Bishop Irinej of Bačka: Silence of the post-Christian West about the persecution against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is really frightening



Some time ago, the Serbian newspaper "Pečat" published a large interview given by Bishop Irinej of Bačka, a hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to a newspaper correspondent. We offer our readers a translation of some of the bishop's answers.

– Your Grace! We are sure that you are following the progress of the situation with the church in Ukraine. How do you assess the current state of affairs and what are your forecasts about the future of Orthodoxy in Ukraine?

– As is known, Orthodoxy in the long-suffering Ukraine is burdened with two large cancerous tumors.

The first is the fanatical anti-Orthodox Uniatism in Western Ukraine, a fruit of the pseudo-ecumenical Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39) and even more of the so-called Union of Brest-Litovsk (1596).

The second is the schismatic parachurch structures.

One of them is headed by ‘Filaret’ Denisenko, who was once considered to be candidate number two for the Moscow Patriarchal throne and remembered about his “Ukraineness” only when he failed to become Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' that naturally included historical Kievan Rus’, i.e. lands that got their current name and current borders only under Lenin. Later, these borders were extended by Crimea, which Khrushchev gave the Republic of Ukraine as a gift (!), although Crimea had always been part of Russia, about which the ‘collective West’, this self-appointed ultimate arbitrator on issues of democracy, ethics and human rights wisely keeps silence.

The other structure is headed by ‘Epiphany’ Dumenko. The attempt to “unite” them ended in failure, despite all efforts undertaken by the then President of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko and his Western allies either directly, by political pressure, or indirectly, through unilateral actions of those Orthodox church circles that believed misinformation about disposition of the canonical Ukrainian bishops, who in fact have remained faithful to the triune integrity of Moscow, Kiev and Minsk.

The “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” was created on the canonical territory of the generally recognized Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but against its will and without its participation, as well as without the Moscow Patriarchate’s consent and with complete disregard for the position of the majority of autocephalous Orthodox Churches. The “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” is burdened with a terrible canonical “mortgage” in the form of its false bishops who were “ordained” by the anathematized Denisenko and by suspicious characters who have neither bishops’ grace nor apostolic succession, and, moreover, are completely alien to the Orthodox Church.

In the light of these facts, the legitimate Ukrainian Church deserves everybody’s esteem and admiration. Having advanced knowledge of what was in store for it, the Church has kept the unwavering loyalty to the canonical order and unity of Orthodoxy, despite the pressure put on it, forcible seizure of churches, and even more visible persecution. As time went on, the persecution by the Kiev authorities was becoming more ruthless and cruel. The Kiev Lavra of the Caves was taken away, monks and students of theology were expelled, respected and dignified bishops were arrested, and so on and so forth. An attempt to ban and abolish the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was the culmination of the persecution and suffering of the Church similar to those it experienced during the most atrocious years of the Soviet power.

Truly speaking, the Soviet authorities have never sunk to such level of insanity and hatred. Yes, they demolished churches and monasteries, while most part of the surviving ones were desecrated and closed (as far as I know, on the eve of World War II there were only two “functioning” churches on the territory of Ukraine - one in Kiev and one in Odessa). Yes, they killed tens and, perhaps, hundreds of

thousands of bishops, priests, monks and laypersons throughout the Soviet Union. Millions were sent to the “islands” of tribulation (read: to the bone-chilling forced labour camps) of the Gulag Archipelago. Yes, the authorities committed these and many other atrocities, but the highest body never made a decision to ban and shut down the Church.

According to Christ, the powers of death shall not prevail against his Church (Mt 16:8) with its conciliar integrity and fullness, and only Christ can remove a lampstand of any Local Church (cf. Rev 2:5; 3:3). However, this has been happening fr om apostolic times to the present day only when members of the Church would not repent of sins, would renounce the true faith and deviate into heresy (cf. Rev 2:14-16), would not live according to the fundamental principles of Christian morality (cf. Rev 2:20), and become lukewarm in their faith (cf. Rev 3:15-18).

Those who in defiance of the gospel truth want to do away with the Church can actually do away with themselves and bury their own state in a grave fr om which it will not be able to rise like a mythical vampire, much less to come to life.

Unfortunately, all the above facts are not the worst in spiritual and moral sense. Truly frightening is the prevailing silence of the post-Christian West, which does not denounce the anti-Christian, or, rather, anti-Christ efforts of modern anti-Russia. Although its ideologists are breaking their hearts over the allegedly threatened rights of the “LGBT population” and other categories of people and animals, including stray dogs, they “take no notice” of the suffering people in Ukraine (whatever that word means!) and are almost oblivious to the suffering of the population in the Middle East, not to mention the suffering of the Serbs, who have been slandered and marginalized by the “international community” of the collective West. But the worst thing is silence or, at best, incoherent blathering of the Christian world, including a substantial part of the Orthodox world.

– To what extent the process of Romanianization of the Moldovan population and attempts to exclude Moldova from the Russian world are linked with Ms Maia Sandu’s revealing statements that the challenging times demand one Church, namely, the Bessarabian diocese of the Romanian Orthodox Church in her view?

The Moldovans themselves declared outright that they want to remain as before. Although they speak a dialect of the Romanian language, they do not want to join Romania. Besides, there are many Russians living in Moldova, as well as representatives of other nationalities, including the Gagauz, a Turkic ethnic group, who profess the Orthodox faith.

The Church in Moldova is in no way disadvantaged or oppressed by its belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate in the status of autonomy. Most bishops and priests are Moldovans, divine services are

celebrated in their language, and nothing impedes development of church life. Besides, Russians and other Slavs use Church Slavonic in churches, and Russian and other languages in everyday life.

The desire to separate the Metropolis of Moldova from the Russian Church is not caused by any problem and far less by actual necessity. On the one hand, it testifies to the expansionist character of the Romanian state and church policies, and to the permanent anti-Russian agenda of the modern West on the other. It is no secret that the present government and political leaders of Moldova are eating out of its hand.

The question comes up: what if on one fine day Bessarabia and Bukovina, that is, modern Moldova, finds itself again, either expressly or by implication, under control of Russia? What if any day now there could appear a leader not “pro-Western,” but East-leaning naturally and for obvious reasons? Finally, what if the Church would be manipulated in any new political and ideological situation? Wh ere is the lim it?

Taking into account the above and other facts, I believe that Ms Maia Sandu should leave the Church in peace and instead of dealing with issues to which she is a stranger, namely, church order, address social, economic and other problems thus fulfilling her official duties. Problems exist in Moldova as in many other countries.

– Why in your opinion those who always criticize the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches are worried about the “Serbian World” and the “Russian World” phrases?

– We have already mentioned the generally known deplorable fact that there are people in the neighboring states, the pseudo-state formations, and also in our homeland whom the adjective “Serbian” bothers and unnerves. The adjective “Russian” also bothers them, mostly when the point at issue is the “Russian World.”

With that said, we could play with the meaning of these words, because the word “world” in the phrase “Russian world” has a double meaning in Russian and echoes the expression “Pax Americana”, or the “American World”, hearing which the mentioned people fall into ecstatic delight. However, the meaning of “Pax Americana” and its practical side is no secret. The point at issue is colonial perception of people who accept any type of hegemony of the United States of America, be it economic, military, or cultural... A large part of the European continent has been taken in by it. And we, who live on the border between West and East, are very sorry to see how the remarkable cultures, which Europe has brought into being and nurtured for centuries are disappearing in the American melting pot. The phenomenon you mentioned and even certain words cause antagonism and hostility. But let us consider the European context as a mitigating circumstance for the favorers of the American hegemony!

I will state my opinion on the term you mentioned. This new “Serbian World» phrase is an important part of the political discourse, but only as a concept. It is alien to church terminology. The Serbian Patriarchate uses the phrase “Serbian spiritual and cultural space,” which is more correct in my view. This space includes all Serbian worlds. We communicate without control and custom duties. The only restriction is the national and individual self-consciousness and aspiration for peace and prosperity of the people.

The expressions “Pax Romana,” the “Russian World,” the “Byzantine World,” “Pax Americana,” and the like are based on geopolitical reality. Yet, it does not apply to the “Orthodox World.” Above all else, this phrase concerns faith and spiritual values, all elements of history, life and experience of Orthodox Christian nations in their conciliar unity and interpenetration and regular dialogue with other religions and cultures. The “Orthodox Universe” “Orthodox World” phrases that have similar meaning to each other are synonyms.

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