



Patriarch Irenaeus: ‘Serbian’ Athos is with Canonical Church of Ukraine

Patriarch Irenaeus of Serbia flew in to Moscow last week together with several Primates of other Local Churches for the celebrations marking the 10th anniversary of the election of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. The hierarchs’ talks proved to be focused on the situation of the faithful in Ukraine where, at the initiative of the state and with the support of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, a new church structure has been created resting upon those who is in schism with the Russian Orthodox Church. His Holiness Irenaeus utterly clearly stated the inadmissibility of this situation and his support for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. He spoke of the results of his visit in an exclusive interview to RIA Novosti new agency, sharing his vision of the Ukrainian problem in the world of Orthodoxy, of Constantinople’s permission of second marriage for the clergy, as well as the situation in Kosovo and a possible canonization of his predecessor, Patriarch Pavle.

- Your Holiness, have any preliminary agreements on the situation in Ukraine been reached in the negotiations in Moscow with the participation of delegations of most Local Churches? What is to be done next?

- The program of our visit to Moscow was rather tough, and in addition to what we could hear in speeches of greeting, we have not had any special opportunities for discussions. However, we all feel the gravity of this problem. The developments in Ukraine are destroying our family. It is not something from outside; it is what is going on precisely within, in the very family of Orthodox Churches.

I expected more from Primates of other Churches – that we might meet in Moscow and discuss what happened and is happening in Ukraine. Unfortunately, many Primates did not come and sent their envoys. We only had an opportunity to have a broad talk on these issues with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

However, it remains a demand our time and the nearest future for us all to discuss the problem of Ukraine in more detail. It is necessary to understand how far this division may go and what consequences it will inevitably bring. Unfortunately, these consequences are already evident, and the fruits of this division can be felt.

- On Mount Athos, which is under the jurisdiction of Constantinople, there is a Serbian monastery, Chilandar. Do you know the attitude of Athonite monks to the recent actions made by the Patriarch of Constantinople in Ukraine?

- We have not yet received any new reports from the Chilandar Monastery, but I am sure that our brothers on Mount Athos are certainly with us, with their own Church. I do not think they could have taken any other stand, different from the position of our Serbian Church.

- And how do you assess the recent decision of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to permit the clergy to marry for the second time?

- This decision came as a surprise to us because it contradicts all the existing canonical norms. Regrettably, it is characteristic of our time and speaks of a temptation through which the Church is going.

- What is the situation in Kosovo now? What is the attitude of society and the Serbian Orthodox Church to the idea of dividing Kosovo into two parts, Serbian and Albanian?

- Kosovo is our grave wound. For 500 years, we protected it from the Turks and all those who wanted to take it away from us. Kosovo is not a mere geographical notion; it is our alma mater, our cradle. All that is connected with the history, spirituality and the holy tradition of the Serbs is in Kosovo and Metochia.

We believe the 1244 Security Council Resolution should be respected and full freedom and autonomy, just as all that there was before, should be ensured for the Albanian people, while it is necessary to retain the territory of Kosovo and Metochia within Serbia. This is the attitude of our Church as it was formulated by our recent Bishops' Council.

- In Serbia and outside it, there is a great veneration of your predecessor, Patriarch Pavle. Do the faithful discuss a possibility for his canonization?

- His Holiness Patriarch Pavle is a unique person indeed in the history of our people and our Church. He was a modest man throughout his life. And the way in which he began his monastic feat is the way in which he accomplished it as a Patriarch.

He was a Primate who did not expect any help from anybody. He was a man of the people who treated him as their own as we could see on the day of his burial. He was a super-wise man. He did not talk much but what he said has become our sayings and proverbs used by Serbs today as folk wisdom. He wrote several significant books.

There are always many people at his grave in the Rakovica Monastery. The Serbs pray to him, appeal to him like a saint.

What will happen next, whether the Church will officially canonize him or not, we will see. Whatever is the decision, he is a holy man.

Interviewer Sergey Stefanov

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