



HOLY TRANSFIGURATION MONASTERY

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Sept. 27/Oct. 10, 1986
Holy Martyr Callistratus

Most Respected Vladika,

Blagoslovite

I make a poklon and ask your blessing and pray that this letter finds you well and in the grace and peace of Our Saviour. Amen.

Here, glory be to God, we are well.

Because many things have happened over the past few weeks, dear Vladika, the brotherhood asked me to convey to you some of our thoughts on these matters, since you are our ruling bishop.

On Saturday, Sept. 7/20, we received your Ukase regarding the Synod's acceptance of Fr. Panteleimon's resignation and the appointment of Fr. Isaac as temporary administrator until the arrival of Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles, who would assume the position of acting abbot until further instructions were given to him by the Synod of Bishops.

This Ukase came as a surprise to us in view of the fact that you mentioned nothing of this to us or to the local clergy who had visited you only one day before you signed the Ukase. Since you left for Australia immediately, we were not able to communicate with you.

Therefore, at about 10:00 p.m., the evening of the same day we received the Ukase, Fr. Panteleimon telephoned Fr. Sergius in Montreal and explained to him the first reaction of the senior fathers and the legal problems that the Ukase presented in regard to our Typikon and the Monastery's by-laws. He also asked Fr. Sergius to contact you and have you call us collect so that we could explain the whole matter to you.

On the evening of the next day, Sunday, Sept. 8/21, Fr. Panteleimon called a special synaxis of the brotherhood. Of course, they were quite taken aback, since this was the very first thing that we have received in writing over the past ten months in regard to this case.

The fathers were extremely displeased over Fr. Panteleimon's request to resign. But they were equally astonished at the second paragraph of the Ukase, which appointed Vladika Anthony of Los Angeles as "acting Abbot." It was pointed out by several of the fathers that, according to our Athonite Typikon and the by-laws under which we were incorporated in the State of Massachusetts, it was not possible for one to be appointed abbot. Both our Typikon -- which dates from the time of St. Athanasius of the Holy Mountain in the 10th century -- and our by-laws, which were drawn up in 1961, state clearly that the brotherhood alone will elect its abbot from among those who are members of the brotherhood.

Because of the strong objections which were voiced regarding the Ukase, some of the fathers requested that we seek legal counsel so that the community would not put itself in a dangerous position, both in regard to our Typikon, and in regard to the laws of the State of Massachusetts.

Accordingly, on Monday we contacted our lawyer and made an appointment to see him the next day, Tuesday, Sept. 10/23. On Tuesday, Fr. Panteleimon and two fathers went to see the lawyer. They gave him a copy of the Ukase and also a translation of the relevant part of the Typikon regarding the election of the abbot. The lawyer already had a copy of our by-laws on file, and therefore the fathers were able to discuss the whole situation with him.

Our lawyer began working on the matter and got back to us on Thursday morning with a letter which he prepared, of which we are enclosing a copy. On Thursday evening, Sept. 12/25, a meeting of the community was called and the lawyers's letter, which covered all the legal aspects, was read.

By this time also, the fathers had had time to discuss this matter among themselves and to express themselves. The unanimous decision of all was that we have to abide by our Typikon and the by-laws, otherwise, we would jeopardize our legal status as a non-profit corporation.

Thus, since the by-laws state that special meetings of the corporation have to be announced at least seven days in advance, Fr. Panteleimon announced that a special meeting for the acceptance of his resignation and the election of a new abbot would be called on Sept. 20/Oct. 3 -- which meant that the announcement was made nine days in advance.

In the meantime, I had been trying to get in contact with Fr. Sergius in Montreal in order to have him contact you and inform you how important it was that you telephone us as soon as you could.

Accordingly, I telephoned on Tuesday, Sept. 10/23, but was told that Fr. Sergius was out and would be back on the following Saturday. Therefore, on Saturday, Sept. 14/27, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, I telephoned again and was told that he was not there and would be back the next Tuesday.

Finally, we decided that it would be best if we contacted you directly in Australia. So, on Sunday evening, Sept. 15/28, I telephoned and spoke to Matushka Nina Grant in Sydney and told her that it was important that you telephone us. Since two days went by with no response from you, we telephoned for the fifth time on Tuesday evening, Sept. 17/30, and left a message that you should telephone us collect, because it was important and urgent.

We thought that since we had delayed the election of the new abbot for two weeks, we would have been able for sure to get in contact with you, so that we could explain to you what difficulties the Ukase presented in regard to our Typikon and the by-laws.

In addition to the above-mentioned difficulties, there were others which arose, because for the past ten months no one, including yourself, has visited us to discuss this matter with us, even though we have requested this on many occasions, both orally and in writing. All that we had been hearing were rumors from various reliable and unreliable sources. Nothing whatsoever was sent to us in writing either officially or unofficially.

As a result, it was only natural that the fathers here began to have all sorts of suspicions and feelings of mistrust regarding how this whole matter was being handled. When the younger fathers asked the older fathers what was going on, we had to tell them sincerely, "We don't know. Some bishops are telling people one thing, the Metropolitan is saying the opposite; others are saying this, and others are saying that; some bishops are saying different things to different people, so what can we tell you? The first thing we have in writing is the Ukase."

Well, glory be to God, on Wednesday, Sept. 18/Oct. 1, you telephoned us. I was able to explain to you how displeased the fathers were with Fr. Panteleimon's request to retire, but that he insisted on it absolutely. He said that he had been asking for ten years to be allowed to retire and he was determined to do so, regardless of the present circumstances. I explained to you also how the second paragraph of the Ukase presented grave difficulties with regard to our Typikon and from a legal point of view. In addition, as I mentioned to you, the fathers became extremely upset when the second paragraph was read. You explained to me at this point in our conversation that the Ukase had not been worded well. And then I said it seemed to state very clearly and unambiguously that Vladika Anthony was to "assume the position of acting Abbot of the Monastery." You told me then that the phrase was not translated well.

At this point in our conversation, I mentioned to you that according to our Typikon and the by-laws, we had to have elections for a new abbot within a few days, and you told me that that was fine, that we should go ahead; you assured me that this was in order, without mentioning any stipulations.

We were very happy, dear Vladika, that we were able to communicate with you because, as I mentioned to you on the telephone, we did not want to do anything without your knowing about it, lest you should think that we were trying to do something behind your back.

So, as was announced and posted, we went ahead and had our special meeting on Friday, Sept. 20/Oct. 3. Everyone was in attendance, except for our Fr. Haralampos who was abroad (the absence of one father from a meeting presents no difficulty as far as the by-laws are concerned, since provision is made for the instance of one who is sick or unable to attend).

At this meeting, many protests were expressed, and in fact, a good number of the fathers had agreed among themselves to refuse to accept Fr. Panteleimon's resignation. This really grieved Fr. Panteleimon who told the fathers that we would become ridiculous. For ten years, he had been asking to retire and now he's given the blessing to retire. If the community were to refuse to accept this, he said, it would appear as though we were playing games. Who would believe that this was not a rehearsed situation?

The fathers, however, insisted that this was their prerogative and their vote, and that they should not accept any form of outside pressure. Fr. Panteleimon said that no one was pressuring him from outside. "I myself am asking to retire," he said.

When Fr. Panteleimon saw that some of the fathers were being very difficult, he told them, "Dear fathers, don't force me to do something which will embarrass the whole community. I could leave by night and you wouldn't know where I had gone, and then you will have to have an election."

Finally, the fathers understood that there was no use contradicting him. Fr. Panteleimon submitted his resignation in writing, as required from a legal point of view.

Even so, when it came time to vote to accept Father's resignation, three fathers abstained from voting out of protest. Nonetheless, the motion passed, just barely, by one vote.

Then, we began the procedure to elect a new abbot. Fr. Isaac was nominated, and the motion was seconded. During the voting, the same three fathers again abstained, not because they did not want Fr. Isaac, but again out of protest over Fr. Panteleimon's resignation. Nevertheless, Fr. Isaac had more than enough votes necessary, and thus he became our new abbot. And so, the meeting was adjourned.

We are enclosing a copy of the Athonite Typikon of St. Athanasius (in Greek), with a translation of the relevant clauses, and also a copy of the 4 1/2 page letter which our lawyer sent us.

To be sincere with you, beloved Vladika, we are somewhat astonished and dismayed that such an important document as the Ukase which you sent us could have been mistranslated, as you told me on the telephone. This is why we would like to request a copy of the Russian original. We have competent people here who are able to translate from the Russian. (As you may recall, you yourself in the past have sent us your encyclicals with the request that we translate them for you into English). It is needful for us to have a copy of the original, because the legal ramifications must be clarified from the point of view of our Typikon and by-laws. Unless the community receives a written clarification describing in what capacity Vladika Anthony will be visiting the monastery and can ascertain whether or not this is in agreement with the monastery's Typikon and by-laws, the brotherhood feels that the matter cannot proceed any further from a legal point of view. At our meeting with you in New York on May 20/June 2 of this year, you told Fr. Panteleimon and myself that someone was to visit the monastery as part of an investigating committee. We agreed to this and said that we had no objection, and in fact, had been requesting this very thing right from the start.

However, as Fr. Isaac and I mentioned to you in our letter of Aug. 28/Sept.20, we had clear proof and witnesses that both of the investigating bishops -- Vladika Anthony of Los Angeles and Vladika Alpyy of Cleveland -- had demonstrated that they were biased against us. Furthermore, someone brought to our attention that Canon 16 of the 2nd Council of Carthage states that both parties -- the accused and the accusers -- have the right to agree on who will judge their case. Yet, our abbot was never given such an option. We know from Church History that St. John Chrysostom refused four times to go to be judged in the council "at the Oak" because he knew that the bishops in attendance were biased against him.

As we pointed out in our letter to you of Aug. 28/Sept. 10, such is the case also with the investigating bishops in this instance, and there are witnesses who can testify to this fact.

Dear Vladika, in view of the many misunderstandings or misinterpretations that could crop up, especially in such a serious matter as this, the brotherhood requests that all further communications regarding this case be in writing. This is necessary, not only from a point of view of getting everything straight and free of ambiguity, but also from the point of view of the brotherhood being able to determine carefully what is permitted and what is not in regard to our Typikon and the laws of the state we live in. We have seen already how things can be expressed wrongly or mistranslated even in writing. How much more so is this so in spoken conversations over the telephone! This is why the brotherhood strongly requests that from henceforth, all communications must be in writing, or else the fathers will not be able to properly consider them in our meetings or examine them from a legal point of view. Our lawyer has also counseled us the same.

To be sincere, beloved Vladika, we are surprised and disappointed that you, as our ruling bishop, have not once visited us during all these months to speak with the fathers, to hear what they have to say about the accusers, and to determine if the holy canons are, in fact, being observed in this matter, or if, as many clergymen have concluded, the whole investigation has been carried out on the basis of an erroneous interpretation of one canon.

Nevertheless, the fathers again ask you to visit us. Indeed, despite his evident bias, even Vladika Anthony of Los Angeles is welcome to come as a visitor or as an investigator.

We will not hide from you, beloved Vladika, the dismay which some have expressed, both from within and without the community, over how unusual it is -- if not against canonical norms -- that a bishop from an outside diocese should assume an acting role in another's diocese. Does this not foster the suspicion that the ruling bishop is not held competent to rule his own diocese?

Before I close, beloved Vladika, permit me to remind you of the request which Fr. Isaac made to you in his letter of Sept. 3/16, in which he requested a copy of the letter which he allegedly wrote to Fr. Theodore on the Holy Mountain, and also a copy of the Russian translation of that letter. In view of the gravity of the allegations, and also because there appear to be serious discrepancies between the letter which Fr. Isaac actually wrote and the letter which was read to the bishops in a Russian translation, we believe that Fr. Isaac's request is neither unreasonable, nor out of order. One priest informed us that Bishop Hilarion brought a copy of Fr. Isaac's alleged letter to the Erie conference and showed it to him. From what this priest reported, there is a very great discrepancy between Fr. Isaac's actual text (of which we have a copy) and the text which Bishop Hilarion used.

We pray that Vladika Paul is recuperating well and that you had a spiritually fruitful trip to Australia. All the fathers make a poklon and ask your blessing. Please give our greetings to Fr. Sergius and all the brotherhood.

With reverence, I ask your blessing,

Ephraim monk

P.S. Dear Vladika, this letter was read at a synaxis of the brotherhood on Friday evening (Sept. 27/Oct. 10) and was approved as expressing the unanimous views of our community. As Grammateus, I have only set down their views in writing.