

December 12/25, 1986
St. Spyridon & St. Herman of Alaska

Rev. Hieromonk Justin
Holy Transfiguration Monastery
278 Warren Street
Brookline, MA 02146

Dear Father Justin,

As you are aware, by the diocesan resolution dated Dec. 3, 1986 of His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly, you have been appointed temporary administrator of Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

On December 12 of this year His Eminence received a letter signed by Monk Ephraim, in which he states that by a unanimous vote of the brotherhood the monastery has seceded from the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and has placed itself under the omophori of "hierarchs of the True Orthodox Church of Greece."

This declaration has grieved us immensely, since the reasons for secession which Fr. Ephraim sets forth are without basis and substance. We see in this hasty and uncanonical decision a reaction on the part of the brotherhood to the various lawful decisions made by the Synod of Bishop and by Metropolitan Vitaly, as diocesan bishop, with regard to your former abbot, Archimandrite Panteleimon, including his retirement and suspension, and the suspension of Hieromonk Isaac, pending further investigation of the numerous accusations made against them by six former members of your brotherhood.

Monk Ephraim and your supporters falsely accuse the hierarchy of our Church of being soft on ecumenism or of succumbing to it by maintaining friendly relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church. There has been no significant change in the degree of involvement of the Patriarchate of Serbia in the ecumenical movement or of the relations of the Synod with the Serbian Patriarchate (which are minimal, to say the least) during all the twenty-or-so years that Fr. Panteleimon and Holy Transfiguration Monastery have been associated with the Synod. Why the sudden change in the monastery's attitude to positions of our Church?¹

It is also dishonest to say that the Russian hierarchs show no love or concern for the monastery or for their Greek and American parishes. In a time of need the Synod gave spiritual shelter to priests and parishes fleeing the innovations and modernism of New Calendar churches. Trusting your sound judgment and spiritual discernment, the Synod

¹ This certainly begs the question in the light that Anathema Against Ecumenism of 1983 explicitly forbids such con-celebrations. Please see [Letter of the New England Clergy, November, 1996](#) and the [Departure Letter of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, December, 1996](#). Metropolitan Vitaly, in his *Nativity Epistle of 1986* was to articulate an understanding of the Anathema of 1983 that was different from his former stance of 1983. Please see [On Metropolitan Vitaly's Nativity Epistle](#) and [Revision of the Text of the 1983 Anathema Against Ecumenism](#).

did not interfere in the administration or in the internal spiritual and liturgical life of the monastery or the various parishes under its aegis. All this time while under the Synod you enjoyed peace and tranquility, and the monastery and parishes flourished both spiritually and physically. Does this bear witness to a lack of love or concern on the part of the bishops?

Now it appears that the Russian Church Abroad has ceased to be any further use or value to the monastery (and some of the parishes affiliated with it) and can be discarded like an old pair of shoes. The hunt is now on for "hierarchs of the True Orthodox Church of Greece," who supposedly will suit you better as an ecclesiastical authority. Does this not indicate a lack of love, rather, on your part and certainly gross ingratitude to the Russian Synod for all that it has done for you during these past two decades? Should you not first remove the log from your own eye before noting the splinters in the eyes of the bishops who, as men, are not immune from making mistakes? If some of our bishops have erred as individuals (and what most of their critics call errors are really the differing opinions of the bishops concerning the use of economy), this does not change the general course of our Church, which condemns ecumenism and the innovations of ecclesiastical modernism. Nor does our Church seek any compromise or pact with the Soviet-dominated Moscow Patriarchate until the latter radically changes its stance of loyalty to the militantly atheistic government and rescinds its decisions concerning ecumenism and the giving of communion to Roman Catholics-- in other words, until it returns to a confession of true Orthodoxy.²

Believe me, the sad events of this past year were not a plot or a conspiracy on the part of the bishops to discredit or bring harm to your monastery. The origin of your present woes can be traced back solely to your own monastery-- to your own former brethren, who were tonsured and nurtured in your midst, but who, for various reasons, have abandoned you. Not one, not two, but six of them accuse your former abbot of grievous offenses against their persons. They have come to the hierarchs seeking judgment and the bishops have had no other alternative but to hear them out and to commence an investigation. The bishops had no right to turn them away, even though some of the accusers may at the present time be in a fallen state, for they claim to have been personally wronged.³

² This is not true, for twenty years later, on the Feast of the Ascension, 2007, ROCOR was to enter into full communion with the Moscow Patriarchate without resolving these issues. This has caused no little dissension within ROCOR itself with one bishop, and many clergy and parishes departing ROCOR because the Moscow Patriarchate has not "radically changed its stance to the government of the Russian Federation (which has too many vestiges of its Soviet past for most people's comfort) nor has it "rescinded its decisions on Ecumenism or giving communion to Roman Catholics." The Moscow Patriarchate has not yet decisively repudiated its past. The MP and ROCOR simply pretends that WCC has "changed" and it is no longer what it was, nor are there unorthodox implications in belonging to it, and the MP has "postponed" its decision to give Holy Communion to Roman Catholics! For an article that appeared in the *Orthodox Christian Witness* about the MP's decision to "postpone" the giving of Holy Communion to Roman Catholics see [Orthodox Christian Witness, November 2/15, 1987](#)

³ This is the crux of the whole matter, that the fathers of Holy Transfiguration Monastery and many Clergy and laity were utterly bewildered as to how the bishops of ROCOR could accept the testimonies of witnesses unworthy to make moral accusations against a clergyman according to the Sacred Canons of the Orthodox Church and also the interpretations of the said canons by universally acknowledged authorities

For numerous reasons, including the appearance of many other pressing Church matters and the illness of several of our bishops, the Synod proceeded slowly and cautiously with the matter of the accusations against Archimandrite Panteleimon and Hieromonk Isaac. It was only this December that the two were suspended from serving (in accordance with church law) by their diocesan bishop, pending further investigation by a newly-appointed commission.

In view of these circumstances, the sudden decision of the brethren of Holy Transfiguration Monastery to secede from the Synod of Bishops can be interpreted only as an attempt to escape any decision a future spiritual court would have made in this matter. Furthermore it will undoubtedly establish and confirm in the minds of many the guilt of the accused.

My dear Father, beware that in plunging into the abyss of schism you not lead the flock which has been entrusted to your care into spiritual suicide and eternal damnation.

I implore you and all of the brotherhood, repent of your hasty and impulsive error-- before it is too late. Return to the bosom of the Church which awaits you with loving and forgiving arms.

If, however, you fail to come to repentance of this grave sin of disobedience and schism, and if you continue to repudiate your lawful Church hierarchy, know that the Church will be forced to exercise its God-given right to bind its recalcitrant and erring members.

The priest who has come to you with this letter awaits your answer. There will be great rejoicing in heaven and on earth if the monastery repents and returns to communion with the Church.

If, however, you decide to continue in sinful separation, you must immediately hand over to him as our representative the Holy Chrism and any and all antimenses of the Russian Church Abroad which may be in the possession of the monastery.

May God bless and enlighten you and the brotherhood of Holy Transfiguration Monastery to return to the safe and secure harbor of the Russian Church Abroad!

+ Bishop Hilarion

(see [Canons governing who can make moral accusations against a clergyman](#)). Later, in 1986 and 1994 Bishop Gregory Grabbe also made the same observation the canons governing such procedures were ignored (see [Bishop Gregory Grabbe's Letter of 1996](#), [Excerpt from Bishop Gregory Grabbe's Letter of 1994](#), [complete English text of Bishop Gregory Grabbe's 1994 letter](#), [Complete Russian text of Bishop Gregory Grabbe's 1994 letter](#)). The synod of Archbishop Auxentios came to the same conclusion in 1988. (see [Auxentian Synod on Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1988](#))