



Albanian Church refuses to recognize “Orthodox church of Ukraine” created by Patriarchate of Constantinople

In compliance with the decision taken by the Holy Synod of the Albanian Orthodox Church at its session on the 4th of January 2019, the Albanian Church refused to recognize “the Orthodox church of Ukraine,” recently created by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is stated in the letter sent by His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople on the 14th of January 2019 and published in accordance with the decision of the Holy Synod of the Albanian Orthodox Church of the 7th of March 2019. The text of the letter is given below.

Your All-Holiness and Most Divine Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch, the greatly beloved in Christ God brother and concelebrant of our Mediocrity, Bartholomew , embracing Your Most Divine All-Holiness in the Lord, we affectionately greet you.

"Christ our God has appeared and has enlightened the world." May He enlighten the perceptions, the decisions and the actions of all the Orthodox in the new year, guiding aright the Church "which He purchased with His own blood" to the path of peace.

Gathering in Synod on January 4, 2019, we thoroughly read the letter that Your Most Divine All-Holiness sent on December 24, 2018 and extensively treated the issue of granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. With sincere respect and love, as always, we summarize the assessment of the Albanian Church, chiefly with regard to the issue of the activities of the Holy Spirit.

Our criticism of the Church of Russia for refusing to take part in the Great and Holy Orthodox Council on Crete is already well-known, as well as similarly recently for hastiness in breaking Eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Specifically, in our letter (November 7, 2018) where, among other things, we pointed out to His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow Kirill, "... Is it possible that the decision and order of the Hierarchy of the Church of Russia may cancel the energy of the Holy Spirit in the holy Orthodox churches that operate under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate? ... We proclaim that it is impossible for us to agree to such decisions. It is imperative that the Holy Eucharist, this mystery of unfathomable sacredness and unique importance, remains far removed from all ecclesiastical disagreements."

The very same distress and anguish for safeguarding the unity of the Orthodox Church obliges us to

formulate a fundamental doubt about the retroactive validity of ordinations performed by a deposed, excommunicated and anathematized person. The career of the one who committed the actions in question, Mr Filaret Denysenko (the protagonist of the ecclesiastical crisis in Ukraine) is revealing. Consecrated as a bishop of the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1962, he acted, among other functions, as president of its Department of External Affairs and Metropolitan of Kiev. In 1991, he sought autocephaly, not from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but from according to him the "Mother Church", the Patriarchate of Moscow. In 1992 he was deposed, while in 1997 he was excommunicated and anathematized by the Church of Russia, an organic part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, actions that were recognized by all the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

While Filaret was deposed and excommunicated, he performed uncanonical liturgical actions, which do not constitute valid mysteries. Therefore the ordinations performed by him are non-existent, void, deprived of the divine grace of the Holy Spirit. Among them are the ordinations to deacon, priest and finally bishop of his pupil Sergei Dumenko, now Metropolitan Epiphany. In your letter from December 24, 2018, it states "... have returned them to the hierarchical and priestly ranks..." We question, nevertheless, whether the ordinations performed by Filaret, while he was excommunicated and anathematized, acquired thereafter, without canonical ordination, validity from the Holy Spirit and a genuine seal of apostolic succession.

It is recognized by all of Orthodoxy as a fundamental ecclesiological principle that the ordinations of schismatics and heretics, as "mysteries" performed outside of the Church, are invalid, so all the more so ordinations by someone who is deposed and excommunicated. We believe that this basic principle, which is inextricably tied to Orthodox teaching about the Holy Spirit, constituting an unshakeable foundation for the apostolic succession of Orthodox bishops, cannot be neglected.

It is difficult for us to understand that invalid and non-existent things are being made Spirit-bearing "by economy" and that actions constituting repeated blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (such as the invocation by the then-excommunicated Filaret, "Divine Grace... is placed into the hands... let us pray for him upon whom the grace of the Holy Spirit comes...") are being recognized retroactively "by economy". It is, finally, well-known that according to the recent Unifying Council, the selection and election of the new Primate of the Church of Ukraine was the result of the insistence of Filaret, who moreover today is officially called in Ukraine "His Holiness the honorary Patriarch of Kiev and All Rus-Ukraine." After all the above, we question adding the name of Metropolitan Epiphany to the diptychs.

The expected peacemaking between Ukrainian Orthodox, who have in the past suffered various persecutions by atheistic regimes, has not yet been achieved, inasmuch as millions of Orthodox believers under Metropolitan Onufry (according to the statistics of January 2018, organized into 12,069 parishes under 90 bishops, counting 12,283 clerics, 251 monasteries and 4412 monastics) have

refused to participate in the process of granting autocephaly, indeed breaking Eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, whereas in the past the ecclesiastical pleroma of countries (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, Albania, Chechia and Slovakia) to which autocephaly was granted was united.

We regret that the concerns that we expressed to the three-member delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate (July 2018) as well as at our personal meeting on Crete (October 2018) have been confirmed: instead of making peace among and unifying the Orthodox of Ukraine, the unity of Orthodoxy throughout the world is threatened with division.

The predictions that the current conflict and the obvious division will last a short time and that all the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches will eventually accept what has happened can only be perceived as unfounded speculation by those familiar with the history of ecclesiastical schisms and the durability of religious fanaticism. But the reassuring conjectures of some that perhaps this will take place... in the next century are rather cynical. Serious injuries that are not treated in time are not healed by time. Rather, they expand and develop into incurable wounds.

The situation existing today requires new approaches and inspired initiatives for promoting peace in Ukraine, above all for safeguarding the dangerously wounded unity of Orthodoxy. In this regard, we unshakeably believe that a solution is found in recourse to the synodality inspired by the Holy Spirit, which was stressed on Crete: "The Orthodox Church expresses her unity and catholicity "in Council". Conciliarity pervades her organization, the way decisions are taken and determines her path" (Message of the Great and Holy Council, paragraph 1).

We still think that the Pan-Orthodox Synaxes of Primates and the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church were unique achievements of the Orthodox in recent decades, due to the tireless efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of Your Most Divine All-Holiness personally. In accordance with the spirit of synodality of the Great and Holy Council, the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church warmly requests that the Ecumenical Patriarchate, making eminent use of coordination of the Orthodox Churches, convenes as soon as possible a Pan-Orthodox Synaxis or Council in order to prevent the immanent danger of creating a painful schism that endangers the credibility of Orthodoxy and her persuasive witness to the contemporary world.

From the depths we pray and humbly supplicate that God in Trinity will guide all of our steps toward securing the unity of Orthodoxy. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

And so, embracing You with a holy kiss, we remain, with all respect and most profound love in Christ

God who has appeared to us and has enlightened the world.

+ANASTASIOS

Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and All Albania

Tirana, 14th of January 2019

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