Metropolitan Hilarion: Patriarch Bartholomew's actions do not heal the schism but rather deepen it

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, gives interview to Romfea, a Greek church news agency.

- Your Eminence, how would you comment on yesterday's statement of the Council of Bishops' of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church?

- I admire the courage and unanimity of the hierarchs of the canonical Ukrainian Church headed by His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine. In spite of the most powerful pressure exerted by the Ukrainian authorities, on one hand, and the Patriarch of Constantinople, on the other, the episcopate stand firm defending their right to live according to church canons and preserve unity with the with the plenitude of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was born on the Dnieper in the baptismal font of the Great Prince Vladimir of Kiev 1030 years ago.

For the past centuries, political borders in the territory, which used to be called 'Kievan Rus', appeared and disappeared, but the unity of the Russian Church has remained immutable.

And today, the bishops of the Ukrainian Church have firmly stated that they 'support the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine', that is, they respect the political order of its state. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the statement underscored, 'is present in all the regions of Ukraine and united the territories both under and beyond the control of the Ukrainian power, sharing with its people all the joys and sufferings'. The bishops, clergy, monastics and lay people of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are patriots of their country. They are not some strangers who have come from abroad and settled in Ukraine. An absolute majority of them have been born and grown up in Ukraine. They love their motherland and do not want to be identified with other states.

It is precisely for this reason that the Bishops' Council 'speaks out against any attempts to change the name of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church' to Russian or any other Church. It is not Russian but Ukrainian Church fully independent in its governance not subjected to Moscow either administratively or financially or in any other way. Preserved are only ties in prayer through the liturgical mention of the Patriarch and participation of Ukrainian bishops in the work of the Holy Synod common for the Russian Orthodox Church.

I will point out that neither the Bishops' Council, nor does the Synod of the Ukrainian Church, have any

representative from Moscow. All the decisions are made by the episcopate and Synod of the Ukrainian Church on their own. But the episcopate of the Ukrainian Church can influence decisions made in the Russian Church through their representatives at the Synod of the Russian Church. It is a unique situation, which makes it possible for one side to preserve full independence and self-governance in decision-making and for the other to preserve unity with the plenitude of the Russian Church.

Precisely for this reason the Bishops Council stated, 'The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is vested with all rights of independence and self-governance that are needed today for fruitfully serving God and the people of Ukraine'. This statement was already made in June and now it is repeated. The Ukrainian Church did not ask and does not ask for any autocephaly. The process of granting autocephaly to 'the Ukrainian people', which has been initiated by Constantinople, is given a clear assessment: 'The process of granting the so-called Tomos of Autocephaly is artificial and enforced, that it is not caused by the inner church necessity and will not bring about the real ecclesiastical unity, but will deepen the division and worsen the conflicts among the Ukrainian people. In such circumstances we believe that the participation of the bishops, clergy and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in these processes is impossible'.

What is happening today is the first ever case in the history of Orthodoxy when autocephaly is not asked but imposed. At the same time, it is imposed by force and gross pressure. The bishops of the canonical Church are demanded that they should take part in some 'uniting council' the convocation of which has been initiated by the schismatics with the aim to have their structure legitimized. It is astonishing and sad that the Patriarchate of Constantinople has identified with the schism instead of supporting the canonical Church which unites millions of the faithful including 13 thousand parishes, over 200 monasteries and which is present throughout Ukraine including territories beyond the control of the Ukrainian authorities.

I heard with my own ears how, during the Synaxis of the Primates of Local Orthodox Churches in January 2016 in Chambesy, Patriarch Bartholomew said for all to hear, 'We welcome His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry as the only canonical head of the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine, certainly with all his hierarchs'. What has happened then? Why all of a sudden Patriarch Bartholomew's position has changed to an opposite one and preference is given to the leaders of the schism now sought to knock together into some new structure. We have not answer to that. But by no means can we accept this situation as normal. Therefore, we have had to sustain the Eucharistic communion with Patriarch of Constantinople as a one who has identified with a schism and thus himself has fallen into schism. The Russian Church stated this at the Synod which took place on October 15 in Minsk.

Yesterday, a similar statement was made by hierarchs of the Ukrainian Church: 'The Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church regards the decisions of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of

Constantinople of 11 October 2018 concerning the Ukrainian ecclesiastical issue as void and not having any canonical power. In particular, the decision on the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the territory of Ukraine is the result of speculative interpretation of church history. And the decision to lift the anathema and other ecclesiastical bans imposed on the leaders of the schism and the recognition of validity of the pseudo-ordinations performed by them while in schism are the result of distorted interpretation of the Orthodox canons. The history of the Ukrainian Church does not know any examples of overcoming a schism by mere legalization. Having adopted such anti-canonical decisions and having recognized the schismatics in their current rank, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, according to the ecclesiastical rules, embarked on the path of schism. Therefore, the Eucharistic communion between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople is currently impossible and is broken off'.

I would like to note that we are not alone in refusing to recognize the anti-canonical actions of Constantinople. The other day, the Serbian Orthodox Church, through the voices of all its bishops, stated that 'the Patriarchate of Constantinople adopted a decision not based on canons with the aim to rehabilitate and recognize as bishops the two leaders of schismatic groups in Ukraine – Philaret Denisenko and Makary Maletic together with their episcopate and clergy'. The decision of the Bishops' Council of the Serbian Church states that the former was in due course canonically deprived of his rank and later excommunicated from church communion and anathematized, while the latter is deprived of the apostolic succession as spiritually belonging to a sect of the so-called self-ordained 'due to which the Holy Bishops' Council considered this decision of the Synod of Constantinople to be not obligatory for the Serbian Orthodox Church'. As is noted in the issued document, the Council of the Serbian Church does not recognize these persons and their followers as Orthodox bishops and clergy and, therefore, does not admit them and their supporters to canonical communion.

I hope that in other Local Churches, too, there will be voices calling the Patriarchate of Constantinople to stop their actions allegedly aimed to heal the Ukrainian schism. Actually, these actions lead to the deepening of the schism in Ukraine and to creating for the Orthodox Church an unprecedented situation when the whole body of the world Orthodoxy may find itself split into pieces.

- In your view, what are the prospects for convocation of 'a uniting council' and what can be expected from it?

- In my view, the prospects are rather dim. The date of that 'council' has already been announced but there is no great enthusiasm to be seen around its convocation either in the canonical Church or in schismatic groups. Various figures have been indicated with regard to possible participation of canonical hierarchs in this brigandish gathering – from 10 to 25. So far, we have seen only two canonical hierarchs who have disagreed with the opinion of the episcopate of the canonical Church expressed in

the decision of its Bishops' Council. But will they attend the 'uniting council'? Not a sure thing. The adventurous nature of this event is obvious to all.

And there is no unity on this issue among the schismatics either. Makary's group has repeatedly stated that it will not join a structure to be headed by Philaret Denisenko. True, Philaret now says that he will not put oneself forward for election, while continuing to call himself patriarch and hoping to have in the new structure the title of 'Honorary Patriarch of Kiev and All Rus-Ukraine', to head its 'synod' and to enjoy special privileges. He even declared himself as holy archimandrite of the Kiev Laura of the Caves and Pochaev Laura.

However, it is not included in Constantinople's plans. Their wish is that the 'autocephalous church' under creation should be headed by a new man while Philaret should be written off 'to the dustbin of history'. Indeed, they have recognized him not in the rank of patriarch but merely in some hierarchal dignity as 'formerly of Kiev'. An agreement between President Poroshenko and Patriarch Bartholomew that Philaret will be written off as junk has been reached. But will the 'episcopate' in Philaret's jurisdiction agree with such a development? Not a sure thing either.

- **Nevertheless, if the 'uniting council' does take place, who will be able to head the new structure?**

- Various names are being considered and discussed. Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnitsa has already been asked to head it as he is the only hierarch who attended the Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church but who refused to put his signature under the Council's statement.

For Constantinople, it would be important of course that the structure be headed by a canonical hierarch, not someone of the schismatics. In Constantinople's view, it will give the new structure a greater legitimacy. That is why it is a very slim possibility that the structure will be headed by someone from Philaret's 'episcopate'. Rather, it may be headed by one of the two 'exarchs' of Constantinople – Archbishop Daniel (Zelinsky) or Archbishop Job (Getcha), who recently has been increasingly active in the Ukrainian field.

Archbishop Job has proved himself very poorly in Paris where he headed the Archdiocese of Russian Parishes of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for a short time. As a result of an acute internal conflict caused in that structure after his assignment, Constantinople had to recall him. May be, they now want to test him in another field.

- What is the reaction of Local Orthodox Churches to the development and what reaction you expect if Ukraine is granted a Tomos of autocephaly?

- First of all, I will point out that none of the Local Orthodox Churches has spoken out in support of Patriarch Bartholomew's actions despite the efforts made in this respect including a tour of the Orthodox Churches made by its representatives. Now it acts in full loneliness and even stresses that it does not need an approval of other Local Churches. If before that Patriarch of Constantinople acted as a coordinator for all the Orthodox Plenitude acting on behalf of Local Churches, now we do not see anything like it at all. Coming from Fanar are only declarations about some special powers of the Patriarch of Constantinople, which allegedly allow him to make unilateral decisions.

Appeals to Patriarch Bartholomew to abandon this stand have been made by a number of Local Churches. Other Churches have adopted a wait-and-see attitude and do not make any statements. Still others believe that the problem should be resolved in dialogue between Constantinople and Moscow. However, there is no such dialogue today: there is a monologue of Constantinople.

For us, it is evident today: the problems of such importance as granting autocephaly cannot be solved solely by Constantinople even if there were such precedents in the past. On the stage of preparing a Pan-Orthodox Council, a fundamental agreement was reached that from now on the granting of autocephaly should be agreed by all Local Churches. Even if this agreement was not finalized, was not submitted to the Council of Crete, the very fact of inter-Orthodox consent around this topic is evident and beyond doubt.

Along with pan-Orthodox consent, the firm grounds for autocephaly should include a firm unanimity around this issue of the episcopate, clergy and church people of a particular country. There is no such unanimity today. A deep schism cannot be healed only through its legitimatization. And it means that the so-called autocephalous church in Ukraine – even if created by a tomos of Patriarch Bartholomew and supported by an edict of President Poroshenko and a decree of the Supreme Rada – will be a house built not on a solid foundation but on sand. And it will experience what the Saviour said, 'And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it' (Mt. 6:27).

As for the canonical Ukrainian Church, we believe that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Mt. 16:18). The Lord will reward its hierarchs, clergy and church people for their firm and courageous standing on the guard of canonical order. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church today is a confessor Church wrestling 'not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12). And from this struggle she will certainly come victorious.

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