

Czech hierarch: What is happening in Ukraine is unbelievable



The way that the authorities in Ukraine use the Church for political purposes and to cover their own sins is unbelievable, His Eminence Archbishop Juraj of Michalovce and Košice of Slovakia commented in an interview with the Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church yesterday.

Abp. Juraj began the day yesterday celebrating the Divine Liturgy with the Ukrainian hierarchs His Grace Bishop Viktor of Baryshevka and His Grace Bishop Dionysiy of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky in the Far Caves at the Kiev Caves Lavra. He also met with His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kiev and All Ukraine, conveying words of support from His Beatitude Metropolitan Rostislav, the primate of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and discussing the current state of Orthodoxy in the modern world after his interview.

The Czech hierarch notes that he is in Ukraine not on official business but as a pilgrim, to pray and support the Ukrainian episcopate and faithful and to find

common consolation in the common chalice at the Divine Liturgy.

“It is unbelievable that in 21st-century Europe—and Ukraine is part of Europe—such things can happen!” the Czech hierarch said in his interview.

“You know what the worst part is? When the authorities try to use Church terminology to cover up their greed and to acquire some sacred status before the people. I have one question: Do we need this religious conflict in Ukraine now, or are there other problems before Ukraine that are important to resolve?” Abp. Jaraj asked rhetorically.

“Again, I repeat: What is happening here, in the 21st century, is unbelievable! It should not be! It’s not ‘freedom’ and it’s not ‘democracy,’” he said, contradicting President Poroshenko’s claims that Ukraine is moving towards Europe.

Abp. Jaraj also stressed that the issue of Ukrainian autocephaly should be resolved without the intervention of state structures, and only by pan-Orthodox consensus. In this regard, the position of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia remains unchanged. As the archbishop explained, the Holy Synod stated in June that the issue of Ukrainian autocephaly should be resolved by pan-Orthodox consensus in accordance with the sacred canons, without the intervention of the state.

Met. Rostislav also warned against the interference of politicians in Church affairs in a meeting in May with former Ukrainian Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, when he told them that “any participation of state officials in Church matters is unacceptable in a democratic society.”

“Everything concerning the Church issue in Ukraine, including whether any 300-year-old Church decisions can be canceled, the question of transferring Church properties, and so on, should be decided at a synaxis of the heads and representatives of all the Local Orthodox Churches,” the hierarch believes, “because I am certain that there is no Local Church that is, in simple terms, a ‘super Church,’ having authority over the others.”

“Therefore, it’s very, very important that such a pan-Orthodox synaxis be gathered,” Abp. Jaraj said.

He also points to the ecclesiological issue and nationalism that underpin the entire Ukrainian crisis: “It makes us all think. Perhaps we need to pay attention to problems of ecclesiology, to the understanding of what the Church is and what the Church is not? Perhaps we’re fixated on the question of nationalism? Perhaps we preach the state and nation but we don’t preach Christ? Then we have a huge

problem...”

Abp. Juraj also assured Met. Onuphry and the Ukrainian people of his love, support, and deep respect for them and their martyric faith.

In a previous interview in August, the Czech hierarch explained that the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia maintains that the agreed-upon procedure for granting autocephaly—that a petition must be submitted through the Mother Church—must be followed.

“Was there a petition for autocephaly from His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry and the episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church through the Moscow Patriarchate to the Patriarch of Constantinople? There was not. As far as I know, a petition was submitted only from the politicians and non-Orthodox Christians of Ukraine,” Abp. Juraj explained.

“Never in the history of the Church has autocephaly been granted to schismatic groups without the petition of the canonical Church,” he added.

The procedure for granting autocephaly was agreed upon by an Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission in 1993. The Patriarchate of Constantinople itself used to accept this procedure, until it resolved in April to create and grant autocephaly to a new Ukrainian church. Patriarch Bartholomew himself acknowledged in late November when speaking before the Romanian Holy Synod that Constantinople had abandoned this agreed-upon procedure.