



Establishing Autocephaly: The Canonical Aspect

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An autocephalous church, as is well known, is independent of any other Local Church, whereas all Local Churches, being part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, are interdependent. Autocephalous Churches have equal rights, although they hold different places in the diptych, which implies the precedence of honour of one over the other, but not differences in rights. Churches are not equal in their numerical parameters, such as the number of clergy and laity, as well as in their influence and in their historical role.

The essence of autocephaly lies in the fact that a Local Church possessing this status has an independent source of authority. Its first bishop is ordained by its own hierarchs, and the church itself can maintain apostolic succession of hierarchical ministry in it. The Third Ecumenical Council, affirming the ancient autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus, decreed that its prelates “shall enjoy, free from molestations or injury, the right to perform by themselves the ordination of their excellent bishops” (Canon 8). Since the normal procedure for an archpastoral consecration requires the participation of three bishops, and the ordination is performed for a vacant see, it follows that for its autocephalous being the church must have no less than four episcopal sees.

The factors that provide grounds for establishing a new autocephaly may include complete or partial political independence of the territory on which the autocephalous Church is proposed to be instituted, its geographical remoteness, and the ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness of the region from the main territory of the kyriarchal Church. However, these factors alone are not sufficient for the church to be recognized as autocephalous. An absolutely necessary condition for establishing autocephaly is the desire for it by the lay believers, clergy, and episcopate of the region, and this desire must be supported by a significant majority at all these levels.

The issue of the right to autocephaly for a part of a Local Church and the procedure for its establishment become crucially important and acute in our time. Controversies have arisen around this issue in the past and continue to arise today, often becoming painful and leading to discord and even divisions, up to the severance of canonical communion. To clarify the canonically indisputable criteria for autocephaly, it is necessary to shed light on the issue of the right to grant autocephaly. The principle

that no one can give another more rights than they themselves have is a legal and canonical axiom. Therefore, a new autocephalous church can be instituted only by the bishops of the Universal Church at an Ecumenical Council or in some other way.

Historically, the Ecumenical Councils, which are the highest and extraordinary bodies of episcopal authority, have indeed resolved issues concerning the establishment of Local Churches (Canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council), their ranks and the boundaries between them (Canon 2 of the Second Ecumenical Council), as well as the abolition of autocephaly for some Churches. For example, the Council of Ephesus confirmed the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus (Canon 8), while the Council of Chalcedon, having recognized the autocephaly of the Church of Constantinople, subordinated to it the previously autocephalous Dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Thrace (Canon 28).

However, since Ecumenical Councils were exceptional events even in ancient times and have not been convened for over twelve centuries, the question of a new autocephaly is usually decided by the local bishops, whose competence, unlike that of the Ecumenical Council, extends only to the canonical boundaries of their Church. The will of the local episcopate can be expressed either by a general council or, in exceptional cases, by a lesser council of bishops - a synod (Canon 19 of the Ecumenical Council, Canon 8 of the Council in Trullo, Canon 20 of the Council of Antioch).

Thus, aside from an Ecumenical Council, only the will of the kyriarchal Church can be a legitimate factor for establishing a new autocephaly, but history knows other examples. Autocephaly has sometimes been declared by a state authority or by local bishops who have voluntarily withdrawn from the subordination to the conciliar episcopate of the autocephalous Church and its first bishop. The illegality of such actions is obvious from a canonical perspective, although in cases where they were caused by really pressing needs of church life, the problems that arose from an unauthorized act of separation were solved by autocephaly granted by the Mother Church later. For instance, the Greek episcopate proclaimed autocephaly of the Church of Greece in 1833, but it was granted only in 1850; the Polish autocephalists went to the length of illegal separation from the Russian Mother Church in 1923 and received the illegitimate autocephaly from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The matter of autocephaly of the Polish Church was settled in a correct canonical way only in 1948.

Autocephaly may be established aside from the prescribed order, but on a legal basis, namely, in case the authority of a kyriarchal church falls into heresy or schism. Then Canon 15 of the Council of Constantinople of 861, also known as Protodeutera, comes into force: "Those persons, who, on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Councils or Fathers, withdrawing themselves from communion with their president, who, that is to say, are preaching the heresy publicly, and teaching it barehead in church, are not subject to any canonical penalty on account of their having walled themselves off from any and all communion with the one called a Bishop before any conciliar or Synodal verdict has been

rendered, but, on the contrary, they shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the honour which befits them among Orthodox Christians. For they have defied not Bishops, but pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers; and they have not sundered the union of the Church with any schism, but, on the contrary, have been sedulous to rescue the Church from schism and divisions." This canon also extends to the faithful Orthodox episcopate of one of the parts of the Church whose supreme authority has departed from Orthodoxy. The Russian Church found itself in such circumstances after the Council of Florence. Therefore, in 1448, it asserted its independence from Constantinople without consent of the synod and patriarch, who had betrayed Orthodoxy and thereby fallen away from the Universal Church.

The authority of a local episcopate is valid only within the boundaries of a Local Church. If this principle is not observed by any Local Church, this Church becomes a source of serious conflicts within Orthodoxy. Therefore, the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople committed by some of its primates are canonically untenable. The first was Patriarch Meletios IV (Metaxakis), who in 1922 proclaimed a made-up doctrine of the Patriarchate of Constantinople's right to exclusive jurisdiction over the entire Orthodox diaspora. This meant the extension of the Phanar's jurisdiction to dioceses, parishes, monasteries and missions that have appeared thanks to missional ministry of other Local Churches in the diaspora. Worse still, Patriarch Meletius IV extended his claims to jurisdiction over the dioceses located within historical canonical territory of the Russian Church, which, as a result of the events of 1917, have found themselves in the newly formed limitrophe states, namely in Poland, Finland, Latvia, and Estonia. The Patriarch of Constantinople accommodated political interests of the governments of these new entities, which encouraged or coerced local clergy to ask the Patriarch of Constantinople to accept them into his jurisdiction. Thus, in 1923, Orthodox dioceses in Poland, Finland, and Estonia were received into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople without obtaining approval from the hierarchs of the persecuted Russian Church. In 1924, Patriarch Gregory VII granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Poland in canonically illegal manner. After the assassination of hieromartyr Ioann (Pommer) in 1935, Patriarch Photius received the Latvian Church into his jurisdiction, in other words, seized it.

Nowadays, we are witnessing the Phanar's new actions undertaken in the interests of political forces alien or hostile to Orthodoxy and aimed at undermining the unity of the Universal Church. We are talking about the invasion of the Patriarchate of Constantinople into the canonical territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is in unity with the kyriarchal Russian Church; the notorious tomos of "autocephaly" granted at the official request of the Kiev state authorities to schismatic groups that had previously agreed to unite at a "unification council" initiated by the government of "independent" Ukraine and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Among those taking part in the council were three persons who had canonical ordination as bishops; one of them was later anathematized as schismatic, and the other two became renegades; and several persons ordained as bishops by schismatics who had been banned from ministry and defrocked. This reckless attempt has resulted in the inevitable severance of

canonical communion between the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which had occupied the first place in the diptych earlier, and the Moscow Patriarchate, which makes up no less than two-thirds of the entire Orthodox flock. The consequences of this crisis in relations between the autocephalous Orthodox Churches could be compared with those the Church of Christ passed through in the 11th century. The unity of the Universal Orthodox Church has been put at risk.

The debate continues between the advocates of the Phanar and its incursion into the canonical territory not belonging to it and the critics of these actions. The arguments of those justifying the Patriarchate of Constantinople proceed along two lines, which can be summarized as follows. On the one hand, they assert that the Patriarchate of Constantinople did not intrude into the jurisdiction of another autocephalous church, because the Kiev Metropolis has always remained within the canonical space of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. On the other hand, they claim that Constantinople, possessing powers equal to those accorded to the See of Rome by Catholic ecclesiology and incomparable with the status of other autocephalous churches, is entitled to make final authority decisions, which all local churches without exception must implement. This position may be likened to a situation where a thief who took someone else's property without permission claims that he did not take anything belonging to someone else and at the same time says that he has a legal right to seize what was stolen.

Therefore, in order to analyze the current situation it is necessary to consider the historical question of jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Church and assess from the canonical and ecclesiological perspectives the legitimacy of the claims of the patriarchate, which has borne the honorary title of "ecumenical" granted to it by the Byzantine emperor since the 7th century. This is similar to how a number of institutions of the Roman Empire had the honorary title of "ecumenical" (i.e., universal) at that time. The question is whether the Phanar can claim universal jurisdiction.

The arguments of the Patriarchate of Constantinople's proponents regarding the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's continuous presence under the canonical jurisdiction of Constantinople do not correspond with historical facts and the ground truth, being an oddity that stems from error. The Russian Church under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople till 1448 used to be a single entity, regardless of the location of the residence of its head, be it in Kiev, Vladimir-on-Klyazma, or Moscow. His title, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus', emphasized the unity of Orthodox Rus', which extended from the Carpathians to the upper Volga at that time. Even before the mid-15th century, there were preconditions for attaining the autocephalous status, such as the independence of Rus' from the empire with capital in Constantinople; a vast territory that exceeded the size of the empire itself; a population that was at least ten times greater than that of other metropolises of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, the Russian Metropolis had not taken any action until the canonical need for withdrawal from the

patriarchate arose.

Bishop Makarios of Christoupolis, in his report at the ill-fated Synaxis of the Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne held in Istanbul in September 2018, described with astonishing cynicism the salutary for preserving Orthodoxy actions undertaken in Moscow in 1448, «In 1448, the Moscow Local Council, contrary to the canons, independently and arbitrarily elected Metropolitan Jonah as the successor to Metropolitan Isidore... Our Russian brothers believe that since then the Moscow Metropolis has acquired its “autocephaly”, although, of course, there is no document that would have blessed this act.” Does the Most Reverend author of this tirade really believe that there are canons requiring Orthodox bishops to remain under the jurisdiction of the apostate first hierarchs until receiving their blessing for autocephaly? Yet there are no such canons and could not be, but there is Canon 15 of the Protodeutera Council cited above, which stipulates the severance of communion with first hierarchs who have fallen into heresy.

The synod's statement on repealing the 1686 act of the Patriarchate of Constantinople according to which the Kiev Metropolis was transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate, is extremely surprising. Arguments regarding the Ukrainian Church's continuous being under the canonical jurisdiction of Constantinople, despite the fact that the actual state of affairs bears no resemblance to this claim, are an outrage against common sense.

There is such a concept in church law as the statute of limitations, which is mostly thirty years, but not centuries. If Constantinople found the transfer of the Kiev Metropolis to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, authorized in 1686, to be unlawful, then several centuries had passed since then, providing ample time for lodging a protest. Meanwhile, the transfer of the Kiev Metropolis that was essentially the restoration of the original unity of the Russian Church was declared temporary and incomplete for the first time only in 1924, when, after the marauding seizure of the Polish Church, which had been granted autonomous status under the holy Patriarch Tikhon, the Patriarchate of Constantinople granted it autocephaly. Patriarch Tikhon recognized this treacherous act illegal and denounced it immediately, but not three and a half centuries later.

An analogy to the repeal of the 1686 act in international law could be the repeal of the Treaty of Verdun of 843 that divided the Carolingian Empire ruled by Charlemagne into three kingdoms. Another parallel would be the repeal of the acts granting independence to the former British and French colonies or the decrees on the sovereignty of Poland and Finland, issued over a hundred years ago. These acts written on paper have brought about real facts that are superior to the stroke of the pen in London, Paris, or Istanbul.

As an argument for Phanar's claim to universal jurisdiction, they give a peculiar kind of interpretation of

Canons 9 and 17 of the Council of Chalcedon. Canon 9 states the following: "If a Clergyman has a dispute with his own Bishop, or with some other Bishop, let it be tried by the Synod of the province. But if any Bishop or Clergyman has a dispute with the Metropolitan of the same province, let him apply either to the Exarch of the diocese or to the throne of the imperial capital Constantinople; and let it be tried before him." Canon 17 reads as follows: "If anyone has been unjustly treated by his own Metropolitan, let him complain to the Exarch of the diocese, or let him have his case tried before the throne of Constantinople." These canons are currently interpreted in Constantinople to mean that clergymen and bishops are granted the right to appeal to Constantinople against the judgment of their own patriarchs.

An analysis of historical context and of the content of these canons brings us to the only conclusion: the point at issue is the right of bishops and clerics of three dioceses, namely, Asia, Pontus and Thrace, to appeal, as before, to the Exarchs of these three provinces, or, after their inclusion in the jurisdiction of Constantinople at the Council of Chalcedon, which issued these canons, appeal over the head of the exarchs to the throne of Constantinople, which only at the Council of Chalcedon received the right of jurisdiction over these "great exarchates" of Pontus, Asia, and Thrace mentioned in Canon 28. Since these three exarchates made up the Patriarchate of Constantinople, their role was soon diminished. The norm contained in Canons 9 and 17 applies only to the Patriarchate of Constantinople within its canonical boundaries. John Zonaras, in his commentary on Canon 17 of the Council of Chalcedon, gave an adequate interpretation of its content: "The idea of this rule on the separation of courts would be this: when a Bishop has a case with another bishop, or a Cleric with a Bishop, then the Metropolitan will judge them, whom the canons call the Exarch of the Region. But when a Bishop has an accusation against his Metropolitan, then the canons entrust this to the court of the Patriarch of Constantinople. But the Patriarch of Constantinople is not set to judge over all Metropolitans without exception, but only over his subordinates. For he cannot impose his judgment upon the Metropolitans of Syria, or Palestine and Phoenicia, or Egypt against their will; for the Metropolitans of Syria are subject to the judgment of the Patriarch of Antioch, while those of Palestine to the judgment of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and those of Egypt are to be judged by the Patriarch of Alexandria, from whom they have received ordination and to whom they are subordinate."

Two centuries ago, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite offered a critical assessment of the false interpretation of Canons 9 and 17 in his "Pedalion." It would be appropriate to quote a summary of his lengthy and impeccably adequate commentaries. "The canon means that if any bishop or a cleric has a dispute or difference with the metropolitan, let him appeal to the exarch of the diocese; which is the same thing as saying that clerics and metropolitans subject to the throne of Constantinople must have their case tried either before the exarch of the diocese in which they are situated, or before the bishop of Constantinople as before a patriarch of their own. I did not say that if any cleric has a dispute or difference with the metropolitan of some other diocese, or if a Metropolitan has a dispute or difference with the metropolitan of any diocese or parish whatsoever, they must be tried before the bishop of Constantinople." It is

important to emphasize that St. Nicodemus belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. His interpretation breaks down everything based on a false interpretation of Canons 9 and 17 of the Council of Chalcedon that is aimed at justifying the Patriarchate of Constantinople's claims to universal jurisdiction.

The Phanar's actions are an encroachment on the canonical territory that does not belong to it. This is an act for which those guilty, according to Canon 2 of the Council of Sardica, are not only subject to defrocking, but "such persons should not be deemed worthy of even lay communion at the time of death." The holy confessor Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow wrote to Patriarch Gregory VII of Constantinople in 1924: "We were greatly embarrassed and surprised that <...> the head of the Church of Constantinople, without any prior communication with us, as the lawful representative and head of the entire Russian Orthodox Church, is interfering in the internal life and affairs of the autocephalous Russian Church. The Holy Councils (see Canons 2 and 3 of the Second Ecumenical Council, etc.) have always recognized only primacy of honour for the Bishop of Constantinople, but have never recognized and do not recognize primacy of power for him."

Canon 8 of the Third Ecumenical Council demands that "none of the God beloved Bishops shall assume control of any province which has not heretofore, from the very beginning, been under his own hand or that of his predecessors. But if anyone has violently taken and subjected a province, he shall give it up; lest the Canons of the Fathers be transgressed; or the vanities of worldly honour be brought in under pretext of sacred office; or we lose, without knowing it, little by little, the freedom which Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Deliverer of all men, hath given us by his own Blood."

The Patriarchate of Constantinople claims authority over other autocephalous churches. Meanwhile, the primacy of honour that previously belonged to it in the family of Orthodox Churches was not dogmatic, but historical in nature. We mean the deplorable fact of the Roman See's secession from the Universal Orthodoxy, after which the second in honour see held the first place in the diptych for a long time. This place gives no canonical privileges other than primacy of honour and has no jurisdictional consequences. It would be enough to repeat that from the perspective of Orthodox ecclesiology, all autocephalous Churches are enjoying equal rights, and a place in the diptych confers no advantages or privileges on a Local Church. The issue of the presence or absence of authority prerogatives of the first in the diptych episcopal see has been a key polemical issue for Orthodox and Catholics polemics during many centuries. Until the 20th century, bishops, theologians, and canonists of the Patriarchate of Constantinople defended the Orthodox position in this dispute. In the last century, beginning with Patriarch Meletius, they took a pretty much Catholic position, assuming almost the same rights in the Orthodox Church that popes enjoy in the Catholic Church.

In light of these sad developments, the letter of the African bishops to Pope Celestine, which is included

in the canons of the Council of Carthage, gains ground: "The Fathers did not think that the grace of the Holy Spirit would be wanting to any Province <...> whosoever thinks himself wronged by any judgment may appeal to the council of the Province or even to a General Council unless it be imagined that God can inspire a single individual with justice, and refuse it to an innumerable multitude of bishops assembled in council." The letter concludes with a prophetic warning addressed to the Pope: "Moreover whoever desires you to delegate any of your clergy to execute your orders, do not comply, lest it seem that we are introducing the pride of secular dominion into the Church of Christ which exhibiteth to all that desire to see God the light of simplicity and the day of humility." The warning of the Fathers of the Council of Carthage was ignored in ancient Rome, and is being ignored by the Phanar at present.

The actions taken by Patriarch Bartholomew and his synod, and their theological justification, are particularly alarming because they contain an ecclesiological doctrine that reproduces Catholic teaching. Here are some of Patriarch Bartholomew's statements that almost literally repeat the arguments of those who defend the exclusive rights of the Bishop of Rome: "Orthodoxy cannot exist without the Ecumenical Patriarchate"; "The Ecumenical Patriarchate is, for Orthodoxy, a leaven which 'leavens the whole lump' (Gal. 5:9) of the Church and of history"; "The Ecumenical Patriarchate bears the responsibility of setting matters in ecclesiastical and canonical order because it alone has the canonical privilege... to carry out this supreme duty." This is precisely what the bishops of Rome claimed almost literally regarding their see in the era preceding the Great Schism, which was provoked by such claims. There is not even a hint of such a doctrine in the Holy Scriptures and Tradition, or the holy canons. The Church venerates the host of saints from among the archbishops and patriarchs of Constantinople, but among those who occupied this see there were, and in no small number, bishops who were anathematized by the Ecumenical Councils.

The newest trampling on the canonical order of church authority has been the action aimed at the illegal separation of the Latvian Church from the Russian Orthodox Church, its kyriarchal parent. On 8 September 2022, the Latvian Saeima, at the President Egils Levits' initiative, amended the law on the status of the Latvian Orthodox Church, granting it "autocephaly" and removing its dependence on foreign church centers. The Latvian Church had the self-governing status granted by the Patriarchal Tomos in 1992 under which the Church takes independent decisions with regard to the relationship with the state located on its canonical territory. At the same time, it remains under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has historically been its Mother Church.

The interference of the Latvian legislators in internal church affairs is a curious incident, extravagant from a legal perspective, the more so that no acts have ever been issued on granting the status of state religion to the Orthodox Church in Latvia. It is separated from the state like other religious communities in its country. It means that the state authorities have no legal competence to intervene in the internal affairs of the church, including its ecclesiastical status and institutional place in the Orthodox world.

Even in the USSR, where the Orthodox Church was once persecuted, juridical interference in the internal church affairs was not declared, thus keeping the situation within the rules of propriety, but these rules are not for the Latvian authorities.

And one more thing. The novel legislation adopted by the Saeima is a naked discrimination against a large part of the country's population on the grounds of religious affiliation. If Orthodox Christians in Latvia are banned from maintaining canonical ties with their Mother Church, then on what ground similar prohibitions are not extended to Latvian Catholics and followers of other faiths and religions? Or perhaps a law is being drafted in Riga to ban the local Catholic community from being subordinate to the Vatican, which, as we know, is located outside the territory of Latvia and rather far from it?

There is nothing fundamentally new in the discriminatory policy of the Latvian authorities. From the very beginning of the renewed phase of the notorious Latvian sovereignty, Orthodox Christians born and raised in the country have been subjected to unceremonious discrimination based on the ground of national origin and language. Russians and Russian-speaking residents of other nationalities have been deprived of political and several civil rights; and the so-called "non-citizen passports" have been issued for them as identity documents to humiliate them. It is obvious that if numerous "non-citizens" of Latvia were to regain the right to participate in parliamentary elections, the parliament would have a fundamentally different composition and would not be guided by discriminatory anti-Orthodox and Russophobic motives in its lawmaking. The massive deprivation of civil rights and the brazen interference of secular authorities in purely internal church affairs is not a unique phenomenon, but it has only few precedents in global legal practice over the past two centuries. Slavery of negroes and mulattoes was abolished in the United States in 1865. A century later, during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, the policy of segregation of these categories of citizens was ended. Even then, unlike the Russian-speaking pariahs of Latvia, they were citizens! The apartheid in South Africa, this legal division of the country's population into whites, blacks, and coloureds, became a thing of the past with the fall of the racist regime there in 1994. For comparison with what is happening in Latvia, there remains one historical example: "The Reich Citizenship Law" and "The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour" ordained in Nuremberg in 1935.

On 20 October 2022, the Council of the Latvian Church addressed the authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church with a request to grant total independence to the Church of Latvia, that is to say, autocephaly. The Holy Synod explained in its response that according to the current Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, this request is subject to consideration first by the Bishops' Council, and then by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. Heretofore, the situation with the Latvian Orthodox Church has not changed because of the norms stipulated in Chapter XII of the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Self-Governing Churches.

The issue of the legitimate, rather than forced, autocephaly of the Latvian Church is not on the agenda for various reasons. Moreover, in the current situation, its flock needs special protection from the Mother Church, which throne is located on the territory of the great state that is quite capable of standing up for itself and its friends and has repeatedly extended a helping hand to those in need. The persecution of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia unleashed over thirty years ago has now got an additional resource in the form of discrimination against Orthodox Christians. In this situation, they are called upon to demonstrate confessional zeal in upholding canonical truth, for “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt. 24:13). Those who hate Orthodox Russia and incite ethnic hatred and religious strife would do well to recall how aggressive attacks on Orthodoxy and Holy Rus' ended in the past.

On 13 August 2023, Metropolitan Alexander of Riga in concelebration with two hierarchs consecrated Archimandrite John (Lipshans) as Bishop of Valmiera. But according to the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, bishops of the self-governing churches, and the Latvian Orthodox Church is one of them, are elected by the synods of these churches from among candidates approved by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. Archimandrite John's candidacy was never submitted for approval to the Synod or to the Patriarch. It means that the mentioned episcopal consecration was an act of arbitrary and unlawful conduct. This is a flagrant violation of the Statute, which provisions conform to canonical norms. Also, according to local sources, this notorious episcopacy was agreed upon with the Latvian government in advance.

Moreover, it has become known that Metropolitan Alexander is eluding the canonical rule of commemorating the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church at liturgies and demanded that the clergymen under his jurisdiction stop canonical commemoration of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's appeal to preserve church unity made at the Bishops' Conference on 19 July 2023, had no effect on the Primate of the Latvian Orthodox Church. On 24 August 2023, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted a resolution denouncing the actions of the Primate of the Latvian Orthodox Church aimed at destroying church unity.

Anyone who feels like behaving as a servant to please the power holders of the moment would do well to consider the dire consequences of betraying canonical Orthodoxy, both in life eternal and in our earthly temporal life. The sin of schism, according to St. John Chrysostom, cannot be washed away even by the blood of the martyrs.