Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary: Sin must not be legitimized for the sake of some geopolitical or national issues

In his interview to RBC-Ukraine, Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, told about the sentiments prevailing among the clergy and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with regard to the recent developments in the church life in Ukraine, as well as about the likely reaction of other Local Churches in the event that Constantinople will grant a tomos to the Ukrainian schismatics, and the preparations by the authorities for taking a series of actions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – adoption of anti-church laws and provocations against the major Orthodox holy sites in Ukraine. Metropolitan Anthony also noted that the faithful would defend their rights by all legal means.

– What actions will the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate take in response to Constantinople's decision to appoint two exarchs to Ukraine?

– The most important decisions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are taken by the Synod. We make all decisions collectively. Perhaps, even the Bishops' Council will be convened. Yet, we have already expressed our position: these are the unfriendly, uncanonical actions taken by Constantinople against another Orthodox Church.

– What will you do in the event that the tomos of autocephaly will be granted?

– Everything depends on how far the representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople will go, that is, what their actions in the canonical territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be. For the time being we have only heard statements.

– In his interview to RBC-Ukraine, "patriarch" Philaret said that the appointment of the exarchs was an irreversible step towards the granting of the tomos.

– As the phrase goes, the plans of the mind belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. Maybe, the Ukrainian exarchate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople will be established. Much will depend on how the schismatics – Kiev patriarchate and the Ukrainian autocephalous orthodox church – will act at a unifying council. It is highly questionable whether that council will take place at all. Unification is a matter of great complexity, because had it been easy, it would have happened in the

past 25 years.

– What is, in your opinion, the main reason why it has not happened yet?

– The reason is the status of these organizations. The establishment of the so-called “Kiev patriarchate” was a result of a conflict caused by personal ambitions of the former Metropolitan Philaret (Denisenko) of Kiev. The Ukrainian Orthodoxy suffers because of the ambitions of this man.

– So is it personal ambitions that are the reason? Or is it the fact that a considerable part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Christians want to have a Church, completely independent, first and foremost, from Moscow?

– It is an opinion of the inchurched people that matters to us – the people who overcrowd our Orthodox churches. The majority of the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine are members of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

– However, according to the Razumkov Centre polls, in the past several years more and more citizens affiliated themselves with the Ukrainian orthodox church of the Kiev patriarchate. At present there are more such people than those belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

– Should we have believed the polls conducted over the recent ten years, we would have to say that we do not exist any more. However, here we are, the largest Church in Ukraine. As for these polls, the result often depends on how a question is formulated. And the reality is such: if on Sunday you go to the churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the churches of the so-called “Kiev patriarchate,” you will see at once which are more crowded.

We can also compare how large-scale the processions with the cross are, for instance, our procession on 27 July, which was led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry and which people joined, answering the call of the heart, or the procession which took place the day after, organized by government agencies at the command from above. Joining this procession were not only Orthodox Christians, but also Greek Catholics and atheists. Even so, taking part in our procession were 250 thousand people, while in the other one – 60-65 thousand. We are living at a time of great worldview and geopolitical changes, and, regrettably, we are not one of the sides in these processes, but an object and sometimes even a victim of the shifts.

– Anyway, is it true that you will not recognize a new autocephalous church under any circumstances?

– These are unlawful and anti-canonical actions. I know that not only our Church, but other Local Orthodox Churches as well will not recognize it.

– What Churches? In his interview to RBC-Ukraine, "patriarch" Philaret claimed that, probably, the Ukrainian church would not be recognized, besides the Russian Orthodox Church, by the Bulgarian, Georgian, Antiochian and Serbian Churches.

– This is his personal opinion. How can he know the position of other Orthodox Churches if none of the Primates of these Churches communicates with him? For the "Kiev patriarchate" is a schismatic movement, which none of the Local Churches recognizes.

– They communicate with Constantinople at least.

– Philaret has no direct communication with Constantinople, unlike our Church which is in communion with all the Local Churches and receives first-hand information.

– And who else, according to this first-hand information, will not recognize the new Ukrainian church?

– I would rather not run ahead, but I have all reasons to believe that none of the Churches, except that of Constantinople, will recognize it.

– What are the current sentiments prevailing among the UOC clergy? The news has been spread that ten hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have already sent to Constantinople a request for the tomos, and, according to Philaret, up to two thirds of the episcopate might join the new church.

– We have learned about the existence of the list of ten people from the mass media, and Patriarch Bartholomew told us about it during our meeting in Istanbul. However, during that meeting another number was mentioned – eight. I know about that list. Trustworthy is the information concerning only two people – those who have publicly admitted it. Perhaps, yet another name is open to question. As for the rest, I have no idea how these hierarchs came in that list, who put them on it. That is to say, the "list of ten names" is a fake, intended to create an impression that our hierarchs support the establishment of the new church.

– So do you deny that there is a tendency among your hierarchs to support the autocephaly?

– Of course, I deny it. Each of them during the episcopal consecration took an oath to be faithful to the canonical Church and not to do anything without the approval of other bishops.

– However, if the new church receives the tomos, it will have a canonical status, and then it will be possible to join it. At least such is an interpretation of "patriarch" Philaret.

– But how can a canonical structure be established by uncanonical means? It will *a priori* be uncanonical. In the early 20th century, when Bolsheviks came to power, the atheistic regime tried to create its own quasi-church, the so-called Renovationist church. Seeking legalization, they came into contact with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and then Constantinople initiated a process of the legalization of the Renovationists, whom the USSR used to destroy the Orthodox Church.

There is a classical phrase said by Metropolitan Sergy: "The communication between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Renovationists can only make the Patriarch a Renovationist, but not the Renovationists Orthodox." Here we see a direct parallel with the current situation.

I do not know why the Phanar forgot about other events of the 1920s, when the Turkish authorities tired to establish a Turkish Orthodox church that had nothing to do with the Greek Orthodoxy. Mindful of the pain that it suffered back then, the Church of the Constantinople must be aware of the consequences of its current actions in Ukraine. Why they have forgotten that, I do not know.

– How likely is it that the prayerful communion with Constantinople will be broken off?

– If, God forbid, it will come to it, then yes, it is likely, and the full responsibility for the decision will lie with Constantinople.

– Can the decision taken at the extraordinary session of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church "to suspend the liturgical commemoration of the Patriarch of Constantinople" be seen as the first step towards breaking off the communion?

– Yes, it can.

– Will it be a "schism" of the Orthodoxy or shall we use another term?

– These actions may cause a split in the Ukrainian society, and then we will have to give up any thoughts of one Church for years or even for centuries. This is what worries us most right now. The existence of two church jurisdictions will leave a very deep cut in the body of our society, and I have no idea how it can be healed. Of course, that is what will bring about a schism in the whole Orthodox world.

Regrettably, no one can be safe from a heresy or a schism, if their life is not based on the principles of conciliarity. There were times in the church history when the great patriarchs became heretics and schismatics. The Church lives by its Plenitude. Bishops neither do what they want, nor follow somebody's orders, but are guided by the awareness of what their flock needs. Unlike politicians, we do not regard people as an electorate; we see them as the people of God.

– If the Verkhovna Rada adopts a law, according to which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate will have to change its name, will you comply with it?

– People have already called these legislative initiatives "anti-church laws." I believe that these initiatives are illegal and, in fact, wrong. Our Church's parishioners are Ukrainians, citizens of Ukraine, and their Church must be called the "Ukrainian Orthodox Church." It is wrong to artificially make millions of citizens aliens in their own country. No good will come of it.

– Then what will you do, litigate?

– We live in a democratic country, wherein the right to life is at least declared by the laws. And we will use all the legal means. We also have a document called "The Basics of the Social Concept of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church," according to which, in the most difficult circumstances, I will quote, "the Church can call for non-violent civil disobedience." This is a measure of last resort, specified in our social concept that was approved by the Council of Bishops.

– It is representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate who are constantly speaking of a possibility of some civil conflicts, while the Kiev patriarchate emphasizes that everything must go peacefully and quietly, that all conflicts will be initiated artificially, and so on. Why is it so?

– Rhetoric is one thing, and the real life is another. Has any of our ever priests being recorded as publicly calling for aggression? No, there has not. And what are representatives of the Kiev patriarchate saying? Philaret himself stated that once such quasi-church is established, the first thing they will do is seize the Lavras.

Words are all very well, but what about actions? For the past four years, has our Church seized any church building? And look what representatives of the Kiev patriarchate have done. Over this period they have seized about 50 our church buildings. They even used weapons to do that. Then what will happen if they have the government's support, as what is being established now is a governmental church?

– And what exactly will happen?

– We have it on good authority that the Ministry of Culture has already received a directive to prepare all the necessary documents for the registration of the new structure. Certain nationalist groups have been instructed to organize provocations at the Kiev Lavra of the Caves and the Pochayev Lavra on 14 October.

Our people will defend their churches. The pressure is such that they have no other choice. If the law gives no hope, people have no other choice but to defend themselves. Yet, neither of us is calling for aggression, we are only warning: people, do not take such a step that may lead to conflicts, serious conflicts. This is what we are emphasizing.

– What nationalist organizations have received such instructions and from whom?

– This information is confidential, and I would not like to disclose it.

– The Lavras are now owned by the state, but used by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in compliance with the authorities' decisions. Should these decisions be annulled, the Lavras will be given to the future church. What will your actions be?

– Firstly, we will pray that it will not happen. God is the One Who has the last word in all matters. Secondly, if the Lavras are taken from us, who will live there? At the moment living in the Kiev Lavra of the Caves alone are some 300 monks. As far as I know, the UAOC and the Kiev patriarchate altogether have no more than 200 monks.

– Do you not expect that many of your parishes will join the new church?

– Once again I will recall the events of the early 20th century, when the Bolsheviks created several Renovationist movements and gave them church buildings. Those churches stood empty. People did not go there; they were faithful to the Church led by Patriarch Tikhon. "Tikhon's" churches were full, and those of the Renovationists stood empty, because people know where the truth is. Sin must not be legitimized for the sake of some geopolitical or national issues. Sin always remains a sin.

– To what extent is the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate defined here, in Kiev, and to what extent is it coordinated with the Russian Orthodox Church?

– According to our canons and the Statute, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is independent in its governance. As a member of the Holy Synod, I can say that no instructions have ever come from Moscow concerning any issues, be it the establishment of dioceses, election of bishops, etc. In fact, we enjoy not autonomy, but even autocephaly, albeit it was not set down in a legal manner.

– Now one can often hear from the Russian mass media that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has fallen into a heresy. Do you share this point of view?

– Such conclusion can only be drawn by an Ecumenical Orthodox Council; this is the only instance.

– Patriarch Bartholomew is also being accused of "Eastern Papism." Does the Ukrainian Orthodox Church see any threat that some sort of the Eastern Holy See will be created?

– I can only rely on the publicly available information. At the latest synaxis of bishops in Constantinople, such things have been said with regard to the ecclesiology, that is the teaching about the Church, that the Orthodox Church has never heard before. The issue of primacy, papism, once caused the schism that divided Christianity into the Eastern one and the Western one. Constantinople used to defend the Orthodox teaching, according to which every Local Church is independent and equal. Such tendencies as we see now have become obvious since the beginning of the 20th century. Yet, it is a very complicated issue; it must be first discussed at theological forums. Only then a decision can be made.

– Will the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appeal to other Local Churches if the tomos of autocephaly is issued?

– We are now receiving calls from other Local Churches. The First Hierarchs show concern in the situation. If it happens, although it cannot happen in accordance with the truth of God and ecclesiastical rules, then, indeed, we will officially appeal to the Local Churches, which, I once again emphasize, know from reliable sources what is going on here.

– At is extraordinary session, the ROC Synod proposed to convene a Pan-Orthodox Council in response to the situation with autocephaly. When might it take place?

– It is difficult to speak of terms. However, this is an issue of importance for all the Local Churches, because if the schism is really legitimized, it will be a problem for each Local Church, for many of them have their own schisms. The reconsideration of the borders of the Local Churches is a very dangerous process. Now these borders are established, but there were time when some areas belonged to other Churches. A certain patriarch may say: since the current situation has been questioned, why cannot I do the same with regard to some area which 500 years ago belonged to my Patriarchate and which I now

need to take back? It can bring about an absolute chaos in the whole Orthodox world.

– The topic of autocephaly is being actively used by the Ukrainian politicians. President Petro Poroshenko made it one of the main topics of his election campaign. However, representatives of the "Opposition Bloc," actively supporting the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and participating in the processions with the cross, have also started to exploit it. Are both sides using this story for their own pragmatic political benefit?

– It seems that there is such a desire. However, the Church has always emphasized its neutrality. The doors of our churches are opened to anyone, regardless of political beliefs. And we always officially invite the President, the Prime Minister and the Chair of the Verkhovna Rada to join our processions with the cross. Some of the politicians are members of our Church; they go to church, go to confession and take communion as believers, not as politicians. And we cannot impose any restrictions on political grounds.

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