the OCA in Fargo, North Dakota. I talked to him on the phone two or three times and we sort of agreed to disagree based on the evidence that we had. We had the same evidence, and he was sort of leaning towards an assumption of guilt on the part of Vladyka Arseny, and I didn't see it that way.

Fr. Andrew: I'm having a hard time seeing it – from what I've read and even from reading all of his stuff, it seems to me that he's speculating quite far towards the speculation of guilt with very, very little evidence.

I would agree, particularly based upon the court transcripts.

Fr. Andrew: The court transcripts themselves, if I'm not mistaken, what I'm understanding from reading them a little bit and I'm still in the middle of really

trying to sort through them as well because there is a lot of them, my understanding is that this was a libel case which Archbishop Arseny himself – or Archimandrite Arseny in those days I guess, brought against the Uniates, because the Uniates were slandering him by this in the paper, and he wanted to prove himself [innocent]. And even right in the transcripts, this lady says that the Uniates paid her, and she recanted it had anything to do with him. So I'm trying to figure out how you work around that and decide that he's still guilty.

Yes, exactly, I know, that's exactly correct. It's very clear in the transcripts about the testimony, I mean we don't have the full transcripts, but it's pretty apparent.

Fr. Andrew: Yes, I guess that seems to be the thing that they are hanging on is the fact that 'we don't have full transcripts so it must have been settled out of court, and if it was settled out of court, why would it have been settled out of court unless he ran out of money, but maybe something came up that made him want to just settle it' – you know he's really, really going off on speculation there.

It's all speculation and so I just don't think there's a lot to go on there.

Fr. Andrew: It would be so nice to really put that one to bed though. I'm really hopeful; I've been in e-mail contact quite a bit actually with Fr. John Perich. In his first conversation with me, and I didn't have my tape recorder because I was moving my sister, he said "I can prove what happened there and that he was just protecting one of the seminarians at first and there is a tombstone that can prove," very cryptic kind of thing he said, "there is a tombstone that can prove it and I will get you the information but since then he sent me his 204 page thesis which is quite interesting on the whole history of St. Tikhon, but Fr. John is involved right now with helping another lady, but I am going to continue to track that statement down because it would be very helpful if there is something that can really help on that whole case.

I'm sure there is. I'm quite certain that that's the case. I think we have to just look at the whole picture and I think you are absolutely correct, I think that for one,

raising the whole libel case which Vladyka Arseny brought against the newspaper as any sort of accusation against him is really stretching it. So the important thing to remember there is that he was never charged with anything. I think that it's important to look at the whole sweep of Vladyka Arseny's career, particularly as well, you know we talked about how wherever he went things just came to life and the church just came alive wherever he was. Things began to happen and I think that is the most important thing to acknowledge is that he was, he had this was sort of life-giving energy that he sort-of brought with him. And so you see, institutionally, in St. Tikhon's Monastery, in the life of the church in Canada, Sifton [Manitoba], the monastery at Sifton, the pastoral school at Sifton, some of these other places, when he is over in Europe during the war, his connection as well with his son who has been glorified by the church and was a martyr. I mean, we know from the early church how this, the holiness is shared in families by that love you know and so I think that is something that we see even there.

Fr. Andrew: Can you tell me a little bit about, I understand that at a certain – maybe you weren't around during the early days when this happened – but I understand that at a certain point in time we kind of had got permission from the Synod to call him St. Arseny, locally at least, and that is when we named St. Arseny Institute and different things like that. Do you know, I forgot to ask Vladyka Seraphim about that and I will have to phone him back because he would have been the main one to do that I think but do know anything about that?

Yeah, I think it was done, I know it was at least announced, I think, in one of the articles in *the Canadian Orthodox Messenger*. I think those are all available on the Archdiocesan website and if you go back there you will see reference to the first acknowledgment of the recognition, and the use of St. Arseny, to refer to him there.

Fr. Andrew: That would be very helpful, because you know, sometimes because the thing stalled out a little bit, when you are talking, some people seem to be a

little uncomfortable with that terminology and if we have been allowed to use it and some of us are comfortable and use it.

Yeah, I know it was very common in the Archdiocese, we all said St. Arseny. I think more recently there has been a critique of that, you know, coming from say Fr. Oliver's critique and as well, you know the fact is maybe we should wait, I don't know, I'm not sure where we are on that.

Fr. Andrew: I would think that if we have been given permission then it would be an individual choice to some degree, it's not that it is wrong to call him that, if you feel comfortable doing that.

Exactly. I think we all do that, it's very common with St. Olga, in Alaska. It would be interesting to know, I don't think I have ever seen a Holy Synod document relating to that; however, I think it is a question as well that we have about, a legitimate question: "What is the process by which the church glorifies saints or by which we recognize them to be glorified by God?" Because it seems to me that... so is it a local church, is it an autocephalous church that must glorify, or is it a diocese? This is another question because it seems to me that the glorification of Dionysios,³⁸ the son of Vladyka Arseny, was originally, at least in the Diocese of Kharkiv [in Ukraine]? I think it's been sort of ratified by the whole of the Moscow Patriarchate, at least.

Fr. Andrew: The question of when can you call someone a saint. Obviously there was quite a movement; there were a couple of icons around.

Oh definitely, definitely and I am one hundred percent certain, personally, of his holiness, and I, having spent that time like you, you know, digging in to the research. I just don't see how the life that he kind of brought with him wherever he went could be anything else but the Holy Spirit shining through him.

³⁸ St. Dionysios, a new martyr of the Russian Church, a son of Archbishop Arseny, was murdered by the Bolsheviks during the Great Purges of the 1930s.

Fr. Andrew: I'm very comfortable calling him a saint, simply because of that, and because my understanding is, but I have encountered as I have been talking to people a little resistance to that.

Yeah, I think that is kind of a like a formality kind of thing. Some people are real sticklers for the process and you know I guess we have to give some credence to that and just kind of figure it out I guess.

Fr. Andrew: I think from my understanding from talking to Vladyka Seraphim, the Orthodox church has a lot of kind of things that have come in from the Roman Catholic world because of the Uniates, and different things that have kind of entered that he doesn't feel are Orthodox anyway. And that would be a big one of them, even the whole term 'canonization' and the whole need to have a process. He said there really isn't some kind of a book you can go to, this is the process; it's very much organic and ground up.

Exactly, I think it's much more organic like that. I see here actually, I'm looking at a document on line here, I don't know when it was written. It says something the canonization committee of the Orthodox Church in Canada. I think this is actually just the Vita that Fr. Kaleeg wrote, and it's in the beginning there it talks about, it actually says with the blessing of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America. It says following the Holy Synod's direction, the title of 'Saint' is now used for Archbishop Arseny instead of 'Blessed.' The interesting thing about that is, had they made that decision at the Holy Synod, why did they not complete that with the actual act of glorifying St. Arseny? I think that actually was very far along, I do remember an archdiocesan council meeting in Toronto, when the raising of Vladyka Arseny's relics was discussed. I know the meeting took place in Toronto because I remember the discussions took place at Christ the Saviour Church, but I don't see the minutes here so I will have to track those down.

Interview with Bishop Peter of Cleveland (ROCOR)**August 26 2014**

(Fr. Andrew's notes, not recorded)

At the suggestion of Bishop Irénée I phoned Bishop Peter as Bishop Irénée had heard he might have an objection to glorifying Blessed Archbishop Arseny worth looking into. Bishop Peter's objection was that while he was serving as Saint John's³⁹ cell attendant towards the end of his life, he remembers St. John telling him a story that there was a court case between the Metropolia and ROCOR (he wasn't sure of the details, but thought it might have been over a church building ownership) sometime between 1926 and 1933, where Bishop Arseny was called as a witness for the Metropolia, and when asked if he had ever belonged to ROCOR, he denied it. The lawyer then produced papers showing his ordination by ROCOR in Belgrade in preparation for his arrival as Bishop of Canada in 1926, and asked whose signature this was. Bishop Arseny turned quite red, and the lawyer reached over and flipped his Panagia around saying "you aren't worthy to wear this."⁴⁰ This is the only objection that Bishop Peter had, but the story stuck with him. He said I could include it in my paper but that he didn't wish to be recorded as it would be better to source out the court transcripts and get the confirmation directly as it was only a story he heard from Vladika John that didn't have any other details.

³⁹ St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

⁴⁰ Although ROCOR, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, initially often referred to as "the Synodal church," was formally organized in Yugoslavia between 1920 and 1922, with the blessing of Patriarch of Tikhon of Moscow, it remained and considered itself part of the Patriarchate of Moscow. It was not until 1927, when ROCOR formally distanced itself from both Metropolitan Sergius, a temporary head of the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Soviet regime. After 1927, ROCOR insisted to be speaking as the only legitimate ruling body of the Moscow Patriarchate, and indeed, it became widely known under that title, ROCOR. In other words, Archbishop Arseny's testimony that he never served in ROCOR was correct, as he was consecrated bishop by ROCOR bishops (who at that time considered themselves an inalienable part of the Church in Russia) on behalf of the Moscow Patriarchate. Further, by 1927, ROCOR essentially stepped outside the canonical communion of the Orthodox Churches – other canonical churches (in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, etc.) continued to recognize canonicity of the Patriarchate of Moscow. In short, ROCOR's status within the Orthodox Church changed dramatically from 1926 to 1927.

From my research so far, I understand that ROCOR ordained Fr. Arseny as Bishop of Canada, Winnipeg Episcopate, at the request of the Metropolitan Platon and with the blessing of the Patriarch of Serbia Dmitri. He was consecrated in Belgrade in the Russian Orthodox Church by His Beatitude Antony Metropolitan of Kiev and the Galician Chairman of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, His Grace, Hermogen, Bishop of Ekaterinoslav and Novo-Moscow, and His Grace Gavril of Cheliabinsk and Troitskiy. ROCOR at the time accepted Metropolitan Platon as head of the Archdiocese of North America in the Russian Church, so it is easy to see that as the consecration was ordered and initiated by Metropolitan Platon, that Blessed Archbishop Arseny would have considered his service to be in the Russian Archdiocese of North America, and not in ROCOR. Once Metropolitan Platon declares ROCOR uncannonical the next year in 1927, and ROCOR reacts by attempting to install Bishop Apollinary as head of the Russian Church Bishop Arseny's view of ROCOR would have changed to line up with his Metropolitan's. By 1929, there are court cases being held all over North America over ownership of buildings,⁴¹ most of which ROCOR won, and this story probably comes from one of these court cases. Blessed Archbishop Arseny was fiercely loyal to the Archdiocese of North America under the Russian Church all throughout his time in North America, and would never have considered that his ordination from ROCOR bishops was valid without them recognizing his Metropolitan in the Archdiocese of North America within the Russian Church – which they did at the time of his consecration in Belgrade.

⁴¹ The third party involved in these cases was the so-called "Living Church," a quasi-church group sponsored by the Bolshevik regime in the 1920s.