

07/07/2023

ALBANIAN CHURCH PROTESTS CONSTANTINOPLE'S CHOICE OF BISHOP FOR ALBANIANS IN AMERICA



The Albanian Orthodox Church is shocked and disappointed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople's choice for bishop for its Albanian Diocese of America.

Late last month, it was reported that Archimandrite Theophan (Koja), a native Albanian, formerly a priest of the Orthodox Church in America's Romanian Episcopate, was elected by the Constantinople Holy Synod to replace Metropolitan Ilia (Katre), reposed in the Lord in October.

However, according to the Albanian Church, Fr. Theophan is a "divisive" person, whom the Holy Synod of the OCA refused to consecrate as a bishop.

The statement from the Secretariat of the Albanian Church's Holy Synod reads:

Archimandrite Theophan (Arjan) Koja, known to the Orthodox of Albania as a leader of divisive actions, was born in Tirana in 1966. He attended for a while the seminary in Durrës and then went to Romania, where he was ordained a deacon and later a priest. Returning to the country, at the head of a group of ultra-nationalists, on October 8th, 1995, he expelled the celebrants of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy from the Holy Church of the Panagia in the Castle, in the old town of Elbasan. There he installed Nikolla Marku, "ordained" by a schismatic Bishop of the Church of Skopje, under the name "Independent National Albanian Orthodox Church of Saint Maria Elbasan" (Kisha Ortodokse e pavarur Kombetare shqiptare Shen Maria Elbasan). (For an account of this painful divisive action see the journal Ngjallja - November 1995).

Thereafter, his accomplice Nikolla Marku, has not ceased publicly calling the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania as Greek. Using purely nationalist and political terminology, Nikolla Marku continues to occupy the historic Orthodox Church of Elbasan to this day. (See more than 15 related responses in the Ngjallja journal e.g. November 2015, February 2016, April 2016, November 2018).

After his failure, Archimandrite Theophan settled in the USA, where he joined the Romanian Church. He never sought forgiveness for his disruptive actions in the early years of the restoration of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. Three years ago, he moved to Boston and sought to become Bishop in succession to Metropolitan Nikon (Liolin). However, the leadership of the O.C.A. avoided his election, when they received reliable information of his subversive actions.

Recently he sought to join the Greek Orthodox Church of America. Archbishop Elpidophoros promised him elevation to the Episcopate, and with a rapid procedure, according to the official press release, he was elected Bishop of Philomelion "serving the pastoral needs of the Albanian Orthodox Diocese under the jurisdiction of the Mother Church of Constantinople".

Surprise and bewilderment are widespread among the Orthodox of Albania regarding this unexpected development due to the insistence of the Archbishop of America, Elpidophoros. We confine ourselves to the necessary reminder of the divisive problems provoked by Archimandrite Theophan during the reconstruction from the ruins of the longsuffering Church of Albania.

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