Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: It is none of concerns of the secular authorities to dictate to the Church which form of existence she is to choose

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, in his interview to an NTV correspondent spoke of the situation that has arisen in Ukraine in connection with the initiative put forward by the Ukrainian authorities to create an autocephalous Church in Ukraine.

- How appropriate in principle is a situation in which the President of the country and non-canonical communities appeal to Constantinople, personally to His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, to decide the question of autocephaly of the Church in Ukraine?

- The granting of autocephaly as well as other similar internal church matters cannot be initiated by the secular authority. In a modern society, in such countries as Russia, Ukraine and in the most of other countries the Church is separated from the state: she herself is to solve her problems and define her status. It is none of the concerns of the state to dictate the Church which form of existence, which form of administrative structure she is to choose.

The absolute majority of the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the only canonical Orthodox Church in that country. This is over 12 thousand parishes, over 200 monasteries; this is millions of believers. And these believers have not appealed to either the President of Ukraine or the Patriarch of Constantinople to grant autocephaly.

This appeal to him was made by two schismatic structures: one is led by the former Metropolitan of Kiev, Filaret (Denisenko), the head of the other is another leader of the schism. These two structures have requested Patriarch Bartholomew to recognize them as an autocephalous Church. But the

absolute majority of the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine do not participate in this project, which has been initiated and supported not for the first time by the Ukraine's secular authority. Attempts of this sort were made ten years ago, on the eve of the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia.

The schism in Ukraine has existed for over twenty-five years now. In its time it was supported by the authorities of the country. It is thanks to the support of the secular authority that the schism still exists. Without this support it would for sure disappear into thin air, as was the case with many schisms of this kind in the history of the Church.

- That is, it is a manipulation in a sense, if I understand it correctly? In the pre-election year, the Ukrainian authorities are trying to play on something that, after all, has nothing to do with them...

- I believe there is surely some pre-election tactics. But I am afraid this tactics may prove counterproductive since church matters cannot be settled by a gross interference in the internal affairs of a Church. It should be stated too that in the rhetoric about the project of the so-called one Local Church of Ukraine, one more group is often mentioned – it is the Ukrainian Greek Catholics, who are headed by Archbishop Svyatoslav (Shevchuk). He has repeatedly stated his support of the project for a unified Local Orthodox Church of Ukraine while saying that the unity of this Church should be built on the successor of St. Peter, that is, the Pope of Rome. In other words, it is nothing else than an attempt to involve the Orthodox in Ukraine in *unia*. Such attempts were made in the past as well.

As a matter of fact, standing behind this project are three forces: the Ukrainian secular power, schismatic structures and the Greek Catholics.

- Recently, attacks on Orthodox churches by radicals, with whom the Ukrainian authorities are ingratiating openly, have become more frequent. There was an attack on the Kiev Laura of the Caves; there were attempts to burn and loot several churches in other regions. How

critical is the situation?

- The situation is disturbing, one can say, even critical; for already about fifty churches of the canonical Ukrainian Church have been lawlessly captured by the schismatics. Some tough guys, often in masks, arrive in these churches. They grab parishioners including women, beat them, drive the priest away from the church and substitute the community, which was in that church, with some 'community' of their own, which, according to them, own or should own that church. And when it became a matter of the court, the canonical Church won the lawsuits because the truth is on her side. Nevertheless, even in cases when a court rules that these captures are unlawful, the invaders still remain in the churches.

The campaign to legalize the schism, which has been unleashed today by Ukrainian political forces, also legitimizes this vandalism of the schismatics and tough guys in masks. We have seen terrifying videos and photos of defiled and looted Orthodox churches, the abomination of desolation and plundered sanctuaries inside them. All this cannot but raise great concern and deep anxiety.

Literary a few minutes ago we heard an address by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who met today with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, and later, when speaking in the Church of Christ the Saviour's Hall of Church Councils, he said that any support for the schism in Ukraine leads people to destruction. He has quite clearly set forth the stand taken by the Serbian Orthodox Church on this problem.

It should be said that other Local Churches, too, have expressed support to the canonical Ukrainian Church. None of the Local Orthodox Churches has come out in support of the schism.

The support for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church may be more or less explicit but all the Local Churches speak of the need to respect the canonical order and that the schism should not be legitimized because actually the access of schismatics to the Church is thus becomes closed. A return to the Church is made through repentance. It is the way recognized by church canons, and the Russian

Orthodox Church and the whole world Orthodoxy have called the Ukrainian schismatics to do it for already a half of a century. I very much hope that this voice will be heard.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47426/