Bishop Irinej of Bac: Most Local Orthodox Churches continue to recognize canonical Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine while ignoring citizen Sergey Dumenko



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The official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church has installed the Nativity interview Bishop Irinej of Bac gave to Pečat, a weekly Serbian magazine, which came out on December 30. In particular, it deals with the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church enduring a new wave of persecutions.

'In recent days, the state terror has been going literary through its peak. It is illustrated not only by the blasphemous invasion of the police and 'security services workers' into the greatest shrine of not only Ukraine but of the whole Russian Orthodox world - the Kiev Lavra of the Caves, but also by a threat that, if God will permit it' 'the pro-European' and 'democratically'-orientated Ukrainian state will simply ban, if not abolish it', Bishop Irinej of Bac said, 'It goes without saying that virtuous representatives of democracy and human, including religious, rights and freedoms on the both sides of the Atlantic wisely

keep silent. In their opinion, in Kiev their ‘values’ and ‘ideals’ are defended knightly (!).

The hierarch stressed that the hardening persecutions against the canonical Church is due to the deepening schism in Ukraine as a result of the uncanonical actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople which has created in this country ‘its own para-ecclesial structure’ and this ‘in contravention of the existing predominant canonical Church, which it itself had recognized until the day of the implementation of its decision and actually continues to recognize it, for it does not dare declare it uncanonical or non-existent’.

The archpastor regretted to note that he himself and many authoritative people warned Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople against the negative consequences of the step he conceived - the granting of ‘fictitious autocephaly to a non-existent Church in Ukraine, or rather to two forcibly and temporarily united schismatic groupings’ headed by ‘unrepentant and graceless schismatics’. However, unfortunately Fanar ‘did not consider the arguments of many authoritative people, nor the holy canons, nor the experience of past centuries, nor the Holy Tradition of the Eastern Church’. At that, he emphasized, there was ‘no need for a special insight to understand that anti-ecclesial and anti-Russian persecutions in the situation of war waged between Russia and the collective West in the territory of wretched Ukraine would become much more severe than they were before the conflict began’, and Fanar ‘always knew that the post-Maidan Ukrainian power built as the most radical anti-Russian structure serving directly NATO and political ‘West’ is not only interested in transforming the schismatic groupings into a sort of a state Church but shows maximum activity in persecuting the genuine canonical Church (intimidating the clergy, capturing churches and forcible ‘re-registration’ of parishes, terrorizing the faithful…). The hierarch mentioned the special role played by the supreme state leaders in the involvement of Fanar in the Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis during ‘Poroshenko’s infamous rule’.

Bishop Irinej noted that most Local Orthodox Churches ‘openly or silently’ have perceived Constantinople’s invasion in the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate ‘as a unlawful, wrong and fraught with dangers for the unity of Orthodoxy’ and “continue to recognize canonical Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, while ignoring citizen Sergey Dumenko (‘Metropolitan Epifany’).” The Patriarchate of Serbia, he underlines, ‘respects the ages-old canonical order” and, observing this order, ‘regrets the profound spiritual-canonical crisis arisen in Orthodoxy and prayerfully hopes for its overcoming’.

The hierarch enumerated the objective political processes deepening ‘poisoned’ Russian-Ukrainian relations: ‘The anti-Russian project; state persecution of all things Russian in Ukraine, especially the Church, Russian language and culture, long-standing terror against the Russian and Russian-speaking population in Donbass, NATO’s denial of Ukraine’s status as a neutral buffer zone, the Alliance’s intention to reach Russia’s borders’. In this situation, as Bishop Irinej noted, ‘conflicts between the

Orthodox - regardless of whether they were initiated or, already after their beginning, were additionally

stirred up by non-Orthodox or even openly anti-Christian forces' were used 'as a prologue and mise en scene for an inter-state conflict with its millions of refugees, destruction of cities, tens of thousands of victims among the military of the both sides, killed and injured peaceful residents'. The hierarch called 'to tirelessly pray to the Lord of Peace for a speedy restoration of peace between the brothers', underlining that the Orthodox faithful 'by no means should participate in the propaganda of the forces who are orally for peace but 'promote' it by sending to Ukraine ever more weapons thus working for the war to last as long as possible'.

A prominent place is given in the interview to the issue of the superiority of the canonical order of the Orthodox Church over papism as its 'system of conciliar interaction and mutual interpenetration between independent (autocephalous) Churches… is much more authentic theologically or ecclesiologically than the monarchic or pyramidal structure in which there are no equal patriarchs and in which, in place of conciliarity and primacy of honour, the dominating principle of the primacy of power, in which the pope stands on the summit of the 'pyramid, while the rest stand lower'. In this light, the hierarch criticizes Fanar's claims to exclusive, almost papal privileges.

'The present-day Roman Catholic theology', the hierarch says, 'is increasingly discovering the advisability and advantages of the principle of conciliarity, while 'we as Orthodox… more and more often use the terminology and rhetoric invincibly reminding the terminology and rhetoric of the First Catholic Council (1870), such as: 'I have privileges', or 'I have special powers'. The archpastor points to 'the fruits of this way of thinking': 'enmity, struggle for superiority, wrangling and conflicts up to a schism between particular Orthodox Churches', noting that all this undermines the credibility of the Orthodox Church 'among non-Orthodox Christians who expected so much from us in the area of witness to conciliarity in words and deeds'.

'The system of conciliar unity of the autocephalous sister Churches is the best possible system, but when it is implemented by spiritually immature people who have not reached the necessary level of ecclesiastical conscience then, thanks to them, it becomes in practice the worst of possible systems', Bishop Irinej notes, 'Let everyone of us take the trouble to make not the worst but the best system, which it is such actually!'

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