



Pyrrhic victory of the Ukrainian authorities: the fight against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

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The persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is one of those processes in world politics that no longer requires special proof and is recognized by many public figures and publicists, enshrined in documents of international organizations, testimonies of religious figures and legal appraisal. Yet, the persecution does not stop, and this happens because somewhere in the “decision-making centers” the idea occurred that absolutely all means are good for the fight against Russian Orthodoxy.

The Ukrainian Church's belonging to Russian Orthodoxy is not a matter of immediate politics within the crisis in relations that has broken out between Russia and the countries of the Western world. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has never taken a stand in favour of the Russian leadership, has not called for the overthrow of the Ukrainian authorities, and has not excommunicated anyone, including even the incident when the authorities were planning the evidently anti-Christian initiatives, such as a bill to legalize gay marriage in Ukraine. In other words, this religious community has always remained loyal within the scope of the Ukrainian law.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is guilty towards those who decided to destroy it simply because it exists at all. This existence is predetermined by the fact that one people, the predecessor of the Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian peoples, received Baptism in 988, have come a difficult historical way together in the bosom of the one Church, venerating the same saints and praying in the same language. Acting on some invisible order, the Ukrainian authorities want to wipe out history and religious culture of their own people and rewrite it. People who used to live in the Soviet times remember that religion was declared an absolute evil after the Revolution, and all textbooks were rewritten, many churches were demolished, and those who did not fit into the concept of an anti-religious society were liquidated. Quite seriously they wanted to “show the last priest” on TV. This social project collapsed because the fight with God cannot be won without destroying oneself. The same is true of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: “victory” over it will mean the self-destruction of the Ukrainian people. It is deeply symbolic that the state that pursues this policy is headed by the man who does not belong to Orthodoxy and therefore does not understand or does not want to understand against what he is fighting.

So, speaking of apparent evidence, it is worth recalling the report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights dated 4 October 2023, which recognized the violation of religious freedom of Ukrainian believers, or the testimony of the Ukrainian journalist and writer Yan Taksyur given in his speech at the special session of the UN Security Council on 26 July 2023. Ecumenical figures in Europe also recognize violations of religious freedom. For instance, on 15 September 2023, Prof. Dr. Thomas Bremer of the University of Münster challenged conclusions of the so-called religious expert examination carried out in Ukraine with the view of justifying the liquidation of legal entities of the Ukrainian Church. Many of these facts are mentioned in the letters, which the Primate of the Russian Church, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' sent more than a few times to the leadership of the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, and to many religious leaders and public figures.

The persecution of the Ukrainian Church is a planned campaign devised along the lines of the atheists of communist times. It includes media accusations of betrayal of State, the closure of churches and monasteries, and terror against the most prominent clergymen. Let us take a closer look at the latter.

According to the Security Service of Ukraine, seventy criminal proceedings were opened against clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Onufriy in 2022-23, including sixteen against metropolitans. Out of a total of proceedings, twenty are on “high treason” and “collaboration” charges and eighteen – on charges of “violation of the equality of citizens depending on their religious belief.” Charges were filed against twenty-six hierarchs and clerics, nineteen were sentenced by court.

Someday a book about victims of the anti-church campaign of terror directed against clergymen of the Ukrainian Church will be published. The list of their names can be drawn up now.

On 11 May 2023, Metropolitan Ioasaf (Guben) and Archpriest Roman Kondratyuk, the former secretary of the UOC Diocese of Kirovograd, were sentenced to three years of suspended imprisonment with a probation period of two years and without the right to hold senior positions in religious organizations.

On 7 August 2023, the Vinnitsa City Court sentenced Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchin and Bratslav to imprisonment up to five years with confiscation of property.

On 1 April 2023, Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl was charged with “violation of the equality of citizens” and “justification of the armed aggression” on the grounds of his public protests against the schism and wiretap records. On July 13, he was placed in pre-trial detention in Kiev and released on 7 August on a fabulous bail of 33 million hryvnias (more than \$900,000) raised by Ukrainian believers. On 14 August 2023, he suffered a myocardial infarction and had a heart surgery.

On 20 February 2023, Metropolitan Feodosiy of Cherkassy and Kanev was charged with “violation of the equality of citizens” on the grounds of his public denouncement of the schism. In April 2023, he was charged with “justification of the armed aggression,” and the court sentenced him to 24-hour house arrest.

Criminal proceedings against Ukrainian hierarchs were publicly approved by Patriarch Bartholomew. This once again shows his direct interest in the suffering of Ukrainian believers.

This list does not include many other priests who are serving a term of imprisonment, have gone missing, or have been rescued from captivity by the Russian side in the exchange of prisoners. Generally speaking, a method that was worked out during the times of communist anti-religious terror is used to deal with clergymen. It is political hostage-taking. People are captured and persecuted illegally in order to frighten the others into joining another “church,” the “Orthodox Church of Ukraine,” which is a spiritual Frankenstein, a structure created by joint efforts of the US State Department, ex-President Petro Poroshenko and Patriarch Bartholomew. This schismatic community is intended to set Ukrainian Orthodoxy to zero and begin its history not from 988, but from 2018, when the self-ordained were given a “label to reign” - a tomos on condition of hating everything that links Ukraine with Russian Orthodoxy.

It is impossible to predict the number of those who would not withstand the pressure and deception and would join the schism, which has become a sort of official religion of Ukraine with no alternative. This religion should, as envisioned by the authors of this monstrous social experiment, ensure that that Russians and Ukrainians turn from “brothers forever” into eternal enemies. It goes without saying that canonical Orthodoxy that has united the peoples of historical Rus' for centuries, heals and cures the wounds inflicted by the war, notwithstanding the dictated from outside task to make these wounds incurable.

A “victory” over the defenseless Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the deathly silence of those who for decades have proclaimed the unmeasured value of religious freedom, could become a defeat of a comprehensive system of false values that no one will ever believe again. And this defeat has already been inflicted.