Holy Synod expresses judgement about the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Kiev



During its session held on September 23-24, 2021, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed its judgement about the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Kiev. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople visited Ukraine on August 20-24, 2021, at the invitation of the Ukrainian authorities and the leadership of a schismatic religious organisation. While in Kiev, Patriarch Bartholomew concelebrated with the leaders of the Ukrainian schism and assured them of his support, sparking off protests among archpastors, clergy and laypeople of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Synod stated that the arrival of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople with accompanying persons in Kiev without an invitation from the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine and legitimate hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had been a gross violation of canons, in particularly, Canon 3 of the Council of Sardica and Canon 13 of the Council of Antioch.

The issued Synodal resolution condemns “the ongoing anti-canonical actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople aimed at shattering the unity of Orthodoxy” and points out the purely political nature of Patriarch Bartholomew’s visit, revealing his dependence on the forces foreign to the Church.

“While commemorating with gratitude the great contribution of the Holy Church of Constantinople to the enlightenment of Rus’ by the light of Christ’s faith, we emphasise that noble deeds of Their Holinesses the Patriarchs of Constantinople of blessed memory in the past do not justify the current canonical transgressions of Patriarch Bartholomew, who has supported the schism and entered into ecclesiastical communion with the persons calling themselves Orthodox hierarchs, but having no canonical consecration,” the Synod’s resolution reads.

“Having supported the schism in Ukraine, Patriarch Bartholomew lost trust of millions of believers,” the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church stated, noting that “at a time when the majority of Orthodox Christians across the world are not in ecclesiastical communion with him, he no longer has the right to speak on behalf of the whole world Orthodoxy and present himself as its leader.”

The Holy Synod confirmed the Moscow Patriarchate’s commitment to the canon law norms and universally recognised principles of inter-Orthodox cooperation, as well as its persisting openness to a pan-Orthodox discussion on the situation that has arisen in the world Orthodoxy. “The full responsibility for undermining the unity of the Orthodox Church lies with Patriarch Bartholomew owing to his anti-canonical actions,” the Synodal resolution also says.

The Synod members expressed support to His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, the archpastors, pastors and the plenitude of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in their standing for the truth and faithfulness to the canonical unity of the Church.

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The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on repeated occasions made denunciations of the encroachments by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which have become systematic since 2018, on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was also often emphasised that Constantinople’s anti-canonical actions had severe consequences for the unity of the world Orthodoxy and the plight of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

On September 8, 2018, the Holy Synod condemned the appointment of two hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as ‘exarchs’ in Kiev. As the Synod members noted, “these actions lead the relations between the Russian Church and the Church of Constantinople to a deadlock and create a

real threat to the unity of the whole world Orthodoxy… the full responsibility for these uncanonical actions falls personally on Patriarch Bartholomew and those persons in the Church of Constantinople who support these actions."

Well-grounded canonical position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the unlawful intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in its canonical territory was expressed in detail in the Holy Synod's Statement of September 14, 2018. The decision was taken to suspend prayerful liturgical commemoration of Patriarchal Bartholomew of Constantinople and concelebration with hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople, and to withdraw from all the commissions and structures chaired or co-chaired by its representatives. The Holy Synod warned, "In the event that the Patriarchate of Constantinople will continue to carry out its uncanonical activities in the territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, we will be compelled to completely break off the Eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. All the responsibility for the tragic consequences of this division will lie personally with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and the hierarchs supporting him."

On October 11, 2018, the Patriarchate of Constantinople announced its "revocation" of the Patriarchal and Synodal Letters of 1686 on the transfer of the Kiev Metropolia to the Moscow Patriarchate, thus attempting to disband the canonical Church in Ukraine. In grave violation of the canon law, the Church of Constantinople decreed to establish a "stavropegion" in Kiev and an "exarchate" in the territory of Ukraine and to reinstate the leaders of the schismatic groups "to their hierarchical or priestly rank."

In its Statement of October 15, 2018, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church denounced the unlawful actions of the Church of Constantinople and, in compliance with the canons, stated the impossibility of maintaining the Eucharistic communion with it. The Statement reads, "The attempt of hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for political and self-seeking reasons to review this resolution now, over three hundred years after it was adopted, runs contrary to the spirit of the Orthodox Church's canons that do not allow of a possibility for reviewing established church boundaries that have not been challenged for a long time." The Holy Synod called upon the Supreme Authorities of the Local Orthodox Churches "to a proper evaluation of the above-mentioned anti-canonical actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and to a joint search for a way out of the grave crisis tearing apart the body of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church." In view of the growing pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church the Holy Synod assured it of its all-round support and asked all members of the Russian Church "to enhance their prayers for brothers and sisters of the same faith in Ukraine."

In its resolution of November 13, 2018, the Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church unanimously condemned Constantinople's interference in the internal affairs of another Local Church and its anti-canonical decision to recognise the Ukrainian schsismatics. The Council declared the impossibility for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be involved in this process and confirmed the

severance of the Eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

On December 15, 2018, with the participation of Constantinople's hierarchs and under the control of the Ukrainian authorities, representatives of uncanonical groups in Ukraine gathered together and declared the establishment of a new religious structure. By its decision of December 17, the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church pronounced the schismatic gathering illegitimate and imposed canonical punishments on the two hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who had taken part in that meeting.

On December 28, 2018, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (Minutes No. 98) confirmed that judgment, emphasising the uncanonical nature of the invasion of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine, as well as of the convocation of the schismatic so-called "uniting council" led by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Constantinople' hierarchs, and of the creation of the new uncanonical community in Ukraine. The Holy Synod also expressed its deep concern over the adoption of the discriminatory laws in Ukraine targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and appealed to the heads of the Local Orthodox Churches, asking them to support the Ukrainian Church's Supreme Authority, clergy and faithful children.

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Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/88124/