

Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church meets in session



On May 25, 2018, a regular session of the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church took place at the Kiev Laura of the Caves. It was chaired by His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine.

The Synod adopted a message of Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine “To the Episcopate, Clergy, Monastics and Laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the Initiatives ‘to Grant a Tomos of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine’”.

It is stated in the message that it was prompted by the active discussion going on in Ukraine about a possibility for a unilateral granting of an above-mentioned Tomos by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is noted that neither the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, nor Local Orthodox Churches have received official letters on this matter from Constantinople. At a request of the Primate of Local Orthodox Churches, Metropolitan Onufry has informed them by mail about the current situation in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the position taken by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Primates and Bishops’ Councils of

Local Churches have expressed a negative and guarded attitude to a possible granting of the above-mentioned Tomos, as well as their support to the position taken by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

It is stressed that ‘the way to the restoration of unity and to a possible autocephalous status of the Ukrainian Church... should not run through legalizing the schism and substituting it for the Church of Christ’. With a reference to the decision of the Jubilee Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of July 8, 2011, it is once again emphasized that the restoration of unity ‘*should be effected in accordance with the canons of the Orthodox Church without any interference of political forces and through the return of those fallen away to the fold of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church*’.

It is noted that the method of making such decisions in a Church should lie ‘in a conciliar consideration of matters important and topical for both a particular Local Church and the whole world Orthodoxy. Any individual or one-sided action in the Church’s milieu constitutes a violation of the principle of conciliarity and threatens the unity of the Church’.

‘From the modern history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine’, the message states, ‘the conclusion can be made that it was essentially a violation of the principle of conciliarity, a lack of feeling of the pulse of real internal church life, as well as interference of political and other non-ecclesial forces in the internal affairs of the Church that led to the emergence of a schism in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy’. The message points to the fundamental causes of the development of non-canonical structures in Ukraine, such as ‘a lack of canonical awareness and obedience of the Church, a lack of conciliar consideration of important ecclesial matters, a lack of patience and mutual understanding, as well as pride and interference of political factors in church matters’. ‘It is an erroneous way which must not be taken by the Church of Christ’, the message states.

Special emphasis is made on the fruitlessness of the attempt of state power and ‘forces outside the Church’ to artificially unity the Church without taking into account the realities of internal church life and possible dire consequences of such efforts: ‘The autocephalous status is of a solely technical ecclesial nature which lies in promoting the preaching of the Gospel in the territory of a particular state and it cannot be an instrument in geopolitical struggle. At the same time, the autocephalous status is granted to the whole Church within a certain territory. In this connection, it is necessary to realize that the emergence of another parallel jurisdiction in Ukraine may generate new confrontations among our people, which will not only threaten the security of the state but also question the possibility for a future unity of the Church in Ukraine. Our people cannot be divided for long, if not forever’.

The message points out that the way out of the situation lies ‘in the restoration church unity in Ukraine, not in the fixation of the church division through establishing a parallel church jurisdiction’. It makes a special point that for a successful solution of the problem of the Ukrainian church schism ‘there is a

need for other conditions, in particular, peace and stability in our state’.

The supreme authority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has reaffirmed its ‘openness and readiness for any constructive cooperation and dialogue with the aim to achieve church unity’. A special appeal has been made to the archpastors, clergy, monastics and the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to cherish and defend the unity of the Church.

‘The mission of the Church of Christ’ the messages explains, ‘is to preach the Gospel of Christ, to effect the beneficial transformation of the world through Holy Sacraments, teaching people to live according to God’s commandments. Precisely for this reason the Church of Christ lives according to her rules that cannot be changed due a changing political situation. The only way of restoring the church unity is to stop any external interferences in church affairs and to give the Holy Church an opportunity for healing, on her own and with God’s help, the wound of division of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy’.

The Holy Synod also approved the membership of the organizing committee for celebrating the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ to be headed by Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine and assigned the days for festive divine services.

In a special decision the Synod considered the work of Metropolitan Alexander of Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky and Vishnevka. He was called ‘not to discredit the high rank of bishop, which he bears, by his indecent behavior and life and to restrain in the future from any public appearances and statements which provoke indignation among the episcopate, clergy and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and tempt the hearts of the faithful’. The Synod reserved for itself an opportunity for taking ‘a different decision of disciplinary and canonical nature’ in case of this brotherly admonition is ignored.

Archimandrite Spiridon (Golovastov) was elected Bishop of Dobropole, vicar of the diocese of Gorlovka.

Archimandrite Gedeon (Kharon), father superior of the Tithe Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God in Kiev, was elected Bishop of Makarov, vicar of the Metropolia of Kiev.

Decisions were made for the arrangement of inner life in monasteries and convents, in particular, Sister Eulampia (Yeliseikina) was appointed mother superior of the St. Florus convent in Kiev, with her elevation to the rank of hegumenia and the right to wear a pectoral cross.

The Synod has established new holidays in honour of the icons of the Mother of God and the commemoration day of St. Jonas of Kiev (on the Sunday after the Elevation of the Honourable and Life-Giving Cross).

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