

**The Council of Bishops appealed
to the faithful of the UOC
in regards to the information
about the possibility of
“granting a Tomos of Autocephaly
of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.”**

Friday, 25.05.2018 15:45

On May 25th 2018 in the residence of the Primate of the UOC on the territory of the Holy-Dormition Kyiv Caves Lavra a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox church was held during which an Appeal to the episcopate, clergy, monastics and faithful was approved in the matter of the initiative regarding “the bestowal of a Tomos of autocephaly upon the Orthodox Church in Ukraine” (Journal 7). The department of information and education of the UOC publishes the text of the document.

With the blessing of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Onuphrij the text of this Appeal will be proclaimed in all temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

APPEAL

**Of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church
To the episcopate, clergy, monastics and faithful regarding the initiative to
“grant a Tomos of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine”**

*Your Eminences and Graces!
Dear Fathers, monks and nuns, brothers and sisters!*

Over the last weeks the possibility of unilateral granting of a “Tomos of Autocephaly for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine” has been actively discussed. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church even until today has not received from the Patriarchate of Constantinople any official announcements regarding this question. Along with this, we are aware that the Local Orthodox Churches of the world have not received from Constantinople letters which address this question.

At the request of the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Onuphrij of Kyiv and all Ukraine appealed to them with letters, in which he informed them of the ongoing situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and also expressed the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the initiative of granting a “Tomos of autocephaly.” And today it is evident that the Primates and Councils of Bishops of the Local Orthodox Churches express a cautious and negative attitude towards the bestowal of the aforementioned Tomos as a means of conquering the schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. It is especially important that among the Local Orthodox Churches the common thought is that the return of schismatic church groups to the bosom of the canonical Church is necessary to permit the discussion of the question of the status of the one canonical Church.

This position of the Local Orthodox Churches concurs with the position of our Church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the inception of the schism consistently spoke in favour of the renewal of Church unity. Our deep conviction, however, is that the path to the renewal of Church unity and to possible autocephalous status should not be through the legalization of the schism and its substitution for the Church of Christ. We stress that in the declaration of the Jubilee Council of the UOC which took place at the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra on the 8th of July 2011, it was emphasized that “. . . the renewal of the unity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy must take place in accordance with the canons of the Orthodox Church, without the interference of political powers and through the return of those who departed into the bosom of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church” (point 11).

The most important criterion in the approval of all church decisions is the benefit of the Church, and the method of reception of such decisions must be based upon the conciliar discussion of all questions which are important and relate to the individual Local Orthodox Church as well as to all of world Orthodoxy. Any individual or unilateral actions in the Church environment is a violation of the principle of conciliarity and threatens the unity of the Church.

In the recent history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine it is possible to draw the conclusion that the violation of the principle of conciliarity, the absence of a sense of the pulse of the true, interior life of the Church, as well as the interference of political and other non-church powers in the interior matters of the Church truly contributed to the emergence of the schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The discussion about the bestowal of autocephalous status on the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been going on for already almost the past 100 years. But during this entire time none of the initiatives in this direction satisfactorily possessed the spirit of conciliarity and adherence to church regulations, which led to the self-proclaimed creation of non-canonical structures: first the “Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church,” and in time, the “Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyivan Patriarchate.”

In this way, historical experience shows that the absence of canonical sensibility and obedience to the Church, the absence of conciliar discussion of important church questions, the lack of patience and mutual understanding, pride, as well as the interference of political figures in church matters – all of this leads not to church unity, but only to schism. And so this is a mistaken path which the Church of Christ should not follow.

The history of the Church witnesses to the fact that these attempts at unity which proceed “from above” were often not accepted by the churchly people, insofar as they had political motives and did not take into account the particularities of internal Church life. Following such “unifications” resulting from the active participation of state powers the temples emptied out, because the churchly people felt the artificiality of such “unifications.” Interference in this process by powers outside the Church can further divide our people, and instead of the unity desired by us all we might achieve an even deeper schism.

Autocephalous status has an exclusive technical ecclesial character, which is based upon the furtherance of the Gospel teaching on the territory of a specific country, and cannot be an instrument in a geopolitical war. Together with this, autocephalous status is given to the entire church within the borders of a particular territory. In conjunction with this it is necessary to recognize, that the appearance of another parallel jurisdiction in Ukraine can give birth to a new conflict within our nation that will not only threaten the security of the state, but brings into question the matter of the future unity of the Church in Ukraine. Our people could be divided for a long time, if not forever.

The resolution of this situation we see in the renewal of Church unity in Ukraine, and not in the solidification of the church schism through the path of a parallel Church jurisdiction. We share the concern of the state government of Ukraine with the reality of the Church schism in our country. In this we believe that different conditions are required for the successful overcoming of this problem, especially peace and stability in our Country. We have always supported and will continue to support our State in questions of morality and patriotic formation, but reject the exploitation of the Church in geopolitical war. We express our openness and readiness to any and all constructive cooperation and dialogue with the goal of attaining Church unity.

Dear bishops, fathers, monks and nuns, brothers and sisters,

Faithful children of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church!

We call upon all of you to remember, that we are all members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). We are all different, but belong to the one family of Christ – the Holy Church. We are all responsible for the unity of the Church, and we must protect and stand up for this unity. We cannot forget, that the Church is founded not by people, but by God. The cornerstone of all ecclesial being is our Lord and God Jesus Christ. The mission of the Church of Christ is concentrated in the preaching of Christ’s Gospel, the completion of the grace-filled transfiguration of the world through the Holy Mysteries, teaching people to live worthily according to the commandments of God. It is because of this that the Church of Christ lives according to its regulations, which cannot be changed depending upon the changing political situation. The only path towards the renewal of church unity lies in the termination of any external interference in church matters and permitting the Holy Church the opportunity to independently, with God’s help, heal the wound of separation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

Every generation of Orthodox Christians are responsible for preserving the purity of their faith and maintaining ecclesial canonical order. This responsibility rests upon all of us today – upon the archpastors, pastors, monastics, and upon the entire faithful people of the Church.

We call all of you, dear bishops, fathers, venerable monastics, brothers and sisters, to “unity of spirit in a bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), to the preservation and cultivation of church unity. We are members of Christ’s Church and will always remain in her bosom.

May the Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and unity in the Holy Spirit be with all of us.
(cf. 2 Cor. 13:13)!

In the name of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,

**+ONUPHRIJ,
METROPOLITAN OF KYIV AND ALL UKRAINE,
PRIMATE OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

25 May 2018

Kyiv

Translation by Fr. Bohdan Hladio