



Metropolitan Hilarion: Recognition of the OCU by any Church will only deepen the division

Recently Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople has stated that the Church of Greece is the first Local Orthodox Church in the world to recognize “The Orthodox Church of Ukraine” (OCUP) after the Church of Constantinople, which has created it. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations who recently has been on a visit to Greece, speaks in his interview with RIA NOVOSTI new agency about consequences of Constantinople’s actions in Ukraine and the attitude to them of the Orthodox world as a whole.

- Your Eminence, you have recently been to Greece where you met with the Primate of the Church of Greece and a number of its hierarchs. What are the prospects for this Church’s recognition of the OCU?

- My talks with hierarchs of the Church of Greece have convinced me of the fact that they are well aware of the whole complexity and ambiguity of the situation. In particular, everybody in Greece knows that the tomos of autocephaly was received from Patriarch Bartholomew’s hands not by the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which unites a majority of the Orthodox population in Ukraine, but by a group of schismatics who have no canonical consecrations [OCU – ed.].

Unlike Patriarch Bartholomew, I would not like to make any predictions about the decisions of the Church of Greece. It is an autocephalous Church and it is to make its decisions on its own, without an external pressure.

However, it is my profound conviction that the solution of the Ukrainian problem of schism should be of pan-Orthodox nature. If it were a unilateral recognition of the OCU by a particular Local Church, it would only deepened the existing division even greater. And our common task is to safeguard the unity of the Orthodox Church. We are praying for it during each Liturgy.

- Does Patriarch Bartholomew understand that the aim he has declared – the unification of all Orthodox believers in Ukraine into one Church – has not been achieved?

- I suppose he cannot but understand it. Indeed, he was promised that as soon as he delivered a tomos of autocephaly to Ukraine, the newly created structure would see an inflow of bishops from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church [UOC – ed.]. It has not happened, nor could it happen. The canonical Church cannot unite with a schism even if it is legalized by a paper from Constantinople.

It was promised to Patriarch Bartholomew that Poroshenko would stay in power and push the matter through by forcible inclusion of the UOC episcopate, clergy and lay in the newly created autocephaly. However, Poroshenko has failed to stay in power while the new president of Ukraine does not interfere in church affairs, and it does him credit. Everyone should mind one's own affairs; politicians should mind politics while church leaders – church affairs.

It was promised to Patriarch Bartholomew that stauropegias would be established under direct subordination to him but this promise was fulfilled only partially. The church, which Poroshenko allocated to “exarchate” of Constantinople, is standing in scaffolding; there is no flock, and the so-called exarch is bored and inactive.

- Has the attempt of Poroshenko and Patriarch Bartholomew to unite uncanonical church structures in Ukraine failed as well?

- It has failed to unite not only all Orthodox faithful in Ukraine but also even the schismatics themselves. The so-called uniting council, which took place in December in Kiev, ensured the merger of two schismatic groups into one, and it was presented as an outstanding achievement. The leaders of the schism were “restored” in holy orders, although most of them, except for false-patriarch Philaret Denisenko, have never had them.

What do we see after a few months? We see that the schism has split up within itself. And the chief ideologue of the schism, who had been its principal driver for over quarter-century, declared his withdrawal from the OCU and recreation of “the Kiev Patriarchate”.

- How are the actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople evaluated in the world of Orthodoxy as a whole; has anything changed in recent months?

- The actions committed by Patriarch Bartholomew have become the cause of his isolation. None of the Local Churches has recognized the OCU, and some have resolutely opposed them. There is also dissatisfaction with Patriarch Bartholomew's actions both in his own entourage and even broader among the hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, on Mount Athos, and in Local Orthodox Churches.

Some Primates of Churches have addressed Patriarch Bartholomew with a proposal to convene a Synaxis for considering the present situation, but he refused it point-blank.

- Why?

- Because he is aware that he will receive no support. The authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople in the Orthodox world has been considerably undermined. And the schism in Ukraine remains unhealed.

- Since the creation of the OCU, we keep hearing about the persecution against the clergy and laity of the canonical Ukrainian Church, threats, beatings, forced re-registration of churches. How is the UOC holding out?

- As for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the persecution brought down on it by the previous authority and schismatics has only reinforced its unity. They have made the episcopate even more consolidated and the clergy, monastics and laity more united around His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry.

Interviewer Olga Lipich