THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Schism At The Price Of Deceit: Putting an End to the Discussion around the “Chekalin Consecrations of the So-Called “Orthodox Church of Ukraine”

135

ЕГО СВЯТЕЙШЕСТВУ, СВЯТЕЙШЕМУ АЛЕКСИЮ II,
ПАТРИАРХУ МОСКОВСКОМУ И ВСЕЯ РУСИ
И СВЯЩЕННОМУ СИНОДУ РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ.

„Господи, услыши молитву мою
и прииди во еже спасти мя."

Всемилостивейше обращаюсь к Вашему Святейшеству и Священному Синоду с просьбой дать мне возможность возвратиться в лоно нашей Православной Церкви.

Тяготы прещения, постигшие меня от Священного Синода Русской Православной Церкви, душа моя не в состоянии вынести. По долгу совести я умоляю Вас принять моё, хотя и запоздалое, но искреннее покаяние.

Видимо Господь попустил чтобы враг человеческого спасения посеял в моём сердце обиду и другие грехи, приведшие меня к нынешнему печальному положению – вне благодатных Церковных Таинств.

Думаю многим известно, что в своё время я стал жертвой бывшего митрополита Киевского Филарета, который в силу личных своих амбиций и предвзятого, ничем неоправданого отрицательного ко мне отношения, уволил меня за штат, без каких – либо объективных причин. Это решение Священного Синода вызвало в моём сердце большую обиду и скорбь. Ведь Члены Священного Синода, не проявив должного вн[illegible] к этой проблеме, не разобравшись должным образом в эт[illegible] м его, чем решили судьбу человека. В этот тяжёлый для меня период жизни, особенно в первоначальный момент, будучи душевно подавлен, я совершил ошибку: я перенёс обиду, принесенную мне бывшим митрополитом Филаретом на всю полноту Церкви, в чём, конечно, я был не совсем прав. Но это уже кануло в ЛЕТУ.

Сейчас же, после совершённых мною ряда необдуманых и опрометчивых йствий, я хочу ещё осветить некоторые события, о каких не упоминал в предыдущих к Вам обращениях.

В частности хочу сказать о хиротонии Епископов. Мною было рукоположено семь епископов: ВАСИЛИЙ, Тернопольский; АНДРЕЙ, Ивано – Франковский; ДАНИИЛ, Черновицкий; НИКОЛАЙ, Луцкий; Владимир, Закарпатский; РОМАН, Херсонский и АНТОНИЙ / Масендич/, Ровенский. В первой хиротонии Василия Тернопольского принимали участие: я, бывший епископ Житомирский Иоанн, и, как он представился, епископ Яснополянский ВИКЕНТИЙ. Хиротония совершалась в храме свв. безсреб. Косми и Дамиана в селе Михайлевичи, Дрогобичского Благочиния, Львовской Епархии. Остальные – проходили в разных храмах Украины.

Сыновне прошу Вас, Ваше Святейшество, и боголюбивые Члены Священного Синода простить мне моё отступление и снять с меня Церковное запрещение и восстановить в архиерейском достоинстве, в числе служащих Архиереев Украинской Православной Церкви. Я не теряю надежды и верю во всепрощающую любовь Вашего Святейшества и Вас, Святители Божии, и с мольбой обращаюсь ко Господу и Спасителю нашему: „Помилуй мя, БОЖЕ, по великой милости Твоей..., Господи, услыши молитву мою и приди во еже спасти мя", ибо „Благословен Бог, еже не остави молитвы моея и милости Своея от мене".

Вашего Святейшества смиреннейший послушник
Иоанн, бывший епископ Житомирский и Овручский.

гор. Дрогобич, 15 января, 1993 года.

P.S. Я очень прошу Вас, Ваше Святейшество, милостиво прошу ускорить моё дело. Мне это очень нужно. Дальше выдержать не смогу. Не так дальше, как дольше.
Иоан.

On the 25th of August of the year the Ukrainian site Cerkvarium, which usually publishes critical attacks and sometimes manipulative or slanderous articles against canonical Orthodoxy and the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, has once more tried to prove the supposed canonicity of the "consecrations" of part of the current hierarchy of the so-called "Orthodox Church of Ukraine," at the roots of which stood the sadly renowned adventurist and imposter Victor (Vikenty) Chekalin. The article asserts that in these consecrations there took part archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko) of blessed memory, and as evidence of this there was published an "ordination certificate," supposedly signed by Barlaam.

The article was immediately translated into Greek and published on websites which support the position of the patriarchate of Constantinople on this issue, including the site fanarion.blogspot.com which is said to be materially supported by the patriarchate of Constantinople and is an unofficial mouthpiece for its position. It may be surmised that these publications were prepared in order to influence the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Helledas, which was to sit the following day after the article appeared. As we recall, at this time a number of Ukrainian media outlets asserted that the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" would be recognized within twenty-four hours, something which, of course, did not happen.

Even before the end of the Synod's session on 20th August, archpriest Nikolai Danilevich published a refutation entitled "On the Canonicity of the Consecrations of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church: From Kinik to Chekalin." Supporters of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" gave two replies to the article. The first was in the aforementioned Cerkvarium, and the second in the Greek-speaking blogosphere from archimandrite Roman Anastasiadis, who, it would seem, works in close cooperation with the editors of Cerkvarium. Both publications do not convince. His opponents declined to discuss the topic in question and tried to cast accusations and facts at Fr. Nikolai Danilevich which have nothing to do with the problem of consecrations in the Ukrainian schism.

Indeed, the dubious "certificate of consecration," with its badly reproduced signature of archbishop Barlaam without any indication of his title, is all that the defenders of the "Chekalin consecrations" can come up with. Yet there are a number of documents with the signature of John Bodnarchuk which assert the opposite:

1. The "hierarchy" of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was founded in 1991 by two people without episcopal consecration, that is: John Bodnarchuk, who was defrocked in 1989, and the former deacon Vikenty Chekalin, who was never made a bishop;
2. Archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko) did not participate in nor could have participated in the consecration of the "hierarchy" of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
3. John Bodnarchuk was aware of the uncanonical nature of the "hierarchy' he had created and knew that Chekalin had never been made a bishop. For this reason, he forged the signature of

archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko) on the “certificate of consecration” of his brother Vasily Bodnarchuk on 31st March 1990.

A superficial search in the archives shows that the precise makeup of the participants of the Chekalin “consecrations” in the Lvov region in March and April of 1991 has been documented accurately. Among the documents kept at the Moscow Patriarchate are, for example, the following:

The letter of repentance by John Bodnarchuk addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia on 15th January 1993 in which he lists all the participants of the uncanonical actions and requests that he be “restored to his episcopal dignity.” The letter clearly states that in the first “consecration” – of Vasily Bodnarchuk, John’s brother – “there took part: myself, John, the former bishop of Zhitomir and, as he presented himself, the bishop of Yasnopolyansk Vikenty.” There are listed seven “bishops” consecrated by Bodnarchuk and Chekalin (among them, for example, the current Andrei Abramchuk, one of the most senior “bishops” of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine). There is no mention of archbishop Barlaam. The document contains John’s signature, and notes and a resolution by His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, according to which discussion of the issue was to entrusted to the Holy Synod.

In his publication Fr. Nikolai Danilevich justly notes that John Bodnarchuk went into schism and set up the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church for personal reasons, mainly as a result of a conflict with the then canonical metropolitan of Kiev Philaret (Denisenko). His concluding words, written in his own hand, evoke sincere compassion: “I ask you, Your Holiness, and I mercifully entreat you to hasten my case. I am in great need of this. I cannot take it any more. No so much as any more as any longer. John.” Such pain can only have been endured by someone who had earlier lived in the Church, was aware of her grace and had been deprived of it.

Between 1992 and 1993 John Bodnarchuk wrote no less than ten such letters of repentance and petitions to Patriarch Alexy II and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. In them he directly recognizes the absence within himself of episcopal grace after being deprived of his holy orders, the non-canonical nature of the “hierarchy” that had been set up by him and Vikenty Chekalin of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and tearfully requests that he be received back into the canonical Church. In particular, in an earlier petition on 8th April 1992 addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II he A) calls himself the “former bishop of Zhitomir John” and recognizes that he is outside of the Church. “For more than two and a half years I have been out of the bosom of the Church and find myself beyond the confines of the Church, which I bitterly regret; B) appreciates greatly the reunion with the canonical Church of five false bishops of the Ukrainian schism (“You have rendered a great service to the Ukrainian Church and the Ukrainian people”) and regrets that he can no longer be numbered among

them; C) expresses his willingness to declare publicly that the “hierarchy” of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church is not canonical: “Regarding the non-canonical nature of the hierarchy of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, I will prepare everything and tell any journalist from any newspaper at any time when you invite me to do so on this occasion before Moscow”; D) complains of the blackmail and threats from his former colleagues who found out about his intention to return to the canonical Church: “I am now being persecuted and blackmailed, and have received threats by telephone. Someone from the Patriarchate had said that I was in Moscow and had tried to meet with you”; E) promises to “put an end to the non-canonical autocephalous movement” and to be guided henceforth “solely by the advice” of His Holiness the Patriarch.
[gallery ids="178519,178520,178521"]

Unfortunately, the Russian Orthodox Church was unable to accept John Bodnarchuk’s repentance. The Holy Synod believed that a resolution to the issue of the possible restoration to holy orders of a canonically deposed bishop exceeded its powers and entrusted the next Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church with examining the matter. However, in that same year – 1993 – Bodnarchuk renounced his intentions and joined the non-canonical “Kievan Patriarchate” of Philaret Denisenko, and in 1994 he died in a car accident in very strange circumstances. Those around him have repeatedly hinted that the car crash was no accident and that John had died as a result of an attempt on his life. There is nothing whatsoever surprising about this. There have been quite a few strange deaths among the figures involved with the Ukrainian schism…

From his own letters it is evident that John Bodnarchuk was a very contradictory man, prone to adventurism and ultimately a very unhappy man in both his life and death. Clear testimony of this is the curious and little-known document of the inventory of John Bodnarchuk after he had repented before the Russian Orthodox Church. Each page contains the verifying signature of the person who signed. On pages 13, 14 and 15 of the document John Bodnarchuk in detail relates how he and his supporters forged the same “certificate of consecration” which has now been published on the site Cerkvarium.org. The details which it contains, the peculiarities of speech and multiple signatures of John Bodnarchuk leave no doubt that the document is genuine.
[gallery ids="178516,178517,178518"]

According to John Bodnarchuk, he, entrusted to do so by Mstislav Skrypnik, the future “patriarch of Kiev and All Ukraine,” sought out a bishop in order to create a hierarchy for the new “autocephalous church.” In February 1990 the bishop of Pochaev Jacob (Panchuk), who later went into schism with Philaret Denisenko, promised him that he would participate in the “consecration,” but then declined. John was forced to set up the “hierarchy” of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church along with Vikenty Chekalin, intending later to “legitimize this consecration with the canonical episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church.” Jacob Panchuk “several times promised” John that he would “help legitimize the

consecration" (that is, re-ordain candidates or formally put his signature to their consecration *post factum*), but he never did this. The document contains a blank line.

At the end of May 1990, soon after the setting up of the "hierarchy" of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church, Mstislav Skrypnik received from the Russian Church Abroad information that Vikenty Chekalin was a "schemer with no legitimate episcopal authority." He informed John Bodnarchuk of this, who found himself at a dead end: the "hierarchy" of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was expanding and there had already been "ordinations" of clergy… The way out of the solution was quite unusual: Bodnarchuk secretly and "in person" celebrated the "rite of laying on of hands" (?!), and on this basis told Skrypnik and others that he had "taken part in the consecration of Vikenty Chekalin."

But this was not sufficient and John Bodnarchuk, with the knowledge of the other participants of the Chekalin "consecrations," forged the signature of the canonical archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko), who reposed on 17th September 1990. As John Bodnarchuk admits, he "copied" the signature from archbishop's Barlaam's letters of congratulations: "We prepared a 'certificate of consecration,' but left one line blank as Jacob (Panchuk) could not be present. When we came to the village of Mikhailovichi we waited for a long time, and then it became apparent that he (Jacob Panchuk) would not be there, and so we decided to 'consecrate' Vasily Bodnarchuk only with the participation of Vikenty Chekalin. As I intended to legitimize this 'consecration' with a canonical bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, the 'certificate of consecration' had a line left blank in it. Then he (Jacob Panchuk) repeatedly promised me that he would legitimize with me this 'consecration,' but never did this… Closer to autumn of 1990 I realized that I could not longer persuade bishops within the Russian Orthodox Church who were acquainted with me to take part in these 'consecrations,' and 'patriarch' Mstislav was demanding a full report on the first 'consecration.' And in September 1990 I learnt of the death of archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko). He would have been ideal, as he was the archbishop of Volhynia and Rovno, and I had in my possession seasonal greetings from him with his signature. This is why I included his name on the 'certificate of consecration' and said so to 'patriarch' Mstislav and a number of other bishops of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. We got together (those of us who were present at the first 'consecration') and took this decision."

These documents prove that the second testimony adduced by Cerkvarium is false. This is a document with the signature of one Igor Sas-Zhurakovsky on the alleged participation of Barlaam (Ilyuschenko) in the "consecration" of Vasily Bodnarchuk, verified by the Bodnarchuks and the father of the testifier.

At least two of the four signatories of the document – John and Vasily Bodnarchuk – knew of the forgery of the signature on Vasily's "certificate" and had an interest in concealing the truth. The elder and younger Sas-Zhurakovskys, father and son, belonged to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and cannot be considered reliable witnesses. The video recording of the "consecration" which they

mention did indeed exist. But if it is one day found, we will see on it the same Bodnarchuk brothers and Vikenty Chekalin, and not the aforementioned archbishop Barlaam (Ilyuschenko). Archbishop Barlaam, in spite of being slandered to the contrary, remained loyal to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

I believe that in this situation there is only one way for the journalists from the sites Cerkvarium and fanarion.blogspot.com to save face. They should publicly denounce the 'certificate of consecration' which they have published as false and the 'testimony of witnesses' as deceitful. And apologize to the Orthodox public for this unintended disinformation, for the absence of even formal, external signs of apostolic succession of at least a part of the "episcopate" of the so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine remains an incontrovertible fact. The "bishops" of the former "Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church," which has become part of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, originated from a former bishop who was legitimately deposed of his priestly rank and who in writing admitted that he had "left the bosom of the Church" and had "found himself beyond the confines of the Church," with the connivance (in all probability for a financial consideration) of a former deacon, fraudster and schemer, and molester of small boys passing himself off as (depending on the circumstances) a "bishop of the True Orthodox Church," a "Catholic bishop," a "secret Anglican bishop" and a psychiatrist who had graduated from a "KGB school."

It is with such "bishops" that the true bishops of the Holy Churches of God are now supposed to "concelebrate" as brothers. After this, will anyone ever again enquire why the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considers it impossible to continue concelebration with those who at the stroke of a pen received these "hierarchs" into "canonical communion"?

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/46041/