

Synod of Bishops of Russian Church Outside of Russia: Patriarchate of Constantinople violates the principle of collegiality which has guided the Church since Apostolic times



A new threat to the Church of Christ – this is how the situation caused by the Patriarchate of Constantinople’s claims to global jurisdiction has been described in the Russian Church Outside of Russia. “The Patriarch of Constantinople and his supporters now reject the commonly-accepted concept held by the Orthodox Church of its status with regard to relations to other Local Churches as ‘first among equals,’ attempting to demonstrate that his position must be seen as ‘first without equals.’ Based on this erroneous and anti-canonical concept, the Patriarch of Constantinople deems it possible to intervene in the internal life of any of the Local Orthodox Churches, violating the principle of sobornost’[collegiality] which has guided the Church since Apostolic times”, reads the Epistle of the ROCOR Synod addressed to the clergy and flock on the occasion of the Day of the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God, a shrine of the Russian diaspora.

The Synod members noted with regret that the present claims of the Patriarch of Constantinople on the territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are not the first

example of the violation by Constantinople of the unity and sobornost of the Orthodox Church. As early as 1923, the Constantinople Patriarchate unilaterally rent asunder the unity of Orthodox Christians with the introduction of the so-called 'new calendar,' which upset joint prayer and the liturgical life of the Church.

The Russian Church Abroad especially acutely grieves over the events in Ukraine also because among the outstanding hierarchs of the ROCOR there were many who were closely bound with the Ukrainian land. The bishops stated that 'grieving profoundly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and her much-suffering people, we cannot help but remember the words of the Apostle: Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it (1 Cor. 12:26)'.

'Considering the sorrowful events connected with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which have taken place with the aid of the powers of this world, the Synod of Bishops declares its full support for His Beatitude Metropolitan Onouphry of Kiev and All Ukraine, the archpastors, pastors and flock of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and expresses its agreement with all the decisions of her Council of Bishops of November of this year. Praying fervently before the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God, we fraternally join ourselves to the collegial prayers of the canonical Church of Ukraine for her Primate, who this year humbly marks the 28th anniversary of his archpastoral service, earnestly wishing His Beatitude firm health, boldness of spirit and the all-powerful aid of God'.

The message also states that the faithful of the Russian Church Abroad are disturbed by the continued fratricidal war in which Orthodox Christians are dying on both sides of the conflict dividing Ukraine. Also, military actions continue in Syria and other parts of the world, and the news is replete with reports of terrible natural disasters, fires, hurricanes, floods and earthquakes with thousands of lives lost and many left homeless. 'We must combine our fervent prayers for all the dead, the victims and their relatives with assistance to our neighbors to the best of our ability', the archpastors of the Russian Church Abroad remind us, "Let us remember that the Lord warned us about how we must regard calamities that befall us, saying: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27). For 'God is with us!' And if a person not only believes in God but trusts the Right Hand of the Almighty, and in His guidance, then he will always be at peace".

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