Synod: Decisions of the Patriarchate of Alexandria on the hierarchs and clerics of the Russian Orthodox Church are invalid



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At their session on December 29, 2022, members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considered the decision of the Patriarchate of Alexandria's Synod on 'deprivation of the episcopal dignity' of Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, Patriarchal Exarch for Africa (Minutes No. 136). The Synod held its session at the Patriarchal and Synodal Residence in the St. Daniel Monastery. The session was chaired by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

As is known, in connection with Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria's official recognition of the schismatic so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine stated on November 8, 2019 and his liturgical mention of the head of this uncanonical structure, the Holy Synod at its session on 26 December 2019 confirmed 'the impossibility of mentioning the name of Patriarch Theodore in the diptychs as well as making the liturgical mention of his name and having the Eucharistic communion with him' and discontinued

ecclesiastic communion with the bishops of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria who ‘supported or will support in the future the legalization of the Ukrainian schism’ (Minutes No. 151).

Later on, Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria not only did not refuse to mention the head of the above-mentioned schismatic grouping but also concelebrated the liturgy with them on Imbros Island on 13 August 2021. Responding to numerous appeals of the Patriarchate of Alexandria’s clergy, who did not wish to become participators in the anti-canonical actions of their Primate and asked to be admitted to the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, and considering that Patriarch Theodore actually entered the part of schism, the Holy Synod, at its session of 29 December 2021, (Minutes No. 100) decided to form a Patriarchal Exarchate for Africa and appointed Metropolitan Leonid of Klin as its head.

In its statement made on 28 January 2022, the Holy Synod noted that the decision to form the exarchate ‘adopted in the situation of recognition of the Ukrainian schismatics by the Patriarch of Alexandria, is by no means an expression of claim to the canonical territory of the old Church of Alexandria, but has as its only object to offer canonical protection to those Orthodox clergy in Africa who do not wish to participate in the lawless legitimation of the schism in Ukraine.

In Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria’s letters of 12 January and 14 February 2022 to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, there were threats that Metropolitan Leonid of Klin ‘would be deprived of his dignity’. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia replied (letters of 18 January and 5 March 2022). In the last letter, His Holiness stated in particular to Patriarch Theodore ‘that any court decisions of your Church with regard to Metropolitan Leonid or any other hierarchs or clergy of our Church will be recognized by us as canonically invalid’.

On 22 November 2022, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria resolved that Metropolitan Leonid of Klin ‘be deprived of his dignity’.

In view of the fact that Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria have actually diverted into a schism (as he recognized a schismatic grouping of persons, who had no grace of priesthood and were excommunicated from the Church, and had Eucharistic communion with them and supported the schism within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church) and on the basis of the generally recognized principles of the immunity of the clergy of one autocephalous Church to the court of another autocephalous Church, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church resolved that the decision of the Patriarchate of Alexandria that Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, Patriarchal Exarch for Africa, ‘be deprived of his dignity’ and all other similar decisions concerning the Russian Orthodox Church clergy be considered to have no canonical force and to be invalid.

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