Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol: Our faithful feel betrayed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, answered questions from the Romfea Greek church news agency. The text of the interview is published on the website of the UOC Synodal Information and Education Department.

- Your Eminence, on November 13, the Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church took place. What are the principal results of this Council?

- First of all, the Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has testifies to and re-affirmed the internal unity of our Church.

We know that representatives of our state, who have advanced the idea of autocephaly, have promised to the Ecumenical Patriarch that from 20 to 25 bishops of our Church will allegedly come to the so-called 'uniting council' intended to create a new 'united church'. If not twenty but at least ten bishops will come for sure – this is something of which they in Fanar were sure. In our mass media, it was written that Metropolitan Emmanuel of France was secretly present in Kiev in these days to prepare the so-called 'uniting council'. Actually, it was only one bishop, namely, Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnitsa, who refused to sign the decision of the Bishops' Council. This position of Metropolitan Simeon has provoked strong protests among the clergy of his diocese (nearly 50 priests in the city of Vinnitsa protested, and a multitude of lay people supported them). Therefore, Metropolitan Simeon, even if he himself refused to sign these decisions, had to make an official statement that, despite all of this, the decision of the Bishops' Council is obligatory for the whole Ukrainian Church including the diocese of Vinnitsa. He said that because he realized there is a risk of losing his diocese which does not support him in this matter.

It means that the idea of 'Constantinopolitan autocephaly' is not accepted by the church people and clergy of our Church. There are no 'millions' of the faithful who allegedly expect to be granted a Tomos of autocephaly, as our mass media insist, just as Patriarch Bartholomew does, who seems to accept the logic of our schismatics. Why am I saying this? Because today we hear from Patriarch of Constantinople's mouth the same allegations and the same arguments that we have heard from our schismatics for many years now.

I believe that as this ideology has led to a schism within Ukraine, so it is already leading to problems on the pan-Orthodox level too. Here I would like to recall some extracts from a letter of His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Albania, to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow in which Archbishop Anastasios said

that instead of a unity of Orthodox in Ukraine we will arrive at a danger of schism in the unity of world Orthodoxy.

Having taken all this in consideration, the Bishops' Council has issued a statement that autocephaly today does not reflect the internal church need imposed on us from outside and that our Church will not unite with the schismatics without the latter's repentance. We have an impression that our state, together with the schismatics and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, wishes to tear away at least some part of our Church. But our Church has manifested its unity and integrity.

- However, in the Ukrainian mass media they say there are allegedly fifteen letters of attorney from some metropolitans, who will not come for the 'uniting council' themselves but will entrust somebody to vote on their behalf?

- I have read about it; these are fantasies. Otherwise, the 'uniting council' could be conducted through Internet communication or Skype. Why take the trouble to come to Kiev? However, to speak seriously, I would like to make two points. First, even if it is as you have said, then this fact shows what crafty ways are used to commit this lawlessness. And this fact is not to the credit, in the first place, of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which has got involved in this affair. Secondly, if any of the bishops will really go to that 'council', then their faithful and clergy will be the first not to let them come back to their metropolises, as we have seen it in Vinnitsa and in another metropolis whose bishop has made some erroneous steps. They will lose their metropolises and remain with nothing left. It means that the theme of 'Constantinopolitan autocephaly' is not finding support among our faithful people, and this is not a result of Moscow's actions, as it is falsely maintained in the public space.

- What is the stand your state has taken after the Bishops' Council?

- The state authorities are attempting to scare our bishops and priests. Through the last week, the Ukrainian mass media have issues dozens of articles with dirty accusations against bishops and priests popular in our society. In addition, Security Service officials have summoned our bishops for talks. These are not yet persecutions against our Church, as was the case in Soviet time; indeed, times have changed but hints are dropped at what they want from us. There is a pressure.

If it were only the state or other non-church forces that put pressure on us, it would not be so offensive, because we know the history of the Church. But when it is done or promoted or secretly involves another Local Orthodox Church, I mean that of Constantinople, then it is difficult for us to accept spiritually and psychologically. The Ecumenical Patriarchate is acting in Ukraine as a partisan, secretly, ignoring the canonical Church with its millions of the faithful, 12 500 parishes, 90 bishops and 5000 monks, ignoring a great canonical Church and identifying with those who put pressure on our Church. All that Fanar is

doing it is doing together with the political leadership of our country. Yesterday, Ukrainian President Mr. Poroshenko announced that on November 25 a state official, Mr. Pavlenko, will fly out to Fanar to attend a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to take part in the final drafting or adopting the text of the Tomos.

In anyway, we are observing strange things as state officials, being laymen, plan to take part in a meeting of the Holy Synod of a Church and seek to solve church problems. It is a pity that we see such a strange behaviour in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. We disagree with it and we will not let politicians interfere in our church affairs.

- How do the ordinary church people and your clergy see these developments, how do they perceive them?

- I have observed a very interesting and at the same time sad phenomenon. These unlawful actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople compromise, in the eyes of the faithful people and our clergy, not only the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself but also the whole Greek-speaking Orthodoxy. I am told by our priests that today many believers confess to their spiritual fathers that they have negative designs against the Ecumenical Patriarchate because of its actions in Ukraine. Our faithful are aware that these designs are not good for a Christian to contemplate and for this reason they confess them. Some priests, who earlier liked to serve in Greek vestments, now reject them and take up Russian ones. I can see that some of our clergy, who used to come often to Holy Mount Athos, no longer have such a strong wish to go there. Our fathers wonder why the Holy Mountain keeps silent, why the Holy Mount starets say nothing when they see how the canonical foundations of world Orthodoxy are being trampled upon? Overall, I see some antipathy being born toward all things Greek.

Our faithful are pained by the betrayal of people of the same faith, namely, the Patriarchate of Constantinople that has driven a knife into the back of our Church. Our faithful feel betrayed. And this pain is even more strong and intolerable then all the conflicts and confrontations with the schismatics and Uniates that we have endured in recent decades.

Therefore, we can see a silent protest on the simple everyday level, some estrangement from the rich and beautiful Greek-Orthodox tradition. I do not want to say that it is a mass phenomenon but the tendencies are precisely such. I believe that it is a very serious problem because a schism on an ordinary people’s level is very strong and long. It is for this reason that what Fanar is doing in Ukraine unfortunately affects the whole of Greek-speaking Orthodoxy. And, speaking more broadly, it concerns the whole Body of Orthodoxy. We hope that people in the Greek-speaking world will realize it, and we all, with God’s help, will find strength to overcome it.

- How are the schismatics behaving in this situation?

- The schismatics have not changed. The lifting of anathemas and depositions have been taken by the schismatics not as incorporating them into the Church but as the Church's acknowledgement of their position because of which they created a schism.

What does it mean that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has recognized the schismatics? I means that it has changed its attitude to the schismatics, but the schismatics themselves have not changed. Why is it necessary that sinners or schismatics should repent in the Church? It is needed so that they may change their mind. The Greek word *metanoia* means a change of mind. It is necessary that schismatics should change, not that the Church itself should change. In other words, a sinner, instead of repenting and changing his life before God, wants that God Himself should change with regard to him. If the Church admits sinners without their change, what will happen?

It reminds me of the Gospel's parable of the Lord about those invited to a marriage, when the king came "to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless" (Mt. 22:11-12). The Church will not take unrepentant sinners in her fold. Even if she does, she will eventually reject them.

We can see that the schismatics have not changed after October the 11th, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople made its decision. They have remained hostile and aggressive towards our Church. It has been realised and confirmed by the Orthodox Churches of Serbia and Poland, and we are grateful to them for it. In addition, the schismatics, who have been recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, do not have valid priesthood and episcopate. And if other Local Orthodox Churches do not say their categorical 'no', as the Churches of Serbia and Poland have done, then tomorrow they will have to concelebrate with the people who have no and never have had the canonical ordination. In the beginning of the schism, episcopal ordinations were administered by adventurists who were not even priests, who deceived the first schismatics and 'ordained' them as 'bishops' and had other problems of moral nature.

I would also like to note that since Spring 2018 when all this affairs with the Tomos began, not a single Local Autocephalous Church has agreed with the actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Ukraine, and the position of the Serbian and Polish Churches, who refused to recognized the legalization of the schismatics, shows and gives hope that none of other Churches will have a position different of that of the two above-mentioned Churches. It means, in my opinion, that if the Ecumenical Patriarchate does not change its position, then it will surely move to an impasse.

Let it stop; let it begin dialogue with us, the Russian Church and with other Local Churches.

Together we will find a solution. We are ready for dialogue. Otherwise, we will lose everything and the first to lose will be the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the whole Orthodox Church.

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