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Fifth Week of Great Lent, 1988

Dear

Thank you for your patience in awaiting a reply to your letter I have discussed it with the fathers and am writing to you on their behalf. They appreciate your concern and greet you warmly.

Since I'm not sure exactly how familiar you are with our recent history, I'm going to try to explain our position in the Russian Synod Abroad, why we left it to seek refuge under Bishops Akakios and Gabriel of Greece and why, finally, after that, we found it necessary to join Archbishop Auxentios and his synod.

The senior and founding fathers of the community are of Greek background. Though the monastery is a *metochion* of the Holy Mountain, it ceased commemorating the ecumenistic Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964 and joined the Russian Synod for reasons of faith, encouraged, in particular, by the Russian Synod's refusal to participate in Ecumenism, and by the fact that here in the Western hemisphere, its hierarchs — especially Metropolitan Philaret — represented the Orthodox Confession of faith free of innovations. Nonetheless, whenever an incident occurred within the Russian Church Abroad that compromised that confession of faith, the fathers here discreetly but persistently protested, and over the years, the continual protesting of violations of canons caused us to be greatly disliked in certain quarters — not by Metropolitan Philaret, nor, at that time, by the then Archbishop Vitaly, but certainly by those who have now replaced Metropolitan Philaret, and who from start to finish countenanced a campaign of slander against us that began with the repose of Metropolitan Philaret, and handled the case of the moral accusations in an uncanonical, unchristian manner. Even as it began in early 1986, someone at the Synod's headquarters counseled us to ask for a strict adherence to church canons that govern such matters. But even though we continually requested that we be given a canonical trial, our requests went unheeded. Witnesses with obvious malice, whom moreover the canons specifically disqualified, were accepted as star witnesses against us.

It is simply unheard of, that an “investigation” could be carried out for eleven months without providing the accused with any written document whatsoever, stating who the accusers were, what their charges were, etc., so that the accused could prepare a written defense. Even the number of the accusers kept on changing from day to day -- and since the only reports we received were from hearsay and rumor, there was no way one could sort out the facts from the rumors.

In fact, except for a brief Ukase (Sept. 4/17, 1986), we received absolutely no written communication from the Russian Synod whatsoever

Indeed, what could the Russian Synod answer if this so-called investigation had been carried out on the basis of the holy canons — as we repeatedly requested — and not on the basis of public slander and letter-writing campaigns, written by individuals whose admitted intent to destroy the monastery, simply because the monastery would not bless their lawlessness.

<http://www.homb.org/archives/Fr%20Ephraim's%20Letter%20March%2030%201986.pdf>

As many clergy and laypeople protested in hundreds of letters which were sent to Metropolitan Vitaly (and to other Russian Synod bishops who returned the letters unopened), all the accusers, without exception, are untrustworthy precisely because they are guilty of serious offences. Yet, the Russian Synod bishops steadfastly and stubbornly refused to observe the canons of the Church (6th canon of the 2nd Ecumenical Council, 21st canon of the 4th Ecumenical Council, the 8th, 27th, 137th, 138th and 140th canons of Carthage, the 9th canon of Theophilus of Alexandria, the Apostolic Constitutions, and others) <http://www.homb.org/archives/Clergy%20Letter,%20Sept.%2016-29,%201986.pdf>

One other thing which the bishops of the Russian Synod steadfastly preferred to ignore was that for over a period of years, the present accusers — both before and after their departure had sent letters of gratitude to the monastery, praising the abbot and the whole brotherhood and expressing the good memories they had of their stay at the monastery, or, on the other hand, complaining that the monastery was too strict! In this manner, they themselves refute themselves, without there being any other need of a refutation of the accusations which they concocted later. These letters are in the monastery's files. <http://www.homb.org/archives/Accusations,%20misc.pdf>

What are the accusers' replies to their own letters which so completely contradict what they are saying today? They reply that for years they did not know, or were deluded, and it is only of late that “the scales fell from their eyes” and they came to understand (after 12 or 15 years in the monastery?) that certain things were wrong.

They didn't know, or they were deluded, they say. Yet, the epistles of St. Paul are read every day (in English) in our daily Liturgies in the monastery. Does not St. Paul condemn these very sins openly and repeatedly? Are the accusers trying to tell us that

they've never heard of Sodom and Gomorrah? Are not the Lives of the Saints (many of which deal *specifically* with the sin of homosexuality) read every single day in the church after the services and in trapeza in our monastery? The complete life of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ — which was translated by a member of our community — repeatedly and very graphically condemns these specific sins. This life, too, is read in our refectory every year on the feast day of the Saint. Furthermore, the lives of the New Martyrs under the Turkish yoke (many of which have been translated by fathers of the monastery) make frequent reference to the sin of homosexuality, because the Moslem Turks were very much addicted to this particular perversity and many young Christians were martyred precisely because they would not consent to give in to such sexual advances on the part of their Turkish oppressors. Yet, our accusers all use the same story: they did not know! The only excuse they (grown men, supposedly) could have for not knowing, of course, is if they were totally deaf and blind. These falsehoods uttered by the accusers are so transparent, everyone — including even the simple little grandmothers at the parish of St. Mark's here in Boston — saw right through them. The only ones who did not see right through them were the Russian Synod bishops, and that's because they refused to look

But then, if there are six accusers, there are over thirty-six members still in the community who can attest to the opposite. Numerous also are the former members of the community who have written (not at our request) in defense of Fr Panteleimon and the community. They, too, lived with us for many years. In some of these letters, they even bear witness concerning the character of some of the accusers. Indeed, one of these former members was requested to testify by Bishop Alypy, one of the “investigating bishops.” This is the present Fr Mark Gomez of San Francisco, California, who not only did not confirm the accusations, (as Bishop Alypy had evidently hoped) but even testified the complete opposite — that is, that there are “no secrets, and no improprieties at Holy Transfiguration Monastery,” and (in a manner which was actually quite humorous) he demonstrated why this was so.

Among former members of our community who have testified in our defense are. Archimandrite Alexis of England; Fr Mark Gomez of San Francisco (both of whom are clergymen of the Russian Synod); Dr. Richard Stockton (in monasticism, Fr Arsenios) of Bakersfield, California; Ephraim Figueroa, Andrei Dudkin, Basil Buell, and Peter Kordan.

Who, then should we believe? People who themselves have been guilty of immoral or unethical behavior, or who are emotionally disturbed (and who, in addition, have borne witness against themselves in writing), or people who are clergymen and pious laypeople?

As we mentioned above, the accusers themselves are under condemnation and subject to judgment for offenses which they committed after their departure from the monastery (i.e. contracting marriage outside of the Church, ordination to the priesthood without a blessing, accusations of moral offenses under judgment, robbery of materials amounting in value to many thousands of dollars upon their departure from the monastery, renunciation of their monastic vows, etc.).

For a full year we pleaded with the bishops to come in person, to hear us out, to investigate to their heart's content, to give us just the least chance to prove our innocence — this was ignored for a full eleven months, for they feared a confrontation and exposure of their uncanonical dealings not only with us, but more importantly, with regard to their growing involvement with churches entangled in ecumenism and under Soviet control.

In fact, it became very evident that a campaign had been set in motion, with the active participation of the 'new guard' of bishops of the Russian Church Abroad, in order to discredit the monastery (we have letters from Synod clergy which confirm this). Indeed, if it had not been for the serious support of the bishops, the campaign of slander would have gotten nowhere. Fr. Victor Melehov, one of our Russian clergy, emphasizes this in his January, 1988, reply to the Russian Synodal bishops He writes:

“The faithful of the Church Abroad to this day remain puzzled as to how and why the entire administration of Metropolitan Philaret was dismembered virtually overnight after his repose. How was it that anyone who represented any position or authority or influence under Metropolitan Philaret suddenly was accused of immorality or fraud, or even heresy, and immediately was banished, suspended or defrocked? How was it that Metropolitan Philaret had surrounded himself by such “vile men”? Or was it that they knew the meaning of the word ‘anathema.’ Perhaps they represented all too well that tradition upon which the Church Abroad was founded.”

And Fr. Victor continues, ‘It is now apparent that the new administration wished to eliminate, in the most advantageous way possible, the ‘Greek element’ within its Synod Because of its strong anti-ecumenistic and anti-Soviet Church disposition, it is evident that this element stood in the way” of the Russian Synod’s new direction. That which the Russian Synod bishops did not expect, however, was that many others – including large numbers of non-Greeks – perceived the Russian Synod’s new direction and left *en masse* within a very short period. (*editors note: 30 clergy left in December of 1986, which was one sixth of ROCOR’s clergy in North America. Along with them went 55 monastics in 2 monasteries and roughly 4000 laity in 14 parishes. In 1987 two more clergy in North America and the French Mission also left, bringing the total number of clergy who left to 35).*

Therefore, when we finally left, it was not because of the evident malice of the bishops handling our “case,” but for reasons of faith; violations of canons, participation in joint prayer services with ecumenist church groups on an episcopal level, an overturning of the Anathema of 1983, and, in general, a disregard for due canonical church order that was becoming more and more brazen after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret. <http://www.homb.org/archives/Departure%20from%20ROCOR%20Letter.pdf> Even Metropolitan Vitaly, who before had been so strong against the Ecumenists, now changed. As Fr. George Kochergin, another of our Russian clergy, wrote to Metropolitan Vitaly in July of 1987, “Your reconciliation with these infractions is the very reason for our departure from the Russian Church Abroad.” Furthermore, immediately after our departure from the Russian Synod, Metropolitan Vitaly issued his Nativity Epistle, in

which he re-defined the 1983 Anathema against Ecumenism in such a way as to make it completely meaningless. See: [Metropolitan Vitaly's Nativity Epistle of 1986](#)

As Fr. Michael Azkoul – then still a priest of the Russian Synod – wrote in a letter to Metropolitan Vitaly (Pentecost, 1987), “The Anathema of 1983 [against Ecumenism] is the formulation of a doctrinal truth.” But this doctrinal truth has been nullified by its own supposed guardians. The Russian Church Abroad does not believe today that the other local churches are found in the heresy of Ecumenism Bishop Alypy of Cleveland expressed this new position of the Russian Synod publicly on behalf of all his fellow bishops:

Our Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad does not judge any other jurisdiction as being without grace or in heresy.
(*Orthodox America*, Oct., 1986)

If someone objects that this position of the Russian Church Abroad is not “new”, then why did the Church Abroad receive so many clergymen in the past without requiring a canonical release from their former jurisdictions? The only justification for doing so is precisely because the Russian Synod in the past believed that these other jurisdictions were, in fact, teaching and practicing heresy. When it became clear that the hierarchs that had taken the reins after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret had charted a new course for themselves, we realized we had no alternative but to seek other bishops. We joined Bishops Akakios and Gabriel of Greece, whom certain of our clergy knew and who adheres to the Old Calendar. However despite the many pleas of our church group here in the States made (since not only the monastery left, but also some twenty other parishes and thirty clergy with us — since then, others also have joined us) they showed little or no pastoral concern for our needs and circumstances, and after a time they even separated between themselves

In the meantime, we had time to study the canonical status of the Old Calendar church in Greece, and to come to understand that Archbishop Auxentios — from whose canonical synod Bishops Akakios and Gabriel had separated themselves and were remaining separate on grounds that cannot be justified by the holy canons -- that Archbishop Auxentios’ is the only legitimate and canonical church group in Greece. Those who assert that they have “defrocked” him are, unfortunately, ambitious bishops who left his synod first and only *later* issued this “decision” against him only because they want to govern.

<http://www.homb.org/archives/Fr%20Basil%20To%20Kallinikos.pdf>

Even Bishop Akakios does not recognize the Synod of Chrysostom Kiouis that “defrocked” Archbishop Auxentios; at a meeting with fifteen of our clergymen at St. Anne’s Church in Boston in June of 1987, we asked Bishop Akakios if he recognized the defrocking, and he said if he did, he would have to recognize Chrysostom Kiouis and his synod, which supposedly defrocked him, which he does not.

Finding, therefore, that to remain under Bishop Akakios meant abiding knowingly in an anti-ecclesiastical situation, we sought to be united with Archbishop Auxentios. http://www.homb.org/Archived_Docs_HTM/FrSphOnAkakiosAuxentios.pdf Though we repeatedly asked Bishop Akakios to re-evaluate his position and rejoin his lawful senior hierarchy, he refused to do so.

The truth is that we too had been influenced by the many things which we had heard against Archbishop Auxentios and which had been repeated to us by Bishops Akakios of Diavlia and Gabriel of the Cyclades.

However, after our clergy met with Archbishop Auxentios in July of 1987 and had extensive discussions on all these matter with him for many hours — and also now with the recent pastoral visit of Metropolitan Maximos of Cephaloma — we were completely convinced of the absolute integrity of their Orthodoxy, the firmness of their canonical standing, and their genuine love for all Orthodox Christians that transcends phyletic loyalties.

So impressed were we with the visits that these two hierarchs made with the clergy who came with them, that descriptions of these visits were written up and printed in the *ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WITNESS*, published by St. Nectarios Church in Seattle, Washington. I have included copies and from this you can decided if you wish to write to St. Nectarios Press to receive the *WITNESS*; Fr. Nektas, its publisher, has many other materials on our church situation available on request. I should also note that fully a year and a half after our departure from the Russian Synod, the French Orthodox Mission -- comprised of their four clergy and four parishes -- and in the United States, the St. Cosmas Aitolos Parish in Maryland and its priest Fr. Seraphim Johnson, and just recently, Fr. Michael Azkoul, who is of Syrian background, have also left and have joined us in uniting themselves to Archbishop Auxentios -- and this, after the Russian Synod had supposedly defrocked our clergy, *and* the bitter opponents of Archbishop Auxentios had waged an incredibly intense campaign to discredit him both in this country and abroad. Copies of Fr. Michael Azkoul's farewell letter to Metropolitan Vitaly, in which he very thoroughly identifies the betrayal of the new Russian Synodal hierarchy, are available from St Nectarios Press in Seattle

The fact that the Russian Church has changed its course, its confession of faith and its character is not doubted today, even by many Russians themselves. This is demonstrated by an interesting letter that appeared in *VESTNIK*, a Russian language publication in France (No. 151, 1987). The letter, written by a Russian lady in the US and which is not all complimentary to us, typifies the attitude now predominant in the Russian Synod. She identifies the "Greeks" and converts with Metropolitan Philaret and Bishop Gregory Grabbe, and denounces this group as responsible for the isolation of the Russian Church Abroad from the "Mother Church" -- i.e. the Soviet-controlled Moscow Patriarchate -- and the other Ecumenistic jurisdictions, and correctly observes, that now they are rid of us and the younger clergy participate more and more in interjurisdictional affairs and concelebrations with the ecumenistic jurisdictions.

This letter goes on to describe the “unconcealable joy” the Russian Synod felt at the departure of the leaders of the “narrow ecclesiology” of the traditional Orthodox. “This is clear,” continues the letter, “from the letter of Archpriest Alexander Lebedev to Archimandrite Panteleimon, published in the official organ of the Synod press [“Orthodox Life”], which is filled with such insults that it becomes clear that the door for return to the Church Outside Russia is firmly closed to the Panteleimonites” — as if we left — or joined — the Russian Synod for personal reasons, and not for reasons of the Faith!

Our own group now comprises some 37 clergy who have left the Russian Synod; add to this some ten more who have left for other jurisdictions, and you have somewhere between one quarter and one third of all the Synod’s priests, which have all left since the repose of Metropolitan Philaret. Fr. Seraphim Johnson, in a private letter, observed that not only we who joined Archbishop Auxentios have left the Russian Synod, but others as well, some because of Russian chauvinism, others because they felt the Synod was not liberal enough -- but those who did not join Archbishop Auxentios, regardless of the reasons for which they left the Synod, left with impunity, some even with canonical releases, to ecumenistic jurisdictions with which the Russian Synod had no relations in the past; the only intolerable crime has been to join the Greek Old Calendar Church: this has been invariably answered with defrocking and deposition by the Russian Synod.

For us, this in itself says all that needs to be said about the Russian Synod’s new direction. Please forgive me if this letter has tired you. In the last three years I have been stunned at what things churchmen can stoop to doing in order to justify their betrayal of the faith. If I have written a long letter, it is because I wish to do what little may be in my power to answer your query, being myself scandalized at all the things that have been done and the ease with which people both initiate and perpetuate the most horrible rumors. I thank you again on behalf of all the fathers here for your kindness and solicitude, that you took the trouble to ask, that you waited patiently for an answer, and that you have taken the time to read it. May God bless you and keep you, and guide you in His holy will.

With love in Christ,

Pachomius monk

P.S. Of particular interest is a letter which appeared in the periodical *Orthodox News*, (No. 6, Feb. 1987), which is published in England. The letter-writer is a member of the Russian Church Abroad and, except for one inaccurate point — that is, the reason why we left the Russian Synod — his letter speaks eloquently.

Sir,

Just last week I received an issue of “Orthodox News” which, I must say, rather upset me (and, indeed, everyone in our parish). Your coverage of the Boston “schism”

was very unkind, intentionally misleading, and extremely judgmental. The behaviour of our hierarchs in this whole affair has been an insult and an embarrassment to us all, while the Boston Fathers remained patient and honest in all of their dealings. Our Bishops flaunted the canons, acted impiously, and persecuted the monastery until they were left with no other course but to leave. You neglected to mention that several parishes and priest left *before* the monastery and Fr. Panteleimon was the last in the monastery to agree to leave.

Those of us who remain in the Russian Synod are nonetheless very disappointed by our Synod's new attitude towards Her Greek and convert members. Lastly, Mr. Bond, I must tell you that it is not your place or that of any of us to be judging Fr. Panteleimon or any of these clergy. Our Hierarchs refused for a full year to hold an ecclesiastical court for the Elder, if they would not, how can you now tell your readers what his motivations were for this or that actions fifteen or twenty years ago? Do I have to tell you how far this is from Christianity? Your reporting on this matter literally sickens me; I will not be renewing my subscription.

Sergius Reid
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