



Metropolitan Daniel of Vidin: Constantinople acts in Ukraine against the rules

Recently the Orthodox world has been actively working out its position with regard to the developing crisis caused by the intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople into the canonical territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has brought about a break in communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In an exclusive interview with RIA Novosti, Metropolitan Daniel of Vidin, one of the bishops of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and a member of its Synod, has spoken unambiguously on this issue.

- **Bishop Daniel, how would you characterize the actions of the state authorities and the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine?**

In April of last year, the Patriarchate of Constantinople informed the world that it would examine the appeal of church and political representatives of Ukraine, requesting to resolve the issue of 'autocephaly' in this country.

Then, when the Local Orthodox Churches were expecting the initiation of an inter-Orthodox discussion of the problem, envoys from the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Local Churches directly spoke of the intention of the Church of Constantinople to resolve this issue unilaterally. It then became clear that Constantinople's actions were not in accord with the established canonical order of the Orthodox Church.

In September the Patriarch of Constantinople appointed exarchs to Ukraine. This is already a claim that Constantinople has its jurisdiction and authority on the territory of another Orthodox Church – an independent, autocephalous Church! This is already a violation.

We know that the canons, for example, the second canon of the Second Ecumenical Council or the eighth canon of the Third Ecumenical Council, categorically forbid the Local Churches to interfere in the affairs of the other Local Orthodox Churches and their Primates. The eighth canon of the Third Ecumenical Council was adopted with this type of situation in mind. The actions of the Primate of the Church of Antioch who desired to consecrate bishops for the Church of Cyprus and subject this Church to his jurisdiction were then examined. And this was categorically forbidden by the Ecumenical Council.

Further, Patriarch Bartholomew accepted the appeal of the defrocked Philaret Denisenko, the former metropolitan of Kiev, and of the so-called metropolitan Macarius Maletich (*the leaders of the two*

schismatics structures – the so-called Kiev Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Editor's note). The Patriarch of Constantinople attempts to justify his actions by referring to the ninth and seventeenth canons of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. However, the Byzantine canonists, including such authorities as John Zonaras, state that these particular canons do not grant to the Patriarch of Constantinople the right to accept appeals from bishops and clergy of the other Local Orthodox Churches.

- **However, Constantinople refers to precedents of similar appeals in history. What can you say to this?**

If such instances occurred in the Byzantine Empire or later, when its territory came under the Ottoman Empire, then we have to take into consideration the situation whereby clergy from the other Patriarchates – of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem – presented their appeals to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Many of these precedents were initiated by heretics – for example, during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius (491 – 518) there appeared in Constantinople the clergy from the Maiuma monastery who were heretical monophysites (*who denied the human nature of Jesus Christ and worshipped him only as God. Editor's note*). They complained to the then Patriarch Macedonius II of Constantinople (496 – 511) about Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem, who was Orthodox. The Patriarch of Constantinople satisfied the appeal. However, later, after the death of the monophysite emperor, justice was restored.

After the fall of Constantinople, everything changed under the Turks. As is well known, after 1620 the Patriarchs of Alexandria were elected in Constantinople. Why? This was a time when in the Church of Alexandria there was only one bishop and he was the Primate. And if his decision caused indignation among the clergy, then who could the offended party appeal to? And yet, at that time appeals were considered at special councils at which, apart from the Patriarch of Constantinople, there were also present other Patriarchs or representatives of the Churches (a Council of Eastern Patriarchs or, in individual cases, the so called *endimus synodos* – a council of all the bishops who happened to be in the capital at the time).

Later, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite – the compiler of one of two official collections of the holy canons of the Orthodox Church recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople – when commenting on the ninth and seventeenth canons of the Fourth Ecumenical Council also stated that they do not grant to the Patriarch of Constantinople any right to receive appeals from bishops and clergy of the other Churches.

The Council of Carthage directly forbade bishops and clerics of the Church of Carthage to “carry an appeal across seas” – to Rome. And in its second canon, the Quinisext Ecumenical Council included the resolutions of the Council of Carthage in the collection of canons that received pan-Orthodox

recognition.

Therefore, the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople clearly run counter to the canonical order.

- **And can we consider as consistent with this order the unilateral annulment by Constantinople of the historical document of 1686 – the Act of the transfer of the Metropolia of Kiev to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate?**

A document that was in effect for more than three hundred years has been annulled! All this time all of the Orthodox Churches viewed the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as part of the Russian Orthodox Church. We have a tradition, a generally accepted custom in inter-Orthodox relations which views this territory as the canonical territory of the Russian Church. This is affirmed also by the numerous documents and agreements between the Churches.

- **Is the tomos of autocephaly, which Patriarch Bartholomew handed over to the newly-created 'Orthodox Church of Ukraine', legitimate for the Orthodox world?**

The complete disdain for canonical order within the Church is demonstrated by the document issued by the Patriarchate of Constantinople on the 6th of January – the so-called tomos of autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church. For example, it is stated there that the newly-created structure recognizes as its head the Patriarch of Constantinople. On what basis? How is it possible for one Local Church to recognize as its Primate someone who is not even a bishop of this Church?

This clearly shows that we are dealing with the attempts of one man to impose his singular authority over a Church in his own interests and to reinterpret the canonical order that has existed in the Orthodox Church for a thousand years. This is dangerous and should not be allowed to happen. And therefore, it is very important that the Local Churches should not recognize the canonical validity of this document. It imposes upon us a new teaching about the Church.

- **And how do you evaluate the other decisions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople which have been taken in recent years? For example, the decision to allow clergymen to marry a second time?**

This also demonstrates that they do not consider it necessary to adhere to canonical order. There are the holy canons of the Ecumenical Councils which forbid priests to marry after they have been ordained.

This issue has been raised repeatedly in the Church. Yet what has the Church decided? She has decided that it is wrong to enter into marriage after ordination.

This issue was discussed during the preparation for the Council of Crete in 2016. And in the documents which were adopted at the pre-Council conferences it was clearly stated that canonical tradition views priesthood as an obstacle to marriage. This document was even signed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople!

So, this is a demonstrative example of how they disregard the canonical rules and the conciliar mind of the Church. Moreover, these actions undermine and sever relations between the Local Orthodox Churches.

- **What has to be done today in the first instance to preserve the unity of the Orthodox Churches?**

It is important that the Orthodox Churches ignore the political context of all this.

And here the issue is not (as many in the mass media claim) whom to support in the Ukrainian church question: Constantinople or Moscow. Here we are concerned with the preservation of the Orthodox Church as it is – One and Catholic, as has been determined by the Ecumenical Councils and as the Church thinks of itself.

The life of the Church has always been founded upon the Lord's commandments, on the teaching of the holy apostles and upon the canons which the Ecumenical Councils always saw as universal. Changes in these fundamental issues lead to the disruption of the life of the Orthodox Church. This is why it is so important to defend the canonical order and preserve church unity.

- **What are the ways out of the crisis which has arisen in world Orthodoxy as a result of the actions of Constantinople in Ukraine?**

As the actions of Constantinople directly violate the canons and create a situation whereby such dangerous precedents are set in the life of the Orthodox Church, then we have to qualify these actions as anti-canonical.

This will preserve Orthodox unity and, I believe, allow us to overcome the crisis which has arisen today between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople (the rupture in Eucharistic communion).

That is, if the other Orthodox Churches say definitely: no, we do not accept this 'autocephaly,' if the 'tomos' of Constantinople does not receive pan-Orthodox approval and the Ukrainian schismatics are not accepted into the communion, then this will become a way of overcoming the present crisis and of preserving the canonical order and unity of the Church.

- **Are there schismatic communities in the Bulgarian Church? How acute for you is the problem of schism?**

There was a time when the problem of schism was acute, but now it is a thing of the past. In 1992, after the fall of the totalitarian regime, the state authorities once more interfered in the life of the Church. Then the prime minister of Bulgaria met with some metropolitans and gave them guarantees that the government would support them if they unite and oppose the then Patriarch Maxim. The bishops agreed to this and declared that Patriarch Maxim was a 'communist patriarch,' had been elected supposedly with the help of the communist regime and was 'not their Patriarch.' It turns out that for twenty years he was their Patriarch and then became 'not theirs.' A schism began.

The Church then found itself in a very difficult situation: church buildings were seized as were some church workshops and so on. But the worst thing was that the schism was supported by the state authorities. It was provoked after the ban on the Church's participation in public life was removed, when there was a genuine church revival in the country, when there was a spiritual uplift...

As a result, in order to overcome the division, in 1998 a Pan-Orthodox Council was held in Sofia, which was presided over by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

I wonder if he now remembers how the schism was then overcome. And why does he not again put this question up for a pan-Orthodox discussion and convene a council? As the first among equals he is able to do this in order to find a resolution to the situation in Ukraine and preserve the unity of Orthodoxy. Why does he not convene a council? Before, general church councils were convoked in such difficult circumstances. This is the practice of the Orthodox Church.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is painfully aware what schism means. And we believe that the only way to overcome it is through a pan-Orthodox discussion and search for agreement.

- **Is the Patriarchate of Constantinople seeking out this agreement, in your view?**

The claims that the Patriarchate of Constantinople has certain privileges regarding the 'supra-territorial healing of church issues,' such as the unilateral actions of this Patriarchate in the Ukrainian problem, which are in direct contradiction with the canon law of the Orthodox Church (it is especially obvious in the text of the so called tomos of the 6th of January of this year), allow to think that the aim of the Patriarchate of Constantinople is rather to impose its authority over the Orthodox Church than to seek out accord and unity. This is evident not only from its actions with regard to the crisis in Ukraine.

At conferences before the Council of Crete the presence of parallel jurisdictions of the Local Churches in the so-called diaspora which do not belong to any canonical territory was defined as a 'canonical

anomaly.' This is because, according to the apostolic canons, in a single city and in one place there can be only one bishop and only one Local Church. And in order to address the situation it was decided to convoke episcopal assemblies.

I served for seven years in the diocese of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the USA and Australia, and the episcopal assembly in the USA discussed several possibilities of how to overcome this canonical problem. Discussion went on for a number of years. And at one point in 2015 on the eve of the Council of Crete, Patriarch Bartholomew recorded a special video for this episcopal assembly, calling for canonical order. He said: 'As bishops you know the canons – simply apply these canons in practice.' This meant that on the territory of the USA we should set up a single administration while at the same time, it was understood, all projects would be subject to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

This created a huge impression on me at the time... The fact is that a few days before this there was a statement by Patriarch Bartholomew in which he greeted all of the metropolitans of northern Greece who supported his disputed rights in the so-called new territories (*which had become a part of Greece and therefore the Church of Greece after the liberation of these lands from Ottoman subjugation in 1912. Editor's note*). And now the Patriarch of Constantinople has his stavropegic representations on the territory of Greece, that is, the jurisdiction of the Primate of one Local Church is to be found on the territory of another Local Church.

At the same time, this double standard has arisen not for the good of the Church, not out of love or the concern for the resolution of these problems; it speaks solely of the assertion of his authority and personal ambitions. This is obvious, too, in the actions of Constantinople in Ukraine. When a supposed 'local church' is instituted it is said to be autocephalous, and yet the reality is that there is no autocephaly there at all! It is not an independent church because the founding document asserts the leadership of the Primate of another Church on this territory.

Therefore, we have to take these actions very seriously. We have to defend canon law in order to preserve the unity of the Orthodox Church. As the fathers of the Third Ecumenical Council state in the eighth canon: 'Let none of the God-loved bishops extend his authority to another diocese which was never under his guidance or that of his predecessors, lest the haughty spirit of secular power creep in as godly ministry.' Otherwise we will destroy our freedom which the Lord has granted to us through his blood. May God never let this happen!

Interview conducted by Sergei Stefanov