

Your Holiness Most Divine Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch, Most Beloved and Dearest Brother in Christ God and Co-celebrant of our Humbleness in Christ our God, B a r t h o l o m e w, kissing Your Most Divine All-Holiness we address You in a most amiable manner.

May “the revealed Christ our God, Who illumined the world”, shine brightly on the thoughts, decisions, and energies of all Orthodox during the New Year, guiding the Church, “which He has succoured through His own blood”, in ways of peace.

Having convened the Holy Synod on the 4th of January, 2019, we read thoroughly the letter of the 24th of December, 2018, that Your Most Divine All-Holiness sent to us, and we discussed the subject of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. With sincere respect and loving candour, as always, we summarise the assessment of the Church of Albania, regarding primarily the energies of the Holy Spirit.

Our critique that we expressed to the Church of Russia is already known, vis à vis the refusal of the Church of Russia to participate in the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church in Crete. Furthermore, we have recently expressed our criticism to the Church of Russia for Her hasty breaking of Eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Specifically, in our letter (of the 7th of November, 2018) to His Beatitude Kirill the Patriarch of Moscow, we note among others “...Is it possible that the decision and order of the 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? ... We proclaim that it is impossible for us to agree to such decisions. It is imperative that the Holy Eucharist, this mystery of unfathomable sacredness and unique importance, remains far removed from all ecclesiastical disagreements”.

This same pain and agony for the preservation of the unity of the Orthodox Church forces us to express a fundamental doubt, about the potentiality of the ex post facto confirmation of ordinations, performed by an

ex-communicated, defrocked, and anathematised person. The behaviour of said person, who has committed the above acts, Mr. Filaret Denisenko (the protagonist of the ecclesiastical crisis in the Ukraine) is revealing. He was ordained Bishop of the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1962, was, among other functions, President of the Section of External Affairs of the same Patriarchate, and Metropolitan of Kiev. In 1991 he requested the status of Autocephalous Church, not from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but from his then “Mother Church”, the Patriarchate of Moscow. In 1992 he was defrocked and in 1997 he was apherised and anathematised by the Church of Russia, an organic member of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; actions which were recognised by all of the other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

During the time that Mr. Filaret was deposed and anathematized, he uncanonically performed services, which did not constitute valid sacraments. Therefore, the ordinations performed at the time that he was deposed and anathematized, are invalid, void, devoid of any divine grace and the energy of the Holy Spirit. Among these are included the ordinations to deacon, presbyter, and finally bishop of his then secretary Sergei Dumenko, currently Metropolitan Epiphanius. In Your letter of the 24th of December, 2018, it is noted: “... having restored those to the relevant hierarchal and presbyterial ranks...” We wonder, however, to what extent the ordinations by Mr. Filaret, while he was apherised and anathematized, acquired ex post facto, without a canonical ordination, holy-spiritual validity and a genuine stamp of apostolic succession.

Throughout the Orthodox Church, it is recognized as a fundamental ecclesiological principle that the ordinations by schismatics and heretics, as “sacraments” performed outside the Church, are invalid; all the more so, ordinations performed by a person who has been deposed and apherized. We are convinced that this foundational principle, inextricably bound to the Orthodox teaching regarding the Holy Spirit, and which constitutes the unshakable foundation of the apostolic succession of Orthodox Bishops, cannot be overlooked.

We find great difficulty comprehending that things invalid and non-existent become “in economy” Holy Spirit-bearing; that actions constituting repeated blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (as the invocation by the apherized Mr. Filaret “the Holy Grace . . . proclaims. . . let us pray for him, so that Holy Grace may come upon him, the Grace of the Holy Spirit”) are

recognised ex post facto “in economy”. It is finally well-known that during the recent Uniting Council the choice and election of the new Primate of the Church of Ukraine was the result of the insistence of Mr. Filaret, who is officially today called “Supreme Honorary Patriarch of Kiev and All Rus-Ukraine”. Following all of the above, we wonder about the addition of the name of Metropolitan Epiphanius in the Divine Diptychs.

The sought-after pacification among Orthodox Ukrainians, who have suffered various persecutions by atheist regimes in the past, has not been achieved till now. In view of the fact that millions of Orthodox faithful, under Metropolitan Onufry (according to the statistics of January 2018, organised in 12.069 parishes under 90 Hierarchs with 12.283 clergy, 251 Monasteries, and 4.412 monks) refused to participate in the administrative procedure towards Autocephaly, moreover, they broke the Eucharistic communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In contrast, the ecclesiastical congregations of the Orthodox countries to whom the status of autocephaly was previously granted (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, Albania, and the Czech Lands and Slovakia) were united.

We regret that the misgivings, which we expressed to the tripartite representation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (July 2018) as well as during our personal meetings in Crete (October 2018), were substantiated: Instead of a pacification and unification of the faithful of Ukraine, we are confronted with the risk of breaking the worldwide unity of Orthodoxy.

The forecasts, that the present upheaval and the visible division will not last long and that all of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches will finally accept what has happened, can only be considered as a baseless assessment for those that have even an elementary knowledge of the history of ecclesiastical schisms and the perseverance of religious fanaticism. But also the ‘reassuring’ assumption of some, that such acceptance may take place... perhaps next century, are rather cynical. Serious wounds, left unattended are not healed by the passing of time. Rather, they deepen and develop into incurable wounds.

The situation that has taken shape calls for a new approach and inspired initiatives for the promotion of peace in Ukraine and above all for the safeguarding of the dangerously wounded unity of the Orthodox Church. We firmly believe that towards this direction a solution should be sought after by taking refuge Conciliarity (Synodicality) inspired by the Holy Spirit, as

emphasized in Crete: “The Orthodox Church expresses her unity and catholicity "in Council". Conciliarity pervades her organization, the way decisions are taken and determines her path”. (Message of the Holy and Great Synod par. 1).

We shall never cease to believe that the achievements of singular value of Orthodoxy in the last decades have been the Pan-Orthodox Synaxes of Primates and the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, achieved through the tireless effort of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and personally of Your Most Divine All-Holiness. Adhering to the synodical spirit of the Holy and Great Synod, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania extends a warm entreaty: That the Ecumenical Patriarchate, utilising Her exceptional privilege of coordinating the local Orthodox Churches, may call together post-haste a Pan-Orthodox Gathering or Synod to avert the obvious danger of a painful Schism, endangering the credibility of Orthodoxy and its persuasive witness to the modern world.

We wish de profundis and pray humbly, that the Triune God may guide our steps to secure all our moves to ensure the unity of the Orthodox Church. “May the God of hope fill you [and us] with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you [and we] may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13).

Kissing You with a holy kiss, we remain with every esteem and a most profound love in Christ, the Revealed God, Illuminating the World.

In Tirana, 14th January, 2019

To Your Divine All-Holiness,
Least in the Lord Brother,
(signature)
† *Anastasios of Tirana, Chairman*