In Kiev, seekers of tomos are now revolting against it

Philaret Denisenko has announced the re-creation of the so-called 'Kiev Patriarchate'. He is leading his faithful out of the OCU and revolting against the Constantinople-granted tomos, because he has suddenly found out that instead of independence it makes the faithful humiliatingly depended on Constantinople. Archpriest Nikolay Danilevich, deputy head of the UOC Department for External Church Relations, relates to Rossijskaya Gazeta *how this situation is seen by the faithful of the canonical Orthodox Church.*

- **What do Philaret's rebellious 'council' and the recreation of 'the Kiev Patriarchate' indicate?**

- It indicates that what is happening to the schismatics in the so-called OCU is a schism within a schism. We can see that people are being divided because there is no God's grace in the schism.

On the other hand, much of what is being spoked about at this strange 'council' is true. We have said the same when this whole story with the tomos began and its text became already known at the stage of project. We stated straight away that it was not an autocephaly at all but rather a deception and dependence on Constantinople. Therefore, Philaret is right to some extent.

Those who remain in the OCU and refuse to withdraw from it like Philaret did seem to give more importance to a semblance of canonicity rather than to autocephaly. They sacrifice their independence to rehabilitate themselves at least in some way in the eyes of the whole Orthodox world, for which they remain to be schismatics.

This whole story with the tomos has brought only problems to the family of Local Orthodox Churches and to the world of Orthodoxy in general – and big problems at that. And there is no end to this story in sight as yet.

Everybody understand that this story with the tomos has gone in a wrong way and something has to be done. Nevertheless, Patriarch Bartholomew still has no will to solve this problem. Perhaps, it takes some time.

- **What is your prognosis, what will happen to the OCU?**

- It is difficult to say, I am not a prophet. It is easier for me to say what is happening to the canonical

Ukrainian Orthodox Church: it has gained strength and become even more united. The people have become more akin to each other. Many parishioners, and sometimes both the parishioners and 'parish visitors' have come to live as a one large family. Our parishes have begun turning into large spiritual families. And this not only in Western Ukraine, where churches have been taken from us, but also in other cities and villages in the country.

It should be understood that within the Ukrainian society there is a division. People are coming to us, to our largest Church; they really need faith, prayer, not politics. What is more important for those who come to the OCU is national rather than religious identity. This serious division does exist.

- Is it true that the oppression against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is abating?

- Yes, its scale has decreased. But still isolated attempts to capture our churches have continued in villages. Now we are at a transitional stage – one president has gone while another has come, who is still to come on the scene. However there are still those in provinces who were installed by the former president. There is a visible tendency to decrease the number of captures of our churches, but it is still too soon to rejoice, and there are still no grounds for optimism. We need to understand what stand will be chosen by President Zelensky. What he said during his inauguration were all optimistic messages. In effect, he declared a centrist, without-extremes policy for the unification of Ukraine without deviating either east or west. In my view, it is the only correct policy capable of uniting and consolidating the country. We all understand that Ukraine is diverse; there are very strong regional differences in the country. For this reason, one cannot make a special emphasis either on the Galichan or Eastern ideology.

- Does the position of Local Orthodox Church remain strong? Even the Church of Greece has not yet decided to recognize the new, non-canonical religious structure in Ukraine...?

- None of the Local Orthodox Church has recognized the OCU and, it seems, is not going to do it. There are doubts about the Orthodox Church of Greece, as a half of its hierarchy depends on the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Therefore, Constantinople theoretically can win it to its side. On the other hand, they are reluctant to come out against Patriarch Bartholomew, but on still other hand, they do not share his stand. Though they are reluctant to speak about it in public because they believe it to be 'a blow on Hellenism', on the interests of the Greek nation and Greek Orthodoxy. We, on our side, seek to bring home to them the thought that what is important now it not to take the point of new of, say,

Russia and Slavic Churches or Greek Churches or Constantinople, but it is more important to answer the question whether we observe or not the canonical order of the Church? The question is not the faithfulness to Russian or Greek Orthodoxy but to Orthodoxy on the whole. If we sacrifice the Church's canonical order in favour of Greek solidarity, then we sacrifice the whole Orthodoxy.

We have to take this narrative from the plane of political, ethnic, national affiliation, choosing between the Greek, Russian or Slavic world, to the religious plane, that of faithfulness to the Church and her principles. I very much hope that what will prevail is not ethnic, cultural, etc. component but the religious one.

- As a result of this ethnic persistence, is the Orthodox Ukraine affected most of all?

- I would like very much that the Orthodox Greeks realize how much the confrontation between Constantinople and Moscow affects Ukraine. Because our churches are taken away, people are driven away from their parishes; laws that oppress the Church are adopted. It is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is suffering.

We are the Church in the full sense of the word. The OCU is not a church in the full sense of this word. For this reason, it is Orthodox Ukraine who suffers most of all and becomes the victim of all that has been designed.

Interviewer Yelena Yakovleva

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