



Local Orthodox Churches continue sending letters of support for Ukrainian Orthodox Church diocese of Lvov over arson against St. Vladimir's in Lvov

'It is with heavy heart that we have learnt about the arson committed against one of your churches in the Lvov region. We haste to express our sincere compassion and assure you of our prayers for stability and peace in your diocese', reads the letter sent to Archbishop Philaret of Lvov and Galich by the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople.

As was reported earlier, during the night of February 3, 2018, radically minded people set fire to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox church dedicated to the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles. According to His Holiness Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, 'these acts of violence clearly show how destructive and dangerous become the political ideologies deprived of the salvific message of the New Testament, which has liberated us from godless ideals and proclaimed that in Christ *there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28)'. His Holiness stressed that a crime committed in the name of religion is undoubtedly a crime against religion, stating that any manifestation of violence aimed against a house of prayer intensifies tension and division.

A letter expressing sympathy has been sent by His Holiness Neophyte, Patriarch of Bulgaria. In it, the actions of arsonists are described as an abominable act of violation of the sanctity of a house of God. 'Essentially, an arson against a church is an anti-Christian act committed to plant enmity and hatred between Ukrainian citizens', His Holiness writes. He vigorously condemned this barbarian action and appealed to the appropriate Ukrainian bodies to oppose by all possible means such negative developments in the country.

A letter to Archbishop Philaret of Lvov and Galich concerning the arson against the church of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Lvov came also from the Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. In his letter, His Beatitude Metropolitan Rostislav says, 'My heart has been pained by the report that an arson was committed against the church of Holy Prince Vladimir in the diocese entrusted to your care. I express my support to Your Eminence and pray that the Lord may strengthen the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in their faith and devotion'. His Beatitude expressed the conviction that 'this action was committed by those who have nothing to do with either faith or Church', that they 'deserve resolute condemnation'.

‘Clearly, the provocation is aimed to stir up religious hatred and enmity in society and has no justification in a country with deep Christian traditions’, Metropolitan Rostislav stressed, ‘I pray that the Lord may bring to reason all those responsible for the stability and peaceful coexistence in the Ukrainian society regardless of their religious beliefs’.

A mention that it is not the first outrage committed in recent time in Ukraine against a church of the canonical Church is made in the letter to His Beatitude Onufriy, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, from Metropolitan Amfilohije (Serbian Orthodox Church). ‘Disturbing news about the difficult situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has led us to write this letter of support to you and wish you and the flock in your care help and protection from the Only Righteous Judge. We are especially concerned for the Tithe church in Kiev and the church of the Holy Prince Vladimir of Kiev in Lvov, which were attacked by radical extremists, with their hearts in which envy and hate for the neighbour have taken root instead of the love of God’, the letter states.

His Eminence Amfilohije assured Metropolitan Onufriy of his continuous prayers for the augmentation of fraternal love in Ukraine, cessation of all the conflicts and troubles that have befallen this country in the last few years. He also asked to convey the words of support to Archbishop Philaret of Lvov and Galich and to his flock.

‘We hope that justice and common sense will prevail in Ukraine and that Kiev, also in the future, will prove to be worthy of being called the capital of the Holy Prince Vladimir’, Metropolitan Amfilohije wrote, ‘We also wish to hope that one of the basic human rights – the right to freedom of faith will be respected by the Ukrainian authorities thus protecting the rights of the only canonical Orthodox Church of which you are Primate’.

Letters expressing support over the arson against the church in Lvov came earlier from ‘Bishop Joanikije of Budimlija and Niksic and Bishop Jovan of Pakrac and Slavonia, Serbian Orthodox Church; and Metropolitan Panteleimon of Veria, Naoussa and Campania, Greek Orthodox Church.

Bishop Joanikije condemned the actions of arsonists and expressed support for the archpastor, clergy and faithful of the diocese of Lvov. ‘It is difficult to believe that in the country to which the holy prince brought the light of the gospel of Christ, His churches are set on fire. This crime could be committed only by those who are completely alien to the Christian ethics and respect for the fundamental right of each person to have his or her house of prayer’. The bishop also expressed hope that law-enforcement bodies will do all that depends on them to find the criminals and defend the right of the faithful to have their own churches for meeting with God.

Speaking about the arson against the church in Lvov and the suffering of the Church throughout her

history, Bishop Jovan mentioned in this context the death camps in Croatian Jasenovac, 'in which in the 20th century, the blood of hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians was spilt at the hands of those who claimed to be Christians'. He assured Archbishop Philaret of his prayers and promised to testify to the suffering and discrimination of the clergy and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in his contacts with international organizations.

Metropolitan Panteleimon called the arson 'a sacrilegious action whoever might have committed it' and 'a disgraceful and mean manifestation of religious intolerance, and assured Archbishop Philaret of his support.

DECR Communication Service

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