

Reply by Bishop Ambrose to the "Statement from Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand," published on the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church

I will attempt to reply to the many distortions contained in the abovementioned document, while at the same time will try not to descend to the level of discourtesy the author of the statement has. My interventions below are in italics and blue typeface.

*† Ambrose, Bishop of the
Free Serbian Orthodox Church
Diocese for Australia and New Zealand*

Statement from Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand

27. December 2012 - 10:25

"We swear you by Almighty God that in no way should you detract from the worth, greatness and importance of our reconciliation. Let not one empty and unverified word pass over your mouths. Let our reconciliation be an example for all the other Serbs, wherever they may live. Do not allow any one of us by our actions to hinder this common sanctity. Our reconciliation has just begun. We have planted a young seedling which we need to nurture and cherish as the apple of the eye that it may grow to the pride of all" (Metropolitan Iriney of New Gracanica - 19 February 1993).

During the past few weeks there appear a multitude of unverified, inaccurate and often malicious articles published on the internet related to the litigation in which the Serbian Orthodox Church is attempting to return to her fold the now usurped New Kalenich Monastery in Canberra.

In light of the same, the Metropolitan Executive Board of the Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand of the Serbian Orthodox Church desires to emphasise the following:

1. Management of the Property Trust of the New Kalenich Monastery claim to act in the name of the so-called "Free Serbian Orthodox Church", but have absolutely nothing to do with the original Free Serbian Orthodox Church, which existed a few decades ago as a temporary result of misfortunate times and an even more misfortunate schism which had befallen the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The Diocesan Council acts in the name of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese for Australia and New Zealand, a church that has never ceased to exist as a recognised body.

The unfortunate circumstances to which this statement coyly refers were the (1) submission of the Serbian Patriarchate to the Communist authorities of Yugoslavia and (2) their well-known attempts to denigrate and slander Bishop Dionisije, the first hierarch of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church.

It is further understood that the Communist state and their ecclesiastical minions collaborated in this vilification of Bishop Dionisije.

The schism was liturgically overcome on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, 15 February 1992, when the Liturgy of Reconciliation was concelebrated by Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Iriney of New Gracanica, both now of blessed repose. In so doing, the New Gracanica Metropolitanate was established in place of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church and returned to the fold of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

On the contrary, Liturgical communion was indeed then established, but on the basis of complete autonomy of administration, properties, etc., of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church.

It was then agreed, thenceforth, to use the title "New Gracanica Metropolitanate" in all dealings and communication with the Serbian Patriarchate.

2. The Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand of the Serbian Orthodox Church is the successor to the former Diocese for Australia and New Zealand of the New Gracanica Metropolitanate and the former Diocese of Australia and New Zealand. By decision of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church of 10th May 2011, the Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand was established in place of the former two parallel Dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

There is no legal *successor* to the Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese for Australia and New Zealand, because it continues to exist, as is, since 1964.

The purported action taken by the Serbian Patriarchate was:

- a) in contravention of the Proposal of Reconciliation,
- b) without the consent of the interested parties, and
- c) without any basis in Australian law.

We remind the Serbian Patriarchate that the purported merger between the two communities in Wodonga has recently been described by the courts of Victoria as illegal and not valid.

3. The management of the Property Trust has usurped the New Kalenich Monastery and attempted to sever it from the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian faithful and cede it to the jurisdiction of a canonically unrecognised, so-called "True Orthodox Church of Greece", into a myriad of internally rivalled factions known as the "Synod in Opposition" and the "Cyprianites".

The above is complete nonsense. The Property Trust simply administers the Monastery as proprietor, neither for their own benefit nor for any purpose other than that for which it was intended – Bishop's residence, Children's camp, Monastery, cemetery, Serbian social centre, etc.

As to severing it "from the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian faithful", we should address this in two parts.

First, indeed it is true that the Property trust does not submit to the authority of the Serbian Patriarchate (or "Serbian Orthodox Church"). However, we emphasise that the Monastery was acquired and built exclusively with the efforts and contributions of members of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese for Australia and New Zealand. The Serbian Patriarchate did not contribute one single dollar.

How is it then reasonable for the Serbian Patriarchate to allege that the Property Trust has "usurped" the Monastery from them?

Secondly, the accusation of severing the Monastery from the Serbian people is equally nonsensical. The Monastery remains accessible to all Serbian people, with the exception of Bishop Irinej, and continues to be a centre of Serbian culture, language, and tradition.

This "church" was created in 1984 in Greece, when a certain group of schismatics broke away from a schismatic group known as the "Auxentianites" and established the "Synod in Opposition", as they continue to formally present themselves in public domain. This body is not in communion with the Orthodox Church.

It is not our intention here to set out a complete *apologia* for the work of our Synod – that would require a separate publication. Suffice it to say the "Holy Synod in Resistance" is a body which has separated itself from the innovative New-Calendar State Church of Greece, and struggles to maintain the purest standards of the confession of our Orthodox faith.

The "Holy Synod in Resistance" is in full communion with those of like mind on the territories of other Churches, such as those of Russia, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as maintaining extensive missions in various parts of the world.

4. Management of the Property Trust, under the aegis of that "True Orthodox Church of Greece" or, the "Synod in Opposition", or the "Cyprianites", have recently announced that they intend, in the New Kalenich Monastery Church of St Sava, on the very feast of Saint Sava, to enthrone as their "bishop" a certain Englishman, Ambrose Baird, a convert to "Orthodoxy" from London.

The Property Trust has no right to make any such decision. The decision was made, on the contrary, in strict accordance to the registered statutes of the Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese for Australia and New Zealand.

The bishop elected is not English but British; the author can be forgiven this all-too-common confusion!

Although indeed the Bishop is a convert to Orthodoxy, what the author may mean by "Orthodoxy" is unknown to us. Clearly implied is that, since he is not Serbian and moreover a convert, this should weigh heavily against him.

One of the greatest Serbian Saints, St. Simon, father of St. Sava was also a convert to Orthodoxy.

I would like to state quite openly that, with the permission of our Synod, I accepted this nomination with the hope of being able to help the Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese for Australia and New Zealand until

a Serbian candidate could be found to accept the charge.

The Metropolitanate Executive Board once again underscores that the Church has brought forth this litigation with a heavy heart after management of the Property Trust refused to acknowledge that they had any obligation to hold the New Kalenich Monastery Church of St Sava for the Serbian Orthodox faithful. The Metropolitanate Executive Board reiterates that last year's Assembly of the Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand issued an open invitation to this entire group to return with repentance to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which will gladly welcome and receive them.

Again this is nonsense. The Property Trust acknowledges that it holds the New Kalenich Monastery for the Serbian Orthodox faithful; indeed, what other purpose could they have?

They do not, however, hold it for the Metropolitanate of Australia. The terms under which the Metropolitanate offered to receive the Property Trust under its jurisdiction were deliberately insulting and unacceptable.

The Metropolitanate requested the parties attend mediation in an effort to resolve the litigation. The management of the Property Trust resisted this initiative. The Court accepted the submission of the Metropolitanate and ordered the parties to attend mediation. The Metropolitanate participated in the mediation with the directors of the Property Trust in an effort to resolve the dispute and conclude the litigation.

The Metropolitanate did not request or participate in any Mediation; rather, Bishop Irinej did. He did so as an individual, or first plaintiff and also as a Director of a company he formed.

At all times the Property Trust have been committed to resolving this matter as far as practicable through mediation. The Property Trust was prepared to attend a second day of mediation on Monday, 3 December 2012, but it was Bishop Irinej who terminated mediation one business day before this scheduled mediation.

Unfortunately, not only have all of our invitations to repentance, return and reconciliation with the Church been ignored or rejected; but now with the announced "enthronement" of Mr Baird as "bishop", instead of their canonical Serbian Bishop, they have conclusively and publicly exposed their intention to permanently estrange the New Kalenich Monastery from the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Here we reach the apogee of hysterical demagoguery.

I will not imitate the author by referring to Bishop Irinej as "Mr Dobrijevic". I do note, however, that the Serbian Patriarchate does not refer to Pope Benedict as "Herr Ratzinger," even though Pope Benedict is surely infinitely further from the Serbian Patriarchate than I as an Orthodox brother could ever be.

The statement that we are intending "to permanently estrange the New Kalenich Monastery from the Serbian people" is a monstrous untruth for which the perpetrators should be held to account.

Our pious Serbian people should know the depths to which our adversaries have fallen.

We continue to remain hopeful that the planners and organisers of this intended blasphemous gathering will, in the interim, return to their senses and give up on their intentions and further desecration of the New Kalenich Monastery, as well as return to the Orthodox Faith and the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, we remain equally resolved to defend and preserve with all our might the Serbian Orthodox Church and to fight for the right to the Monastery, which was built by Orthodox Serbs, to remain sacred to Orthodox Serbs.

I wish to translate the above into plain English.

"The Serbian Patriarchate will not permit the legal owners of the Monastery, which they themselves built and maintain without any assistance from the Serbian Patriarchate, to use the Monastery as they wish. The Serbian Patriarchate will seek to seize the Monastery by any means, spending, if needed, vast sums of money to this end; money donated for the furtherance of the Church's mission and definitely not donated for litigation or achieving the personal ambitions of one person."

New Kalenich Monastery remains and always will remain a Serbian Orthodox holy place. This is our intention, and may God forgive those who misrepresent our aims, slander us, and persecute us.

We ask no more than to be left in peace in order to pursue the true aim of the Church: the propagation

of our True Orthodox faith, and the salvation of those who call on the name of our Saviour Christ, of His all-pure Mother, of Saint Sava, and of all the Saints!