



Metropolitan Irinej of Bačka: Division in Ukraine has turned into the Orthodoxy-wide division



*One of the topics raised during **the Christmas interview** that a hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Irinej of Bačka, gave to Pečat news magazine referred to the tragedy of the ecclesiastical schism in Ukraine and the support the schism had received from the Patriarch of Constantinople. Given below is an English translation of the fragment in question.*

– The tragedy of the Ukrainian schism would not have occurred if there had been no uncanonical intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the canonical territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – an autonomous Church within the Moscow Patriarchate. What is the current tragic division leading up to, in your opinion as a hierarch who for decades now has been engaging in inter-church relations within Orthodoxy? What is going on in the Eastern Church? Is there a hope to resolve the contentious issues and restore peace, for, according to Saint Paul, Christ Himself is our Peace?

– You are absolutely right to acknowledge the tragedy of the Ukrainian ecclesiastical schism and, I would also add, the sufferings of the canonical Orthodox Church and the people of Ukraine. Ah, if only it had not happened! The tragic division in Ukraine, regrettably, very quickly turned into the Orthodoxy-wide division – a two-fold one at that.

On the one hand, there is a division between those Local Orthodox Churches that see no canonical legitimacy whatsoever in the Ukrainian schismatics led by the pseudo-metropolitan Mister Dumenko and those few Local Churches that recognize their legitimacy, albeit for the most part unwillingly and under pressure and only by the decision of their Primate, not their Bishops' Councils.

On the other hand, a division is beginning to show itself within the latter group. Somewhere sharper, somewhere milder, this division has affected this time, as opposed to the distant and recent past, even the Holy Mount Athos – the centuries-old stronghold of Orthodoxy.

Those responsible for the division, who in defiance of the Councils and the canons encroached, unbidden, on the canonical space of another autocephalous Church and “divided the raiment of Christ,” as if unaware of the words of St. John Chrysostom and other great confessors of Orthodoxy – or, most likely, aware but unconcerned – that the sin of schism cannot be washed away and atoned for even by the blood of martyrdom – the blood that those responsible for the schism would shed for the sake of Christ.

There is always hope that this problem – the biggest one in the history of the Church since the Great Schism of the 11th century between the Churches of the East and the West – will be resolved and peace and unity will be restored among the Local Orthodox Churches, because Christ Himself is the Prince of Peace and *our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished... the enmity... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity* (Eph 2:14-16).

In this regard, allow me to reiterate my position which I expressed during one of our first Christmas interviews for Pečat.

I believe that if His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch made a statement on behalf of the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople that the leaders of the Ukrainian schism and senior representatives of the Ukrainian authorities had misled him, or rather blatantly deceived him by claiming that everyone or almost everyone in Ukraine, from the canonical Metropolitan Onuphry and to Misters Denisenko (self-proclaimed “Patriarch Filaret of Kyiv”), Dumenko (self-proclaimed “Metropolitan Epifaniy”) and Maletich (self-proclaimed “Metropolitan Makariy”) could hardly wait for the “unification council” in Kyiv and the

establishment of the “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” (OCU) – this ecclesiomorphous “centaur” or “tragelaph” (myphical creature, half-goat, half-stag) – and if he then abolished this structure cemented by force, thus ensuring the re-establishment of the ecclesiastical *status quo ante* and the resolution of the problem by means of the dialogue of the still unrepentant Ukrainian schismatics and their “patrons” with the Russian Orthodox Church, that is, with the canonical Church in Ukraine, as well as the dialogue on the pan-Orthodox level, that would not only prevent a new schism, worse than the one that already exists between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, but would also help the Patriarchate of Constantinople regain its reputation and trust and would show Patriarch Bartholomew to the court of history as a great and wise Patriarch.

Further persistence in maintaining the current canonical disorder would have, I am sure, unpredictable catastrophic consequences – a long-lasting schism and perhaps even a new millennium of schism, this time not between the Christian East and the Christian West, but within the Orthodox East. This schism would be irredeemably detrimental to the mission and witness of Orthodoxy in the world and would give rise to a great ecclesiastical heresy. God save us from that! In order to avoid such a scenario, we ought to pray much and with zeal, sparing no effort.