



Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine: Autocephaly cannot be an instrument of consolidation of the Church

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church at present stage of her development faces many threats because of the current development trends in the Ukrainian society, said His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine in his report presented at the Bishops' Council-2008, mentioning nationalism, secularization and consumerism as particular threats.

The ideology of nationalism, popular because of the processes of national revival and the gaining of statehood, reached its peak in the 1990s, Metropolitan Vladimir said. Those who adhere to this ideology criticize canonical relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with the Moscow Patriarchate and their common prayers claiming that these make the Ukraine's independence impossible.

'The nationalist-minded politicians accused us of many things using all kind of means to make the life and ministry of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as difficult as possible. We lived in the context of informational blockade; they tried to call our Church 'anti-Ukrainian and took away our church buildings and property unlawfully.'

The Church courageously opposed the ideology of nationalism and willingly participated in the processes of national revival of the Ukraine, Metropolitan Vladimir underscored and continued, 'We have become the genuine Church of the Ukrainian people while maintaining spiritual ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.'

The ecclesiastical splits of the last twenty years has weakened our Church as they hinder her mission in society and facilitate the thriving of different sects. Moreover, 'with every passing year the wall that divides the Orthodox in our country becomes even higher, and society would soon see the presence of several Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine as a norm.'

'We should not forget our brothers and sisters on the other side of this wall. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has some eleven thousand parishes, while the number of parishes remaining outside the communion with world Orthodoxy amounts to some four thousand. These figures show that millions of the Orthodox Christians in the Ukraine are outside ecclesiastical communion. They are deprived of the grace of the Holy Sacraments, and their eternal salvation is jeopardized. Therefore we, as responsible pastors, must take decisive actions to overcome the schism.'

Metropolitan Vladimir spoke about the necessity to take into account all causes of the schism, such as politization of the life of the Church, penetration of the nationalist ideology of ethnophyletism in it, human pride and cultural polarization of Ukrainian society. Incidentally, the West Ukraine, a seat of the movement for autocephaly, numbering 70% of all autocephalous structures, has become a social basis of the schism.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church 'strives to distant herself from any political and ideological platforms' and does not take upon herself responsibility to determine any civilizational choice of the Ukraine.'

The Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that took place in December 2007 denounced the attempts to turn the life of the Church into a political issue and 'pointed out to the extremist-minded forces within our Church that their activity is detrimental to the interests of the Church and hampers the efforts aimed at the overcoming of ecclesiastical schism.' Metropolitan Vladimir expressed his hope that representatives of the self-proclaimed Kievan Patriarchate, whose ideology is based on 'political Orthodoxy', would do likewise.

The reporter noted a certain progress in the dialogue between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the so-called Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and remarked that cooperation in the overcoming of schism could be constructive if the participants in the dialogue have sincere intentions and are willing to heed to the arguments of the other side. Metropolitan Vladimir stated with satisfaction that 'The UAOC has reconsidered many of her positions that have earlier confused clerics and laymen of our Church. For instance, the UOAC has publicly denounced ethnophyletism and publicly renounced it as a method of the building of church life.'

The schismatic groups in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church link the overcoming of the schism with a new canonical status of the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the present leadership of the Ukrainian state shares this position.

'One may suppose that the improvement of the canonical status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church could help the schismatic groups to join her. Yet, it will not solve the problem of the ecclesiastical unity in the Ukraine as many bishops, clerics and laymen of our Church are not prepared to break off the present canonical ties with the Russian Orthodox Church,' Metropolitan Vladimir is convinced. On the other hand, some people assert that autocephaly is detrimental to the ecclesiastical unity. This point of view, however, would mean in the long run that there is no unity among the Local Orthodox Churches with the autocephalous status. This runs contrary to the Orthodox teaching of the Church. On the other hand, there is an opinion that autocephaly is the only way of solving the Ukrainian ecclesiastical problem. This position is ridiculous. Autocephaly cannot be an instrument of consolidation of the Church; it can rather be a result of the general church consensus. Moreover, historical experience shows that a hastily achieved autocephaly could cause further divisions within the Church.'

'In virtue of the mentioned reasons the Ukrainian Orthodox Church prefers to consider the problem of overcoming the schism in the pastoral vein, avoiding the much speculated problems. This means that we are prepared to discuss problems of how to overcome the schism, but are not willing to discuss any changes in the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as we consider this discussion premature and unhelpful for the current life of the Church,' Metropolitan Vladimir said.

The position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the dialogue with the State is the same. Metropolitan Vladimir believes it positive that the Ukrainian politicians care for consolidation of society and consider the Church as a helper in the solution of this problem. He expressed his hope for the authorities to comply with 'the legitimate demand to grant the Church the status of a legal entity and return the seized property.'

At the same time, he believes, an active participation of the state in the solution of the ecclesiastical problems, even with the best of intentions, could have grave consequences and bring about new schisms. 'There could be such a development if the authorities ignore the position of the largest in the Ukraine Church or take actions aimed at the overcoming of the schism without the knowledge of the Church and without seeking advice from her Primate. In such cases we consider the actions of the authorities as not competent and going beyond the scope of the Constitution of the Ukraine as far as it concerns the relations between the Church and the State,' the First Hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said.

'I focused attention on the restoration of the ecclesiastical unity in the Ukraine, as the unity of the Church is the theme of the present Bishops' Council. I hope that the Plenitude of the Russian Orthodox Church represented here by her bishops would properly assess this difficult and urgent problem, and that their deliberations would be included in the Acts of the Council,' His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir said in conclusion of his report.

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