Metropolitan Onufry on the fate of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine

The information and education department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has published an interview given by His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, to Pastor and Flock *magazine.*

- **Your Beatitude, according to the Ukrainian Constitution, Church is separated from state. When in the early 20th century the Bolsheviks adopted this law, many believers perceived it as a serious religious catastrophe. However, as it very soon became clear, the Bolsheviks separated Church from state only to busy themselves with her destruction. Later, in the early 90th, the situation changed as the communists went down from the historical arena and a time of restoration came for the Church. And here the law on the separation of Church from state played to some extent a positive role: the Church could develop in a necessary direction almost without any pressure from the authorities. But now when the authorities seek to influence the solution of church problems, how would you comment on the developments? Can the government help create 'a One Local Church'? And how should a believer react to all this?**

- The law on the separation of Church from state is a fruit of revolutionary transformations carried out in the early 20th century.

The Bolsheviks separated the Church from the state in order to show that the country adopted a new, atheistic way of development. This law was also necessary to the Soviet power to untie its hands in its struggle against the Church until her full destruction. And this struggle was waged under the slogan: 'The Church is an enemy of the state'.

However, the Lord, Who does everything for the good of His faithful, ordained that the separation of Church from state became a new stimulus for her powerful development. And we humbly thank the Lord for this mercy to us, unworthy children of His holy Church.

Now some politicians are trying to create a one local church in Ukraine. This church is sometimes called Orthodox and sometimes simply 'local church'.

It is all the same for politicians, since they do not quite understand it and do not even try to understand. The tragedy of these efforts lies in the two things: first, politicians, by their nature, are not capable of

healing spiritual schisms – they, by their nature, can only divide people. It is only clergy, with the help of prayer, humbleness and Divine love, are capable of uniting people, with their different temperaments, tempers, outlooks, into a unified society called the Church of Christ. Secondly, the state, unfortunately, is pursuing a policy that was adopted after the revolution, that is, a policy moving people away from God.

Some may object and say that our politicians are believers: they pray and come to churches. I do not argue; it is really so. But there are forces who make our believing politicians adopt laws which encourage and perpetuate sin. And if politicians perpetuate lawlessness, then, despite their faith in God and coming to churches, they go against Christ. They take themselves and people who listen to them away from God. Such politicians want to tune the Church too to the rhythm of their own life. They want to create a one local Orthodox church that would cater to them and put people who are going to God on the path they themselves have taken.

We love our politicians and respect them but we cannot follow them. Otherwise, we will cease to be a Church and turn into a political organization, and the days of our life will be numbered by God.

I will use these words to answer your question of how we, believers, should react to the attempts to create a One Local Orthodox Church: those who believe in God but at the same time get fixated on a desire to get hold of a Local Church do not trust God but live by their own mind. With this attitude, we will soon arrive at a point when each political force would wish to have its own local church that would obey this party in everything and to make God fulfil its political desires.

On other words, those who believe in God but do not commit themselves to Him wish to subject God to themselves and think it can be done through the creation of a One Local Church.

But if one not only believes in God but also commits oneself to God, then one seeks the will of God remembering that all people are children of God. One wishes to live in peace with everybody and to find Christ in one's life, Who is our life, the beauty of our life and its meaning. These people do not seek a Local Church – they build and decorate the inner church of their souls each day.

Live piously, work on subjecting yourselves to Christ, fulfil His holy commandments which for us the light, the way leading us to eternal life. On this way you will find your personal autocephaly, that is, the freedom from sin. And may be, you will also meet a Local Church but it will be quite unlike the one that politicians try to build. It will be filled with love, peace and joy in the Lord. It will not be a political Church but the Church of Christ, the Church that will never be overcome by the gates of hell.

- If the Tomos on the recognition of the schismatics by the Ecumenical Patriarch will still be

granted, how should we react to this news and build our relations with these religious organizations?

- If the Tomos on the Patriarch of Constantinople's recognition of the schismatics is granted, then it will generate new schisms, larger and deeper. These schisms will affect not only our Ukraine – they will affect the whole world Orthodox Church.

I will briefly explain how it will happen so.

First, according to Orthodox canons, the deeply esteemed Church of Constantinople has no right to give autocephaly to a Church that is not in her jurisdiction today. The title of 'Mother Church', which is very often used today, does not give a canonical right to invade the spiritual life of a 'daughter Church', which was separated from 'the Mother' ages ago and has *de factor* lived her own spiritual life.

And it is taken into account that 'the Mother Church' herself is suffering from her own deepest schism because of which the Orthodox Byzantine Empire has turned into a country in which Islam is confessed today, then it will be appropriate to recall the words for the holy Gospel: 'Physician, heal yourself!' (Lk. 4:23).

If a physician who, regrettably, himself is seriously ill and for this reason has no right to treat others, still dares to act, then it will only give birth to greater lawlessness in the form of a global schism of Orthodoxy.

As to the attitude to a religious organization born from lawlessness, I will answer by the words of Psalmist David: 'May the righteous not use their hands to do evil' (Ps. 125:3).

- **Holy Scriptures says that 'all power comes from God'. How should we understand these words? For instance, if power is from God, then should a Christian fully obey this power? If yes, in what cases? But if the power is such as it was 50 years ago, how should we perceive it? And generally, in what cases can and must a Christian fulfil the commands of powers that be?**

- Indeed, all power comes from God. But God does not give us power in our hands for our arbitrariness, not for us to do as we wish, but for us to fulfil what God wills, for us to live according to the commandment of Divine love and to teach our subordinates to live so.

Unfortunately, when we receive power, all this is often forgotten. Power blinds us, and it already seems to us that we are allowed going rogue.

We should not think so. Together with a great power a great responsibility is placed on us. For the way in which we bore our cross we would give an account before God.

It is the Saviour Himself Who has given an answer to the question of how we should treat power if it does not do as we wanted it to do: 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'. That is, give the authorities all earthly things – taxes, work, patience, respect, but your hearts you give to God.

On the other hand, if the authorities begin acting arbitrarily, we should not disdain or hate them for that; we should pray for the authorities. We should pray to the Lord that He might give our leaders the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who will help them bear their cross in a proper way.

- If a parish priest asked to read the burial service or give communion to those who were baptized in a church of the 'Kiev Patriarchate', what is the right response to this request? Perhaps, it is more logical that our priests should bear responsibility for only those who are in their pastoral care and who are in the area of their immediate pastoral concern?

- Concerning the question about reading the burial service for those who were 'baptized' by the schismatics, the answer is clear: those baptized in the canonical Church have thus testified to their wish to be also buried by that Church. But if one is 'baptized' in a schism, one thus expressed the wish to be send to glory in it. We do not read burial services for schismatics because we do not want to violate the freedom of their choice.

In life, however, each individual case has an underlying meaning. And before refusing a request, a canonical priest should thoroughly clarify all the reasons why the deceased chose a different faith. If in doing so, a priest finds arguments associated with a human weakness, not the deceased's fanatical stubbornness, then he has the right to show oikonomy, that is, a concession, with a blessing from his bishop.

- Many are concerned over the further life of the canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. What should disturb us most of all at this time – the fate of the Church or the fate of our souls and the confession of the personal faithfulness to Christ?

- Indeed, our Ukrainian Orthodox Church is going through a difficult time. But to our consolation, I would like to remind you that the earthly Church has no easy times. Even when it is all calm around it, when we are praised it is still a hard time for the Church. And this complexity lies in that praise and wellbeing make us dormant and careless and this leads us to spiritual degradation and decline. For this reason,

even in the times of wellbeing we should struggle with ourselves and force ourselves to stay alert so that spiritual slackness may not happen to us.

We must force ourselves to pray constantly and repent of outr unworthiness, and humbly thank the Lord for not turning His Divine Face away from us but surrounding us with His mercies and generosities out of which we are able to see only a small and minor part while not seeking and discerning the rest of them.

However, we should also know that our spiritual blindness and our ignorance do not free us from the duty to be grateful to our Creator. We should strongly humble ourselves and say: 'Today, by God's mercy, you lie on a featherbed of earthly wellbeing and hear sounds of human praise. Look, do not take it for justice and do not think that you are worthy of it all. Otherwise you will become a church-robber who has appropriated what belongs to God. And then you will share a bitter lot with those who once rose in rebellion against God and were precipitated from the Heavenly circles'.

Those who will do so will have peace and joy in their souls. And they will not depart from the True Church of Christ which will be on earth till the end of time.

- Your Beatitude, today our Church together with the people' is going through a hard time. What would you wish to our flock in the first place as a blessing and edification?

- Hold on to the Church which cherishes the purity and intactness of the Orthodox faith, and in all the rest things 'cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you' (Ps. 55:22). Live according to the commandments of God and look after your steps so that they may be directed according to the word of the Lord and commit all people to the hands of God. He has power to correct human steps.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47023/