Supreme Church Council's statement on the verdict upon the case of the persons who violated the sacred space of the Church of Christ the Saviour

In connection with the Khamovniki Court's judgement upon the outrage committed in the Church of Christ the Saviour, the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church has issued the following official statement published on patriarchia.ru

The Supreme Church Council considers it important to clarify once again the Church's position concerning the blasphemous action committed in the Church of Christ the Saviour and the court judgment on it.

While acknowledging the need for the state to give an appropriate response, we note that a legal assessment is outside the competence of the Supreme Authority of the Church. To determine a measure of restriction or punishment is an exclusive prerogative of the secular court. The Church has no leverage to influence the administration of justice, nor does she seek to have such. Nor do we consider the incident from the political or aesthetic point of view. The pastoral duty of the Church is to give a spiritual and moral assessment to the events which took place.

What took place is blasphemy and sacrilege, a conscious and deliberate outrage against a holy place, a manifestation of gross animosity towards millions of people and their feelings. Therefore, it is impossible in any way to accept the attempts to present the event in the church as a prayer performed in an untraditional form. Regrettably, these attempts have disorientated many people including some church members who are unaware of what sacrilegious and vile words were uttered on the ambo of the Church of Christ the Saviour. The outrage in the church became a continuation of the grossly amoral public actions which were committed earlier by the same persons and their comrades and which have remained unpunished.

Blasphemy is a grave sin. An Orthodox Christian cannot either participate in a blasphemy or approve it or directly or indirectly support it.

There is a difference between sins against man and sins against God. If a Christian as a person is the aggrieved party, he should forgive the one who has sinned against him. However, any forgiveness of a sin against God is impossible without the repentance of the sinner before Him. We read in the Gospel how Christ, while forgiving those who encroached on Him as a human being, warned against sinning against the Holy Spirit: "But who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" (Mk. 3:29). Blasphemy is the main mark of the enemy of God described in the Revelation: "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven" (Rev. 13:6).

To declare forgiveness on behalf of God for a person who refuses to repent before God for his blasphemous action would mean that the Church appropriates the power not given to her. "If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" (1 Sam. 2:25). Unrepentant sinners are brought to God's judgment: "VengeanceisMine, I will repay" (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

Outrage in churches, violation of holy places, manifestation of hatred towards the Church are well known in history. Such actions have always been a mark of the forces which have brought neither peace nor good or freedom to peoples. Our people have gone through a trial by militant atheism and fascist aggression. This has given us a tragic lesson which has formed a special sensitivity towards outrage against religious and national feelings. For this reason, the instigation of animosity and hatred on religious or ethnic grounds in our society always presents a threat of destructive upheavals.

It is impossible to preserve the tradition of a society without respect for those who fell for the homeland. Sacrilegious actions committed in the church built in memory of the 1812 Russian soldiers are especially defiant at a time when the 200th anniversary of their feat is celebrated. To prevent outrage against the feelings of believers, blasphemous actions over religious shrines and desecration of cultural monuments is the task of a state that respects its citizens. The created judicial precedent should prevent the repetition of such actions in the future.

Without challenging the rightfulness of the court decision, we appeal to the state authority to show mercy towards the convicted persons within the law in the hope that they will renounce any repetition of their blasphemous actions.

The Church thanks all who have supported her, condemned the blasphemy and expressed a peaceful protest against it. We also believe it to be a natural expression of pity for the detained which came from both the faithful of the Church and people from outside. It is necessary to separate sin from sinner, condemning the former and hope for the repentance of the latter. God always seeks to save sinners and calls them to repentance. The Church too seeks to reconcile people and to heal the wounds inflicted by the manifestation of blasphemy and animosity.

Addressing those whose religious and national feelings were insulted both by the blasphemous action itself and the propaganda campaign that followed, the Church calls to restrain from any attempt to take revenge, from any unlawful or, all the more so, violent actions, while giving her blessing upon peaceful civil actions aimed at safeguarding the Orthodox people and their shrines against enmity and blasphemy.

We ask all the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church to preserve the spirit of peace and to stand in prayer before God.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/53826/