Comments by DECR Communication Service on Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople's speech at World Policy Conference (Abu Dhabi, 9 December 2022)

DECR Communication Service, 03.02.2023.

On December 9 during the World Policy Conference 'For a Reasonably Open World', Patriarch Bartholomew hurled a number of incorrect, groundless and openly slanderous accusations at the Russian Orthodox Church. In his speech, devoted almost completely not so much to the theme of the conference but to criticism of the Russian Orthodoxy, he gave a biased and distorted interpretation of

the history of our Church and peoples she unites and alluded to an alleged deviation of the Russian Church from the Orthodox doctrine and canons.

Regardless to Patriarch Bartholomew's utterly disputable, incompetent and politicized evaluations of a number of historic events in the history of Russia and Eastern Europe, we have to state the following.

Orthodox Christianity did really underlie the political and cultural identity of the Kievan Rus' and in many ways formed the national identity of the peoples who trace their history to the Kievan Baptismal font. In spite of periods of fragmentation and upheavals, these peoples have always perceived themselves as a one ecclesial community.

Kiev, called in our most ancient chronicles 'the mother of Russian cities', historically was the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy and the first see of the Russian Church. As ancient Antioch was for the Orthodox East, Mtskheta for Georgia, Patriarchate of Pec for Serbia, so for our peoples Kiev has remained to this day the common holy place venerated throughout the Russian Church.

The emergence of Ukrainian identity is not related to 'the dialectic between creation and destruction', as the Primate of the Church of Constantinople vaguely formulated, but rather to the consequences of the history of South-West Rus' in a situation of ages-long struggle of Orthodox Christians for the preservation of their faith, culture and traditions in the situation of an aggressive non-Orthodox expansion both from the East and the West. In this struggle, our ancestors relied on the support of their same-faith brothers in the North, and it resulted in the unification of Moscow and Kiev in the 17th century, the unification both political and ecclesial. It met the ages-long expectations of our ancestors and its voluntary and nationwide nature was sealed in documents and this unification by no mean can be called 'Russian foreign dominion' because the participants in this unification on both sides felt, thought and called themselves Russian at that time.

Later on, our peoples endured together both glorious and tragic times in their shared history. The 20th century, of which the Patriarch of Constantinople made a special mention, was 'especially cruel' not only for the Ukrainian but also the Russian people. We endured together the hardships and losses of the First World War (1914-1918), the devastation brought by the Civil War (1918-1923), the mass starvation in the USSR (1932-1933), which encompassed lands not only in today's Ukraine but also in Volga region, the Urals, Central Chernozemye, North Caucasus, and finally the intervention of the German Fascist invaders in 1941.

To say that the Ukrainian people just found themselves 'amidst an armed confrontation between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, to present them as an apathetic and weak-willed victim of the global conflict means to undervalue and belittle the feat of Ukrainians during World War II. From 1941 to 1945,

the Russian and Ukrainian nations held out shoulder to shoulder against Europe united by fascism. Over five million Russian soldiers and about a million and a half Ukrainian ones gave their lives for the victory over German Nazism. It was by their rights as victors in World War II that both Russian and Ukrainian nations were included in the number of founders of the United Nations Organization. It is sad that the Primate of Constantinople is unaware of our nations' services for the world history, nor does he feel for their sacrifices, that he is ready to insult the memory of the fallen for the sake of momentary political rhetoric and the current state of affairs.

Considered among the trials endured by our nations in the 20th century should also be the atheistic persecutions under the communist regime, which Patriarch Bartholomew mentions only in passing. These religious persecutions, ones of the most brutal in the history of Christianity, cost lives of many thousands of the Russian Orthodox Church clergy and hundreds of thousands of lay people. In the 1920s, the communist authorities artificially created a Renovationist schism in the Russian Church and Constantinople openly supported it.

The Patriarch of Constantinople's accusations against the Russian Church appear ungrateful and unfair as he alleges that after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 'Moscow claimed its right to substitute the Ecumenical Patriarchate'. Even in the most infamous years for the Church of Constantinople when she deviated into unia (1439) and legitimated the Ukrainian church schism (2018), the Russian Orthodox Church restricted herself only to a rupture of communion with those who excommunicated themselves from the doctrinal and canonical unity of the Orthodox Church. But she never claimed the place of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the family of Local Orthodox Churches.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the principality of Moscow and later its reign actually remained for many years the only independent Orthodox state capable of supporting Orthodox Christians in the East. It is for this reason that Patriarch Jeremias of Constantinople, in his 1589 Legislative Letter on the establishment of patriarchate in Rus', addressed the Tsar Feodor Ivanovich, saying, 'O Devout Tsar, your great Russian Tzardom, the third Rome, has excelled everybody in piety, and all your pious tzardoms have been brought together, and only you under the Christian heaven is named tzar in the whole universe, for all Christians'.

However, from the times of Patriarch Jeremias and to this day, in none of the official documents and statements of the Russian Church the political concept of 'the Third Rome' has ever been applied. In the 20th century, the ideas mentioned by Patriarch Bartholomew have mainly become Fanar's instrument of ideology and propaganda. During 'the cold war' waged by the notorious 'Third Rome' and 'Pan-Slavism' were traditionally used to intimidate our Greek bothers in faith and the Western community. As is shown by the documents recently published by the CIA on Patriarch Athenagoras' cooperation with the U.S. intelligence, the mythical 'Third Rome' argument was actively used by Fanar, mainly for fostering the

religious factor in international politics and involve the support of world political forces.

It is sad that the aid given to the nation of the same faith in the Balkans, including the fraternal Greek people in delivering them from the Ottoman yoke is referred to by Patriarch Bartholomew as a 'Moscow's long-standing policy 'to divide the Orthodox world community'. It is evident that from the force of habit the Primate of Constantinople sees the world of Orthodoxy limited to the Ottoman Empire's boundaries of the 18th-19th centuries. Its support and administrative enforcement machine were used at that time by the Phanariots to eradicate mercilessly the distinctive culture of the Balkan nations, their liturgical traditions, singing and even language by replacing them by Greek. This is how Fanar understood at that time 'the universal nature of the Gospel's message' and any opposition to this aggressive expansion among the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians was given the label of 'ethnophyletism' and was condemned as a heresy. At the same time, the idea of the exclusive right of Constantinople was invented to recall unilaterally the autocephaly of Local Churches obedient to it, which was based not on the millennium-long Tradition of the Church but rather on the administrative powers of the millet-bashi granted by the Turkish authorities.

Having invented the notion of ethnophyletism and condemned it at the 1872 Council of Constantinople, Fanar actually condemned its own long-standing policy of the cultural subjection of Orthodox nations. The accusations of the Russian Orthodox Church for 'ethnophyletism' or, more than that, for 'ecclesial racism' sound absurdly and vulgar; for it is the Church that unites millions of the faithful and hundreds of nations and daily preaches, prays and celebrates divine services in dozens of languages of peoples in the world.

The canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church includes 17 states and in each of them our Church supports the sovereignty of a country, promotes the spiritual improvement of society, fosters public accord, makes her contribution to the strengthening of the traditional moral values and the institute of family.

Against this background, the efforts of the Church of Constantinople for strengthening the traditional and family values appear to be far from adequate while her position appears extremely ambiguous. The open support given by some hierarchs in Fanar to the LGTB movement, abortions and family planning program as well as the official permission of the second marriage for clergy crush the millennia-long canonical principles of Orthodoxy, discord with the universal Orthodox documents adopted earlier and provoke a great temptation in the world Orthodoxy, including among the clergy and faithful of the Church of Constantinople herself.

The preaching of 'a new world' does not hinder the Patriarch of Constantinople from accusing his opponents of heresy. Appeals to 'basic rules of the ecclesial order of Orthodoxy' have not hampered his

recognition of ‘hierarchs’ of the Ukrainian schism who have no apostolic succession. And the promotion of ‘Western values’ mentioned in the speech, including the peculiar interpretation of the theme of human rights, does not prevent the Primate of the Church of Constantinople from turning a blind eye to the glaring violations of the basic rights and freedoms of the clergy and faithful in Ukraine.

During the days when the Patriarch Bartholomew’s Abu-Dhabi speech was drafted, mass searches and interrogations were held in monasteries and churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; criminal cases were initiated against her hierarchs and clergy on the basis of artificial or slanderous accusations, forcible captures of her churches and the assault on the clergy continued; her archpastors and pastors were deprived of their constitutional rights and a full-fledged opportunity to live in their own country. No word about it was pronounced in the gala speech of the Primate of Constantinople. Meanwhile, Ukrainian politicians and officials refer directly to the Tomos of the Patriarch of Constantinople as the basis for persecution and absolute prohibition of the activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Moreover, Fanar hierarchs publicly support the persecutions in Ukraine, hypocritically calling them ‘the purification and renewal of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy’.

In his speech, Patriarch Bartholomew has groundlessly accused the Russian Church of ‘using public resources’ to achieve her aims. It is difficult to give a more obvious example of using state levers with ecclesial aims than the process of legalization of a church schism undertaken by Constantinople in Ukraine and its recognition by Primates of some Local Orthodox Churches. According to eyewitnesses, in 2018 the president of Ukraine sat in the presidium of the so-called ‘Council’ of the schismatics, put pressure on schismatic hierarchs and even on the representative of Constantinople, the present Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon. American diplomats and special service representatives carried out a colossal work putting pressure unprecedented in our time on the Primates and episcopate of Local Orthodox Churches with the aim to force them to agree with the anti-canonical deed of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Precisely this brute pressure of world political forces on the Orthodox Church throughout the world and Fanar’s desire to act in Ukraine unilaterally, contrary to the will and protests of other Local Churches, has led to a profound division in the Orthodox world community that Patriarch Bartholomew referred to in his speech.

With deep regret we have to state that now too the Primate of Constantinople only supports and deepens this division. He does not only attempt to accuse indirectly the Russian Orthodox Church of some ‘mistakes’, ‘heresy’, deviation from the canons and dogmata, but also in abusive tone makes comments on the stand of all the Local Orthodox Churches which have not taken Fanar’s side in the Ukrainian ecclesial issue.

Precisely this disrespect of the Patriarch of Constantinople for his brothers in other Local Churches has become the principal cause of the failures experienced by the 2016 Council of Crete. Over the dozens years of preparation for the Council, representatives of Constantinople had kept suppressing the undesirable discussion while blocking the most acute issues of inter-Orthodox relations and excluded them from the agenda. Naturally, this led to slowing down the preparation process and later to an actual breakdown of the Council. By his scandalous speech in Abu-Dhabi the Primate of Constantinople only re-affirms his actual loss of the moral right and ability to be the coordinator of inter-Orthodox relations.

We would like to hope that the stand of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople will not extend to its Primate's personal views and opinion and she still has healthy forces who remember the Saviour's words: Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mt. 20:26-28).

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/90022/