



Vladimir R. Legoida: The atrocious experiment is being carried out on the faithful in Ukraine



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The Ukrainian authorities are intensifying repressions against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Vladimir R. Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media, gave an interview to the RIA Novosti news agency, in which he spoke about arrests, changes in church calendar, and church buildings in the Kiev Laura of the Caves.

– One can hear that the Ukrainian authorities have set themselves the task of eliminating the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. What kind of moves do you expect? Would mass arrests be made?

– I hope that mass arrests are not intended, as it is hardly possible to jail all or most of the people in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the church of the majority. The campaign against the Church is targeted against bishops and well-known clergymen. Apparently, a certain plan is to blaster

bishops and clergymen into obedience and illegally seize holy objects and holy places that are the symbols of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The Ukrainian authorities feel complete impunity. There is no one in the western world except Hungary, maybe, who would take the liberty to criticize their actions. Therefore, the Ukrainian authorities can do anything to exacerbate alienation and controversy between Russians and Ukrainians. The Church, the monuments, the education system are only instruments for generating hatred and making peace distant. First, the authorities are trying to wipe out common past and then common future. This is an atrocious social experiment.

– Is there a threat on the part of the Ukrainian authorities of targeted arrests of clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and their exchange for prisoners from the Ukrainian armed forces?

– I am afraid that such a threat exists and, alas, is unavoidable for those who have taken the courageous decision to stay with their flock. Certainly, the Russian Orthodox Church will do anything it can to help release clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from captivity and give them an opportunity to serve in places where they would not be exposed to danger. However, our capacity is limited.

There are cases of release. We were happy when Archpriest Andrei Pavlenko from Lysychansk returned from a Ukrainian prison. Regrettably, his illegal arrest and torture bring another evidence of the persecution of the Church that will leave a mark in the history of humanity.

– The Ukrainian Greek Catholics have switched to the Gregorian calendar; the Odessa “diocese” of the schismatic “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” has switched to the Revised Julian calendar. Is there a risk of a forceful change of the calendar of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church which, like the Russian Orthodox Church, observes the Julian calendar?

– All these news about the calendar clearly show that the external forces have started a full-scale reformatting of the church landscape in Ukraine. The authors of this process are not interested in the spiritual traditions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Christians or specific features of their church life. Everything must be reduced to the same level convenient for the dominant political force. Certainly, one of the goals is to use calendar that differs from the one the Russian Church is using in order to divide Russian and Ukrainian people to the greatest possible extent.

– Do you think that if the Ukrainian authorities continue repressions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, it could be “torn apart”: parishes would “run away” to the Polish, Romanian

or Serbian Church?

– Indeed, information is seeping out that the Romanian public organizations have called on the Romanian-speaking parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to join the Romanian Orthodox Church. However, the calls of such kind are null and void by standards of canon law. Evidently, whatever these public organizations say about canonical borders of this or that Local Church is of no importance. There is no point in predictions.

– The Kiev Laura of the Caves has filed a lawsuit against the National Reserve of the same name for revoking the lease on church buildings located in the museum part of the monastery. The hearing is to take place in Kiev on February 21. What are the prospects of the proceedings? Do you believe in a fair trial?

– Unfortunately, the prospects are slim. The trial cannot be fair because any action in respect of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is biased and outside the framework of law.

However, it is important to attend court. We know that even St. Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship status to defend his rights. No matter what the court rules, we will pray for the clergymen and lay people of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and for the preservation of this great Orthodox holy place.

– Are actions taken against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church legitimate by standards of the Ukrainian Constitution and legislation and by the rules of international law?

– Most certainly, these actions are illegitimate neither in terms of the Ukrainian nor international law. Legitimacy is outside any framework at present, and this concerns not only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Generally speaking, the clergymen and lay persons are just taken hostages like during the Civil War when the innocent people were killed and persecuted only because they belonged to the antagonistical class. At present, a small group of policy makers and their foreign advisors consider the whole Church as the antagonistical class.

– Is any analogy with the century-old events relevant, for instance, with the Soviet government's campaign for the seizure of church valuables along with the closing of churches and arrests of the clergy?

– Kiev considered the Ukrainian Orthodox Church an obstacle on the way to a “brighter European future.” The Bolsheviks had done the same thinking that Orthodoxy impeded the building of the

“communist paradise” on earth. History has shown that any power for which the faith is an obstacle is ready to carry out the cruelest actions against its own people. Therefore we offer up our fervent prayers for the Ukrainian faithful who are suffering during hostilities and are subject to religious violence and persecutions that have never been provoked as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has always been reasonably loyal to the authorities.

– The schismatics from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) are sometimes compared with the Renovationists of the 1920s-1930s whom the Soviet power supported at first as competitors of the canonical Church, but later repressed them, too. Do you agree with this comparison?

– The schismatics are a means for achieving political purposes of the authorities in Kiev, as was the case with the Bolsheviks. The so called OCU in this picture of the world is only an obedient tool for legalizing and inciting the Russian-Ukrainian hatred. Recently its representatives have expressed support to the ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. They have been created for this purpose. As a matter of fact, neither the Bolsheviks, nor the current Ukrainian authorities need the Orthodox Church. Even the OCU, like the Renovationists of the 1920s, is a temporary form needful for worsening the schism. A veteran schismatic, Filaret Denisenko, has a feeling of his “uselessness” now. He has become a spent force having done his evil deed, and I believe that some time or other the same fate awaits the OCU.

Interviewed by Artem Budennyi