Interview with Metropolitan Theodosius of Cherkasy and Kanev for Romfea News Agency

Metropolitan Theodosius of Cherkasy and Kanev (Ukrainian Orthodox Church) gave an exclusive interview to the church news agency Romfea.gr. The conversation took place just days after the Metropolitan was brutally attacked by followers of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" during the seizure of the Archangel Michael Cathedral.

– Your Eminence, first of all, I must ask about your health following the brutal attack by supporters of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine." How are you feeling now?

– Dear Mr. Polygenis, thank you for your question. I am feeling much better now. After suffering a concussion and burns to my eyes and skin, I was bedridden for some time on doctors' orders. But now, thanks to God, I have almost fully recovered. I am grateful to God that I escaped that day with "only" a concussion. According to forensic experts who reviewed the footage of the attack, the blow to my head with a club by a representative of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" was intended to kill me. Only the

thick monastic klobuk I was wearing softened the blow, reducing it to a concussion.

– How did you experience and process these tragic events at the cathedral? How did we come to this point in 2024, where a metropolitan becomes the victim of such brutal violence?

– To be entirely honest with you, Mr. Polygenis, we still haven't fully come to terms with what happened. It still feels unreal that such an event could occur in the modern world, in the 21st century—especially at the hands of people who call themselves Christians. And yet, it did happen. This is not merely a matter of the gross violation of the constitutional rights of our faithful, who are citizens of Ukraine. Nor is it solely about the blatant disregard for the inviolable right to private property. To this day, both the Archangel Michael Cathedral in Cherkasy (the largest Orthodox church in Ukraine) and the diocesan administrative complex, along with all their contents, remain the private property of our diocese as a legal entity, with all the necessary ownership documents. We even hold a state deed for the land on which our church complex stands. But this is not the main issue.

What shocked and horrified us the most was the sheer malice, hatred, and inhumanity with which representatives of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" attacked not only me but also our priests, nuns, and laypeople. With savage cries, members of the OCU broke believers' arms, legs, and ribs, knocked them to the ground, and beat them with their feet, broken church furniture, and even sacred banners. They knocked out priests' teeth, fired traumatic weapons at worshippers inside the church, and used tear gas. All of this was accompanied by obscene language and blasphemous shouts. Security cameras captured it all. These events shocked and horrified not only the residents of Cherkasy but also many people in Ukraine and around the world.

The so-called "clergy" of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" directly participated in this violence as organizers. Their leader in Cherkasy, the OCU "Metropolitan" Ivan Yaremenko, posed for photos in my office immediately after the forced seizure, shamelessly looting my library. He later posted his videos online. Today, Yaremenko "serves" in the seized cathedral, using our clergy's vestments, my personal staffs, dikirion and trikirion, and other church items.

In short, the OCU once again revealed its true face to the world. There is no trace of Christianity or Orthodoxy in their actions.

– What is the current ecclesiastical state in Ukraine?

– The situation is very difficult, Mr. Polygenis. The current government, using its security services and the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine," has launched a full-scale persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

These persecutions are reminiscent of those during the Soviet era. Clergy are beaten and arrested, churches are seized for the benefit of the OCU, and once taken, these churches are often abandoned by worshippers. Believers are frequently harassed at work, and their children are mocked in schools. Some of our churches have even been destroyed (in Kiev, Ivano-Frankovsk, and Lvov), while others face the threat of demolition.

All of this is done with the approval and direct involvement of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine," which acts as a loyal ally of the current government and the primary beneficiary of these persecutions. The situation is almost identical to the events of a century ago, when the "Renovationist Church" supported the Soviet authorities in their efforts to destroy the historical Orthodox Church.

Unfortunately, Mr. Polygenis, this is the reality we are living in Ukraine today. However, the situation varies from region to region—some areas are better, some worse.

– In the end, has there been any benefit from granting autocephaly to the OCU?

– There has been no benefit, only immense harm. The 2019 Tomos brought tears, grief, blood, and suffering to the Church in Ukraine.

With one stroke of the pen, a true monstrosity—bearing little resemblance to Christianity beyond its external forms—was unleashed upon the Orthodox world. This may sound harsh, but after the events in Cherkasy, I feel morally justified in calling things by their proper names. This monstrosity is now attempting to destroy the historical Orthodox Church in our country. It is cruel and ruthless, using every tool of the state apparatus without hesitation.

What is most horrifying, Mr. Polygenis, is that this monstrosity hides behind church vestments and the 2019 Tomos of autocephaly. This is a spiritual infection! Once it has done its work in Ukraine, it will begin to destroy the entire Orthodox family—the global Orthodox system. And this process has already begun. We cannot allow this to happen, as all of us, Orthodox hierarchs worldwide, are responsible before God for the historical fate of the Holy Orthodox Church.

– What would you like to say to the Primates and hierarchs of the Orthodox Churches who have not experienced what you are enduring now in Ukraine?

– Knowing that hundreds of thousands of Orthodox believers around the world, including Primates of Local Orthodox Churches, hierarchs, clergy, monastics, and laity, read the Church News Agency

Romfea.gr, I would like to express my humble opinion with pain regarding the situation currently unfolding in Ukraine and in global Orthodoxy, as well as on possible ways to resolve it.

Addressing His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, I humbly ask His Holiness to accept my words without bitterness or offense. Under no circumstances do I wish to show any disrespect to Your high office and authority in the Orthodox world. I ask that my words be received as Balaam once received the words spoken through the mouth of a simple donkey.

Your Holiness, it is with great sorrow that I must say: you have made a great mistake in Ukraine!

You erred in your decisions, as any human being, even one gifted by God with high office and great experience, can err. The consequences of these mistakes are already being felt today not only by the faithful in Ukraine but also by the entire Orthodox world, which stands on the brink of a schism comparable to the Great Schism of 1054. Ukrainian schismatics should never have been admitted into the Church's fold without repentance and subsequent lawful ordinations. It is absolutely certain that a significant portion of Orthodox hierarchs worldwide will never—neither now nor in the future—accept these individuals and their followers as legitimate bishops. Anyone who thinks otherwise is gravely mistaken!

Another fatal error was the attempt to canonically sever the spiritual body of the Church that traces its roots to the Baptism of Saint Vladimir—the Russian Orthodox Church—by formally "nullifying" a document that has stood for 300 years. Paper is lifeless and soulless; it can bear anything. But the body of the Church is alive, and when it is torn, blood flows.

Now, these very painful problems must somehow be resolved. And it is our generation, Yours and mine, that must address them—we cannot leave this heavy task for our descendants. The longer this painful status quo persists, the more intractable the Gordian knot of Orthodoxy will become.

The epicenter of the pan-Orthodox ecclesiastical conflict is now in Ukraine. Here, not only is there war, but there are also bloody persecutions against the Church. Therefore, this problem cannot be adequately resolved until these tragic events come to an end. Only after the war in Ukraine ends and our Church is freed from state repression will the bishops, clergy, and monastics of Ukraine be able to freely express their opinions and articulate their position on the canonical issues of the Church’s existence in Ukraine.

Today, even a single dissenting word or mention of the spiritual and historical kinship of Ukrainian believers with the Russian Orthodox Church can result not only in the loss of church property but also in the loss of freedom, health, or even life itself. Under such conditions of repression, attempting to resolve

the Church dilemma in Ukraine would be equivalent to looting during wartime—which, in essence, is what is happening now.

I do not rule out that resolving such a complex and painful issue as the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" may require the fraternal opinion of other Local Orthodox Churches—either in the form of a consensus at a meeting of delegations from all universally recognized Local Orthodox Churches or even at a Pan-Orthodox Council, whose regulations must necessarily correspond to the regulations of the Holy Councils of antiquity.

It is fundamentally important that at such a meeting or Council, from the very beginning, the presence of church groups whose apostolic succession is not recognized by even one of the universally recognized Local Orthodox Churches should be excluded. Additionally, all decisions must be made strictly within the framework of the sacred canons and rules of the Holy Orthodox Church and with respect for the historically established territories of the Local Churches.

Under the current unfavorable circumstances, the least painful and most acceptable scenario for ending the canonical discord between Churches could be the temporary suspension by Your Holiness of the Tomos granted to the OCU, as well as a universal moratorium on concelebration and Eucharistic communion of Orthodox clergy with this religious group. This could not only ease tensions between the Local Churches but also help all of us return to Eucharistic communion with one another—a guarantee of peace and unity of mind. In this way, further escalation of the schism in global Orthodoxy could be prevented, and the persecution of Christians in modern Ukraine could at least slow down.

This is within Your power and authority, Your Holiness.

At the same time, the issue of the OCU and everything associated with it could be resolved after the war in Ukraine ends, based on the canonical rules of the Holy Orthodox Church, as mentioned above.

In the context of this interview, I would also like to address Orthodox hierarchs from various countries, first and foremost to thank you for your prayers and words of support that you have expressed to the humble flock of Cherkasy and to me personally following the tragic events of October 17.

There have been many such words of encouragement and consolation from all corners of the Orthodox world.

Any support from you, whether public or in personal correspondence and phone conversations, has been extremely valuable to us! It is through your support that the Lord has allowed me to tangibly feel the conciliarity and universality of our Holy Orthodox Church throughout the world! In turn, I ask you,

holy hierarchs of Christ, on behalf of all the suffering Orthodox people of Ukraine: do not forget to pray for our Church! Here, we do not lose hope that, through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos, our faithful will be able to endure this difficult trial in their lives with dignity.

– In conclusion, Your Eminence, may I ask at what stage the criminal prosecution against you currently stands?

– At the moment, five criminal cases have been initiated against me, and four court proceedings are ongoing in different courts in the cities of Cherkasy and Kiev.

All these persecutions, dear Mr. Polygenis, have been initiated against me for verbally defending the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, including in official interviews on national television channels in Ukraine over the past ten years.

In these courts, the "victims" are practically all "clergy" of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine," who have written and continue to write denunciations against me to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). After the seizures of churches in my diocese, these informers, the "clergy" of the OCU, become the new "owners" of the seized churches. This "mechanism" operates with the help of the security services and local authorities.

I have been under house arrest for about two years, most of which I was under 24-hour house arrest, and now I am under nighttime house arrest. Three times, the SBU tried to take me into custody and place me in a pre-trial detention center, but fortunately, the courts did not allow this, leaving me under house arrest.

At the moment, there is no end in sight to these judicial investigations. But I believe that the Lord allows all this for the benefit of my soul.

Glory to God for all things!

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