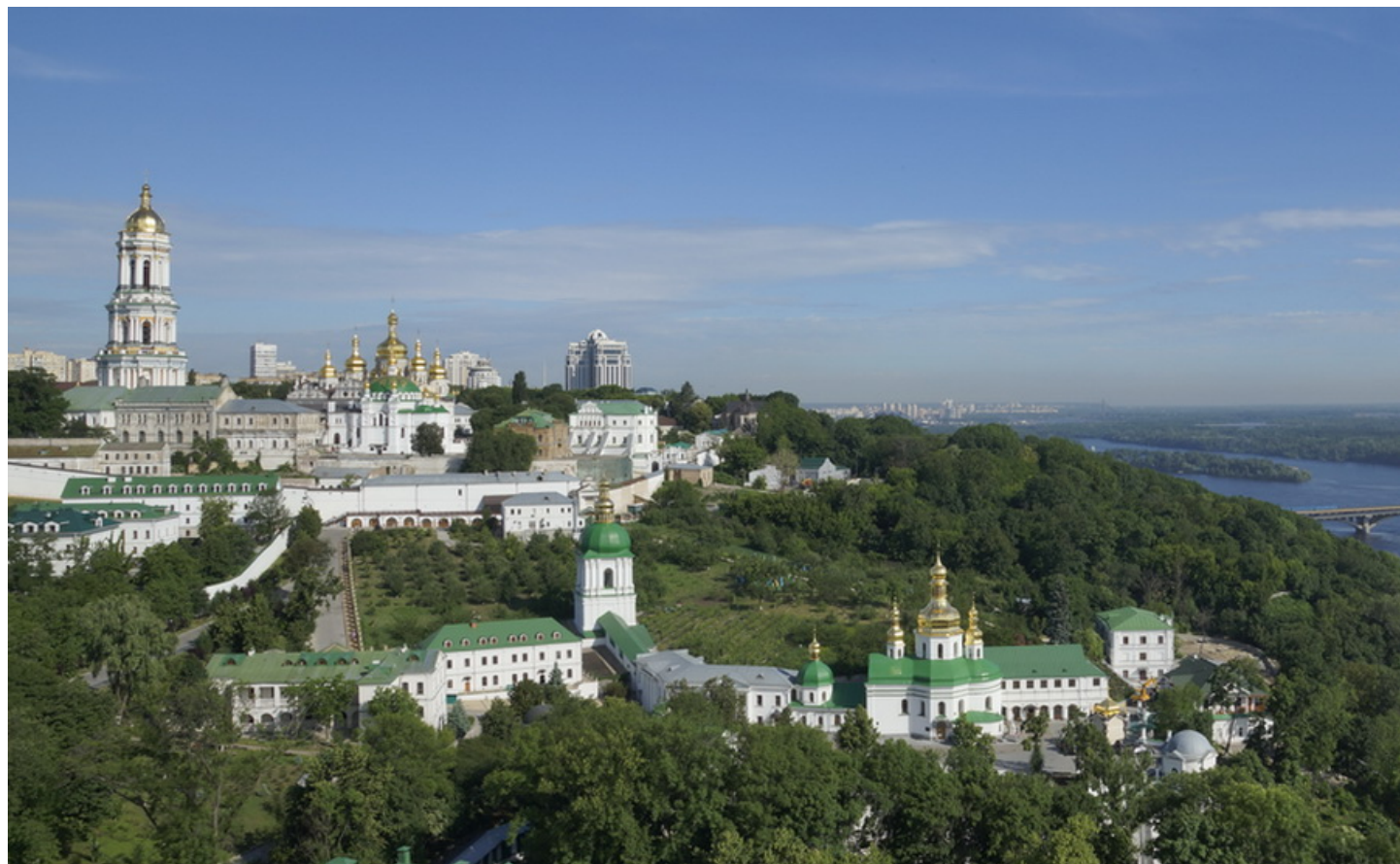




The world should not shut eyes to the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine, a hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia believes



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On March 18, 2023, Bishop Irenei of London and Western Europe, a hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, made an appeal to his flock and all the not indifferent persons in connection with 'the tragedy of the most extraordinary and heartless persecution of Christians taking place in many parts of Ukraine.

'While such persecution has been a reality already for many years, it has reached a pitch in recent days with new injustices being enacted in flagrant violation of Ukrainian law and international conventions on human rights', the archpastor stated.

'The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, headed by the pious Metropolitan Onuphry and his brotherhood of faithful hierarchs and clergy, strive for nothing but to worship God in peace and care for all the people of

their homeland with open hearts and a simple, powerful faith. Yet in response to their apolitical love, they are receiving the most vicious attacks. Attempts by outside entities to politicise church life by falsely linking the autonomous Ukrainian Church — which is independent and not under the thumb of any foreign entities — to political, military or state powers abroad is as false as it is malicious; attempts to set up a 'Ukrainian' false Church, under the influence of a patriarchate in Turkey and flagrantly political in orientation, is deceptive and a wound to Christ and His flock'.

His Grace Irenei recalls that 'In the current days, even the peace-loving monks of the Dormition Lavra in Kiev are being threatened with eviction: having already been evicted from one part of the monastery just before the Nativity of Christ, the monks are now threatened with complete expulsion from the monastery grounds by the end of the present month. The incorrupt relics of the saints kept in the monastery — most of whom laboured and toiled spiritually in Ukraine — are being referred to by Government officers as 'museum exhibitions'. Schismatic false-Orthodox individuals are being brought in to desecrate Holy Altars with profane, non-Orthodox rites in mockery of the Church. Priests are being evicted from nearby parish churches. Peace-loving leaders of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are being groundlessly, illegally sanctioned. Hierarchs are being intimidated with deprivation of citizenship and deportation, seminarians with eviction from their schools and academies, and the faithful with the stripping away of their canonical Church life'.

Having compared the ongoing events with the persecution of believers by the atheistic Soviet State in the 20th century, the archpastor called all to remember: 'It was the fiercest persecution against Christians the world has ever witnessed, producing more martyrs for Christ in the twentieth century than in nearly the whole of Christian history before it. Shall the world stand by now, silently, as the same begins again in the twenty-first?

The hierarch said, 'The monks of the Lavra are not politicians, they are not enemies of any state or any people; they are humble individuals who have chosen a life of self-renunciation in following God, preserving the spiritual heritage of a site that has been sacred to Ukrainian Orthodox Christians — and to Orthodox Christians all over the world'.

Bishop Irenei called upon all those with any means of acting, to act in support of those being so unjustly persecuted before the eyes of the whole world. 'Speak to your political representatives, and make them aware of what is taking place and the need to put an end to it. Telephone your members of parliament, senators and congressmen; speak in contexts where you yourselves can raise the awareness of such matters. Appeal to all and to any who will hear, that peace must reign, freedom of religion must be protected, and the propagandist use of a tragic war to justify additional tragedies cannot be tolerated!'

The archpastor appealed to all pious Christians to pray. 'Pray to our Almighty God that He will work a

miracle amongst His pious flock in Ukraine. Pray that He will strengthen Metropolitan Onuphry and all the leaders of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Pray that He will comfort the suffering faithful. Pray that they will feel the support of our love and the openness of our hearts to be united to them in their suffering,'

His Grace Irenei instructed every parish to serve a moleben with the Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God — to whose dormition the Kiev Lavra is dedicated - lifting up at its end the prayer for the end of civil strife in the Ukrainian lands. And on Wednesday 29th March, the day on which the Ukrainian state has said it will enforce its eviction of the monks from the Lavra every parish is to serve a moleben to all the saints of the Kiev-Caves Lavra, with the prayer offered on bended knee.

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