Metropolitan Hilarion: Constantinople encroaches on others' property



During his visit to Hungary, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople stated that the Cathedral Church of the Russian Orthodox Church's diocese of Budapest and Hungary - the Cathedral of the Dormition in Budapest, "during the sad and hazy days of the Communist regime, because of the shady and perfidious machinations and unbearable pressure of the Soviet power, was forcibly purloined and wholly unlawfully and uncanonically subjected to the Moscow Patriarchate, which to this day continues to possess it sacrilegiously". At a request of the RIA Novosti news agency, the head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk commented on this statement speaking about the past and present of the church.

- **Your Eminence, you have recently visited Budapest, where you spoke at the opening of the**

Eucharistic Congress. And right after you, the same congress saw Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. In his sermon after the Liturgy he celebrated in the Catholic cathedral, he mentioned the "capture" of the Cathedral of the Dormition in Budapest by the Moscow Patriarchate. How can you comment on these words?

- The Cathedral of the Dormition has never belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was built in the late 18th century by a community consisting predominantly of Greeks and Vlachs. Divine services were celebrated in it in Greek. But it was not under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople prohibited as it was in the territory of the Austro Hungarian Empire. True, in the 20th century 20s, Constantinople tried to create its exarchate in Hungary, but it existed only on paper. In Hungary proper, no trace of this exarchate has ever been found; no normative basis for it has ever been established in the Hungarian legislation.

Since 1945, representatives of the parish repeatedly appealed to Patriarch Alexis I of Moscow and All Russia to accept the parish in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1949, a Hungarian Deanery of the Russian Orthodox Church was established and in 1950, the Cathedral of the Dormition and a few more parishes, in which divine services were celebrated in Hungarian, joined the Moscow Patriarchate. Thus, there was a change in the church jurisdiction, but the community remained the same. The correspondence concerning the admission of these parishes to the fold of the Russian Church was carried out not with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with which they had no relations whatsoever, but with the Serbian Church.

In the early 2000s, Constantinople laid claims to the Cathedral of the Dormition and filed a suit. All the three court instances fell on the time when I administered the diocese of Hungary. And we won all the three instances - first the Budapest City Court, then the Court of Appeal and, finally, the Supreme Court. We managed to prove convincingly that the present community of the Cathedral of the Dormition, including Greeks and Hungarians and people of other ethnic background, was a direct legal successor of the original community. Moreover, direct descendants of the first founders are serving in the clergy of our church to this day.

Therefore, the Patriarch of Constantinople can make whatever claims he wants, but it has been already thrice proved judicially and finally that these claims are altogether ungrounded. The tenth commandment of the Law of Moses reads, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Ex. 20:17). It is appropriate to remind the Patriarch of Constantinople of this commandment. Expressing such ideas publicly, he encroaches on others' property whose right holder has been determined by court. Besides, he thus casts doubt on the competence of Hungarian courts.

The Hungarian state acted very wisely by giving the Patriarchate of Constantinople as a gift a territory and a group of buildings where a church will be built (Patriarch Bartholomew blessed the foundation stone). It should seem what else does he need? But no, it proves to be not enough. Right in the presence of benefactors, Patriarch Bartholomew voices claims also to a church building that has never belonged to Constantinople.

The Hungarian state generally treats traditional religious confession with great consideration subsidizing their work. The repair and restoration work in the Cathedral of the Dormition is carried out with the financial support of the Hungarian state.

When I came to Budapest in 2003, the first thing I saw was our Cathedral of the Dormition with only one spire. I was told that the second spire was cut off by a bomb during the Second World War. At that time I set myself the task to reestablish that spire. And it should be said that in the Austro Hungarian Empire, Orthodox churches did not differ externally from Catholic ones. Only when you enter inside and see the icon screen you can understand that it was an Orthodox church. On the outside there were not cupolas but spires. So, one of the latter was missing.

Several years were spent in courts, and when they were finalized, we, with the help of Lukoil Company managed to build a stone base for the second spire. The further work was carried out already under my successors at the see of Hungary. The lost spire was fully restored; the full repair on the outside was fulfilled and now work is carried out on the interior of the church. It is a very large-scale restoration project. Upon its completion, I hope, the cathedral will appear before parishioners in all its beauty.

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