

Albanian Church publishes full text of letters to Pat. Kirill, opposes Russian Church's break in communion with Constantinople



The site of the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) published a news article on His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës, and All Albania's letter to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of October 10 in which His Beatitude expressed his concern that the implementation of the Ukrainian autocephaly project by the Patriarchate of Constantinople "will become a walk through a minefield"—a concern which he also personally expressed to hierarchs of Constantinople and later to Patriarch Bartholomew himself.

Following the Russian Church's report, the [Albanian Church](#) has published the full text of two letters of Abp. Anastasios to Pat. Kirill, the first from [October 10](#), which was previously reported on, and a second from [November 7](#), which show that while Abp. Anastasios is gravely concerned about Constantinople's actions in Ukraine, he also does not support the Russian Church's decisions to first [cease commemorating Pat. Bartholomew](#)

and later to fully [break communion](#) with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In the October 10 letter, noting the Albanian Church's stance that the most important achievements in Orthodoxy in the last decades have been the Synaxes of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, culminating in the Council of Crete in 2016, Abp. Anastasios stresses the great value of Orthodox unity:

The Orthodox Church of Albania accords primary importance to the unity of Orthodoxy and the dynamic witness of the Gospel, both among the traditional Orthodox people and the entire oikumene. All other issues should be faced with insightful discretion, constant prayer, and patient dialogue.

Given this emphasis on unity, the Albanian primate also expressed his displeasure at the Russian Church's September 14 decision to cease commemorating Pat. Bartholomew in the Divine services:

Please allow me to note that the recent decision of the Church of Russia to discontinue the liturgical reference to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to interrupt the eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was announced on the 14th of September, has dangerously complicated the whole matter. Particularly because it touches the core of Orthodox Unity, the Holy Eucharist, during which we proclaim the unity of the Orthodox Church and we pray for its preservation.

His Beatitude also notes that the Albanian Church always prays for unity but has reservations about "whether in this period raising our voice is of priority," because they "consider preferable an insistent, discretionary request to avoid hasty actions."

He also goes on to note that the Russian Church's cessation of commemoration of Constantinople made the convening of a pan-Orthodox council on the matter more complicated: "Who will take the initiative to convene the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, when there exists the discontinuation of the liturgical reference to the Ecumenical Patriarch?"

Given this difficulty, His Beatitude suggests instead a "calm dialogue among the parties directly concerned and search for a common solution." At the same time, the Albanian Church is ready to participate in such a dialogue, if called upon.

His Beatitude also assures that he “will do everything possible, in order to avert a schism within Ecumenical Orthodoxy,” because “Any form of schism weakens the Orthodox witness in the contemporary oikumene, hurts the credibility of the Orthodox Church, and generally traumatises the prestige of the Christian world.”

This first letter was dated just one day before the Holy Synod of Constantinople [announced its decisions](#) to rehabilitate the leaders and laity of the Ukrainian schismatics and to rescind the 1686 document whereby the Kiev Metropolia was transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church, thereby, in its view, canceling the presence of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.

His Beatitude’s second letter comes after Constantinople’s decisions and after the Russian Church’s decision to sever eucharistic communion with Constantinople.

He opens his second letter: “‘My soul is sorrowful’. A deep pain, worry and embarrassment engulf us too, as we follow the developments in the Ukrainian issue, after the decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (11.10.2018) and of the Orthodox Church in Russia (15.10.2018).”

He continues: “Unfortunately, they corroborate the fears we had expressed to the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (30th of June 2018), namely that the current planned granting of autocephaly to Ukraine will be a ‘march in a minefield’ with painful repercussions for all.”

At the same time, Abp. Anastasios also writes strongly against the Russian Church’s decision to break communion with Constantinople:

At the same time, however, we ought to remark that the latest decision of the Church of Russia is also a source of great concern. It is unthinkable that the Divine Eucharist, the mystery par excellence of the infinite love and the utter humiliation of Christ, could be used as a weapon against another Church. Is it possible that the decision and Hierarchy of the Church of Russia may cancel the energy of the Holy Spirit in the holy Orthodox churches that operate under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate? ... And if [the faithful Russian Orthodox come forth “with the fear of God, faith, and love” to partake of the Sacred Gifts [in churches under Constantinople—OC], is it possible that they commit “a sin”, which they should confess?

“We proclaim that it is impossible for us to agree to such decisions,” His Beatitude states categorically.

“It is imperative that the Holy Eucharist, this mystery of unfathomable sacredness and unique importance, remains far removed from all ecclesiastical disagreements,” he explains.

His Beatitude goes on to reiterate the great danger that a schism poses for the Orthodox world, and especially for the faithful in Ukraine, “who are of immediate concern.”

He then reiterates the Albanian Church’s position of readiness to participate in a pan-Orthodox council on the matter, but also his conviction that the break in communion makes convening such a council extremely difficult.

“The following questions remain crucial: Will the Orthodox Church of Russia ask the Ecumenical Patriarchate to convene a Pan-Orthodox Synaxis? What will be the criteria of a final decision in favour of peace and unity?” His Beatitude writes.

And His Beatitude ends with a pertinent quote from Scripture: “The worry and embarrassment, which we initially formulated, are, healed in a paracletic way by the psaltic verse: ‘Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God’ (Ps. 42:11).”