



UOC Chancellor believes that conciliar church wisdom should give assessment for Patriarch Bartholomew's actions



Having come to Ukraine, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople refused to talk with thousands of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church meeting him at the building of Verhovna Rada in Kiev. During this visit which threatens to overgrow with conflicts and to exacerbate the church conflict in that country further, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary spoke with Ria Novosti about what developments the canonical Church could expect and what could be done to meet them; how the UOC assesses the current situation; if the Local Churches are ready to defend the purity of the faith and whether it is necessary for them to continue the dialogue in the “Amman format”.

– Vladyka Anthony, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople has arrived in Kiev on the occasion of the Independence Day of Ukraine; and there were talks about Pope Francis coming too. What do the followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church think about the visit of these religious leaders? Is the refusal of your clergy to participate in the events around Bartholomew's visit still in force?

– Judging by what state officials say, Pope Francis’ visit to Ukraine is unlikely to happen, because nothing was said about preparations for it. As for the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew, it was announced several months ago. Many experts predict that this event would accelerate the aggravation of religious situation in the country. This visit and reception of the Phanar’s head on the highest political level could be taken by the followers and supporters of the “OCU” as a signal in support of their efforts for the weakening of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which might provoke a new wave of raider attacks on the communities and parishes of the canonical Church. In this context, we announced that we would not be able to take part in a pre-planned event in the Cathedral of St. Sophia of Kiev if the delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople were present there, because none other but the Phanar and its head were responsible for the violation of the rights of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. How can one share presence with those whose decisions have brought so many troubles, so much suffering and evil to people who just wanted to preserve intact the faith of their grandfathers and grand-grandfathers?

– **Along with the signing of the so-called Tomos of the autocephaly for the “OCU,” the topic of “stauropegions” (representations) to be transferred to the possession of Constantinople was raised. Now, some experts do not exclude possibility that in view of Patriarch Bartholomew’s visit, the authorities might welcome him with such a “gift”: present him with a church or a monastery of the canonical Church as a “stauropegion.” How real does such a possibility seem, and anyway, is the agreement on stauropegions observed and which of the church buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are under threat?**

– In 2018 an agreement on cooperation was signed between Ukraine and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Some mass media spread information about a supplement to this document with a list of Ukrainian churches which the previous government in the person of Poroshenko had promised to hand over to the disposal of the Phanar. It is difficult to say if this information is true. However, I should mention that in 2019 Speaker of Verkhovna Rada Andrei Parubii publicly spoke about the possibility of handing over to the Patriarchate of Constantinople about twenty of the oldest and well-maintained monasteries and churches of Ukraine. The Kiev Caves Laura of the Dormition, the Lvov Dormition Brotherhood, the Mezhygorye Monastery of the Transfiguration, the Kiev Epiphany Brotherhood and the Manyava Monastery were mentioned among them.

– **The data presented by the Church and Ukrainian police about the number of the participants in the Procession with the Cross on the Day of the Baptism of Rus’ differed one from the other by several times: the Church mentioned 350,000; the police – 55,000. Why, do you think, the figures are so different?**

– In previous years, purposeful understatement of the quantity of Orthodox believers participating in the Procession with the Cross on the Day of the Baptism of Rus' was a common reality. It was to be expected, because the authorities did not want public at large to know what support the canonical Church was getting. But all their efforts would be inevitably smashed by one and the same evidence: TV live reports picturing a sea of people. I am sure that this year, too, TV movie frames showing the endless human river flowing from Volodymyrska Hill to the Kiev-Caves Laura will speak for themselves. Therefore, there is no need to prove anything: all there is to know is in clear evidence. By the way, we are even thankful to the police for the announced figures. Its earlier understatements used to show absolutely ridiculous figures. For example, in 2018, according to the official information, only 20,000 took part in the procession. So, the number of 55,000 is not bad at all. Let them in the police, though in their own strange way, admit and take to notice a steady growing number of the participants in our Procession with the Cross.

– How free do the parishioners and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church feel in Ukraine now? Has life become easier or harder in the recent years?

– Thank God, we are not living through the tribulations that our Church had to encounter in the past century. I am referring to the repressions under Bolsheviks. However, I must say that our clergymen and believers often experience violation of their rights and freedoms. Unfortunately there are facts of direct violence and aggression against the flock of the canonical Church. Since Poroshenko left the post of President, the situation has somewhat improved, but the problems did not disappear for good; they are just left hanging in the air. And any external factor, the outcome of Patriarch Bartholomew's visit to Ukraine, for instance, may aggravate the situation in the church.

– In what regions the situation with the seizures of churches and persecution of the canonical Church is the worst? What is the dynamics of such cases in the country on the whole? Is the situation worsening under Zelensky? How many parishes have been seized in the recent months? What is the reason behind the seizures? Is the return to the time of Poroshenko possible?

– Most often the information about such offences of law comes from western Ukraine. Certain representatives of local authorities or the radical political forces, interested in maintaining their rating, usually stand behind them. It should be noted that cases of unlawful re-registration of parish statutes moving the parishes of our Church to the jurisdiction of the "OCU," have become more frequent. By the way, such official malfeasance of an official of the Vinnitsa regional administration has led to the attempted seizure of a parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Verbovets. People of the "OCU" tried to break into the building; they beat the priest trying to push him and the faithful loyal to the canonical Church from the parish building; threatening them with sharpened iron rods; they tore off the

priest's cross and promised to "slaughter" the UOC believers like "pigs." Present there and witnessing this scene, law enforcement officers of the national police would not interfere to stop the "OCU" representatives. This is what is really dispiriting, since lawlessness, as is known, begets new and greater lawlessness, prompting destabilization of the religious situation in the whole country.

– Have the cases of aggression against the clergy and the attempts at seizing the church buildings become more frequent before the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew? Do you expect them to flare up during or after his visit? What, in your opinion, could the Patriarch of Constantinople say or do to make the situation worse, or better?

– As I said earlier, the unlawful re-registering of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has activated. Here is another recent example. On July 8, 2021, chairman of the regional state administration of Volyn Yury Pogulyaiko signed Order No.406 to re-register St. Nicholas' parish in the village of Boroichiche. I do not exclude that this process could get an additional impetus after the visit of the Phanar's head to the Ukrainian land. After all, the Patriarchate of Constantinople does not conceal its interest in resuming strategic interaction with Ukrainian authorities, the clandestine objective of which is to weaken the positions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Apparently for this particular reason, in all these years, not a single statement has come from Patriarch Bartholomew either about the necessity of stopping raider attacks on the parishes of the canonical Church in Ukraine by the "OCU" followers, or about the inadmissibility of using force, threats and pressure against the believers willing to stay faithful to God and His Church.

– How real is the threat of renaming the Ukrainian Orthodox Church considering that even a law had been earlier passed in this regard? What laws discriminatory for the UOC that were adopted under Poroshenko are still valid? What threat do the new laws passed by Rada imply for the believers? Can the President veto them and rescind the previous laws and why is it not done yet?

– The threat of forceful renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church remains, because nobody has rescinded this law yet. The process is just suspended for the time while the respective case is under consideration at the Constitutional Court.

Over against other measures, like the restriction of the service of military chaplains of our Church, the above-mentioned problem stands out as the most stinging. In case of the successful realization of the scenario of the forceful renaming, the certain forces will get additional possibility for the unlawful re-registration of the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in favor of the "OCU." With the administrative support this will not be difficult to achieve, especially now that, as is typical of raider schemes, the structure of the schismatics has staked out for itself a name of the "OCU," practically

identical to our “UOC.” Unfortunately, there is no hope yet for a qualitatively tangible change of the situation with the discriminatory law. For some unknown reasons, all branches of power are reluctant to rescind the norms contradicting the Constitution, although they have powers and legal justification to do so.

– Does the Ukrainian Orthodox Church feel any support of the international community, the European and international organizations, the European Court of Human Rights, and others?

– We provide the international organizations with comprehensive information about different offences of law. Moreover, these organizations register certain violations of fundamental rights and freedoms of our faithful. Yet, I cannot say anything about significant support rendered by these organizations.

– Have you got any signals from those Local Churches which have not yet find their position on “the Ukrainian issue” – the Bulgarian, Georgian and Romanian Churches? Could other Churches join those which have recognized the “OCU”? On which Churches a particular pressure is being put by the Phanar and different forces from abroad?

– The majority of the Local Church has experienced different kinds of pressure concerning the recognition of the “OCU.” Some could maintain their stand against outside pressure, some could not, but even in those Churches that have in whole or in part recognized the Dumenko’s structure there is no unity concerning their relationship with the schismatics. This is obvious to the entire Orthodox world. That is why other Churches have no sights on extending the recognition of the “OCU.”

In the early 2021, certain mass media wrote that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was allegedly willing to legalize the Ukrainian schismatics. Commenting on these rumors, Metropolitan Gavriil of Loveč said that the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had appointed a special commission for thorough study of the schism in Ukraine. The commission had to present a report to the Synod, but had not done it so far. Moreover, he underscored that there was only one canonical Church in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry at the head. As far as the Georgian Church is concerned, greeting from Patriarch Iliya recently received by our Primate on his Nameday, is self-evident. As to our Romanian brothers, I would say that we maintain good and constructive relations. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church hold different meetings at diverse levels and celebrate common divine services.

– It has been said many times that the Patriarch of Constantinople has lapsed into schism by recognizing the schismatics. Is Patriarch Bartholomew a heretic? Should there be any conciliar decision on this issue?

– The Phanar is promoting a concept of “the first without the equals” and is making steps toward unia with Rome. This raises many tough and pertinent questions, but I believe that the conciliar wisdom of our entire Universal Church not only can, but should give assessment for all these actions.

– How likely is a global split in world Orthodoxy to happen and to repeat the “great schism” of 1054? In view of the fact that Patriarch Bartholomew flatly refuses to convene a pan-Orthodox Council on the Ukrainian problem, could other Churches initiate its convocation? Do you think it is possible and what is needed for this to happen?

– The processes set off by Patriarch Bartholomew have already de facto destroyed the pan-Orthodox unity and brought Orthodox Churches to division. An absolutely new model of world Orthodoxy is being formed before our eyes. The central place in it is being prepared for the “Eastern Pope” to enjoy unprecedented powers and privileges. It is quite obvious that successful launching of this model will inevitably bring about profoundly deep changes to other aspects of the life and activity of the Church. In particular, it would affect work related to the foundations of the Orthodox teaching. In this context, the readiness of the Local Churches to protect the purity of the faith comes to the forefront. It is already clear now that the escapade of Patriarch Bartholomew in Ukraine is going far beyond the framework of a dispute over the jurisdiction of a territory. In this situation, the resumed activity in the “Amman format” could play its role, because this is the format in which disputable issues, however deep and acute they may be, could and should be considered.

– Do you have fears that a new big war might break out? What is to be done that it won't? Are you going to call politicians to peace?

– Everything is in God's hands. As St. Nikolaj of Serbia said at his time, “War of man against man is the result of war of man against God.” This truly is the core reason of any big conflict or confrontation. Proceeding from this truth, we all must be aware of our responsibility for every our move, every word and decision. This especially concerns politicians who are responsible for the destiny of their people.