



Appeal of the UOC Holy Synod to the Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

All-Honourable Fathers,

Brothers and Sisters Beloved in Christ:

The division in Ukrainian Orthodoxy is a pain for the entire Orthodox Church. Our brothers and sisters of the same blood and faith have found themselves outside the saving fold of the Church. Some of these people have split consciously, separating themselves from the Mother Church egoistically due to such faults of their own spiritual life as pride, lust for power, wrongly-understood patriotism, etc. Yet we are aware that many Orthodox believers, who are in schism today, have not found themselves in it by a conscious choice but for reasons of some or other life circumstances. Many have been led astray by the false patriotic rhetoric of schism teachers, others have fallen away because of a lack of reliable information, still others were already born in schism. One thing is clear: the path they have taken is not salvific but those who have taken it have increasingly realized that their views are false. Our aim and pastoral duty is to point to their faults and bring those who are lost back to the church fold.

These people confess our common Orthodox faith; many among them sincerely seek to be members of the Church and participants in authentic Orthodox spirituality. Yet being outside the canonical Church and communion with Universal Orthodoxy, the separated cannot obtain the full churchliness given through the grace-giving gifts of the Holy Spirit. A tragic situation has developed where those who seek union with Christ cannot achieve it since the sacraments they take are devoid of saving grace. The Mother Church deplores the sinful state of the separated, their desire to fall away from the fullness of the catholic Church. But at the same time we sincerely sympathize with those who have found themselves outside the church communion and pray for their speedy return to the saving unity with Universal Orthodoxy in the fold of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Guided by the Saviour's commandment 'that they all may be one' (Jn. 17:21) and responding to the request of non-canonical church communities, the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has set up a working group for preparing a possible dialogue with representatives of the UOC KP. On October 2, the working group met with representatives of this non-canonical church group.

These initiatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are of pastoral nature. The establishment of our working group has been prompted by the awareness of the need to overcome church divisions in Ukraine. The Holy Synod of our Church stated its readiness for a constructive dialogue in response to

the appeal made by the UOC KP on December 14, 2007. The actions of the Supreme Authority of the Ukrainian Church were approved by the ROC Bishops' Council which took place on June 24-29, 2008, in Moscow and was chaired by the late Patriarch Alexy II. It stated:

- Par. 25. The Sacred Council, assessing the sacrificial service of the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine, and the episcopate and clergy who carry out their obediences in a difficult situation of religious and political instability in Ukraine today, states with gratitude to God the steadfast growth and development of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church uniting people in Jesus Christ regardless of their political or ideological sentiments and views.
- Par. 26. The Council expresses pastoral gratitude to the faithful of our Church in Ukraine who have kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and love. The Council approves the work of the Supreme Authority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in search for canonical ways of restoring church peace and unity in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.
- Par. 27. To our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who are outside the Orthodox church fold the Council says: the Mother Church with sorrow and patience awaits all those who have left her saving fold. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven by the Lord or fault that the Church cannot shield with her maternal love'.

The idea of restoration of unity in the Orthodox Church in Ukraine also ran through all the addresses and sermons His Holiness Patriarch Kirill during his recent visit to Ukraine: '... as Patriarch, of Ukraine as well, I will do everything for the people to reunite so that political and national contradictions may disappear and the united Church of Christ, a confessor and martyr Church which remained faithful to Christ to death and shared the destiny of her people, may have the power and possibility to embrace maternally all her faithful children. My words full of love are addressed today not only to you, people in Donbas, but also to those our brothers and sisters who are in division. We will pray for you even if you do not want this prayer. We ask God on our knees that He may show His mercy for Ukraine and unite the Church, the people, so that all together we may say: Unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and the Cup in the communion of the one Holy Spirit'.

Concerning the church division in Ukraine, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill stressed that he fully shared the concern over the division still existing between the Orthodox faithful. This division is a painful wound in the body of the Church, on one hand, and it has made a negative impact on the state of Ukrainian society, on the other, provoking instability and generating conflict situations. 'I will note', His Holiness points out, 'that finding ways of overcoming the division is in the competence of the self-governed Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We are positive about restoration of the unity of Orthodoxy in Ukraine through dialogue between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the communities which have separated themselves from it, if this dialogue is built on recognition by all its participants that the canonical norms of the Church's order are inviolable'.

While expressing her readiness to begin a constructive dialogue with non-canonical church structures, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church upholds her principled position with regard to the historical fact of the division and its initiators. Our position was and is unchangeable: we believe that from the point of view of Orthodox ecclesiology and canon law the only acceptable model for resuming church communion is unification of all Orthodox Christians in the fold of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, that is, the return of the separated to the place they left.

Unchangeable is also our view of how those separated from the fullness of the Church can unite with it. The way to restoration of unity lies through repentance, that is, through a beneficial 'change of the mind' and the way of life adopted by the separated. Repentance to which the Holy Church calls those who have fallen away into division, is not a humiliating procedure of begging for pardon, as some may imagine, but is admission before God of one's imperfection that caused one's separation from God and His Church. Repentance by the schism leaders is an admission of their own fault before the whole Church and first of all before their own faithful as it made them 'blind guides of the blind' (Mt. 15:14).

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is ready to forget the wounds inflicted by those who separated themselves from it. But, while wishing that our brothers and sisters who we believe temporary remain in schism may return, we have no right to divert from the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. The Church is ready to show charity and love for sinners in the gospel's way. But we cannot accept sin as such, that is, schism proper. And diplomatic efforts or meetings are insufficient to eliminate a sin. A sin is healed through repentance, and we sincerely hope that our brothers and sisters from non-canonical church structures and in the first place their leaders will find the courage to make a sincere repentance.

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At the same time, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church keeps its position concerning its canonical status stated in the ROC Statute adopted by the ROC Local Council on 28 January 2009. We believe any review of the existing canonical status of the UOC is not good for church life. We remind our flock that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is self-governed part of the ROC with the rights of broad autonomy, as stated in the ROC Statute. Through the Russian Orthodox Church it is united with the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Our Church is in unity with Universal Orthodoxy precisely through canonical and devotional bonds with the Russian Orthodox Church. The present status of our Church is optimal for her fulfillment of saving mission in the modern Ukrainian State – the mission to sanctify the people of God, the citizens of Ukraine, making them citizens of heaven.

The Old Kievan Metropolia is a continuer of the great spiritual tradition of Kievan Rus', whose heritage unites today the fraternal Orthodox Slavic nations. Aware of its historical responsibility for the fate of this

common heritage, we seek to make the unity of our Church grow so that the holy Kievan land may not be a center of strife but a place of union and sanctification, as it was in princes' times and as it is inherent in the very soul of the Ukrainian people.

The aim of our dialogue with non-canonical church groups is not a desire to separate ourselves canonically from the fullness of the Russian Church but the desire to restore church unity. Dialogue is not a justification of the schism or a concession to those who insist on it today, but a form of witness we bear to the beneficial fullness of church life in canonical Orthodoxy. The Fathers of the Church prescribe that we love a sinner but hate sin. It is for this reason that we consider it our task to show our sincere and unhypocritical love towards the separated, on one hand, and to make them aware that the path of anti-canonical building 'one local Church' they have chosen is harmful and lacks any prospects, on the other. We should realize the following: as long as Orthodox Christians in Ukraine live in a tragic division, the Orthodox mission in today's Ukrainian society will never succeed. The wound of schism weakens Ukrainian Orthodoxy and becomes a temptation for those outside it, thus discrediting the Church in the eyes of society.

The Church of Christ lives according to the law of fullness of love – the law which orders us to forgive, to show charity and pray for the repentance of sinners. The aim of our dialogue with non-canonical structures is a beneficial transformation of the mind and life of those who we believe remain in schism only temporarily today. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church follows Christ's love shown in the parable of the prodigal son and His words about the good shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep for the sake of saving one (cf. Lk. 15:4). And in heaven, too, there is more joy about one converted sinner than ninety-nine righteous people. We desire not victory or superiority over brothers but their return to the saving and grace-giving fold of the Church. Addressing the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church we appeal to you to pray every day for a return of the separated to the Church so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the Lord.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Approved by the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church at its extended session on 23 November 2009.

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