

The Role of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Christian Geopolitics

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Trush, Tetiana (2022) The Role of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Christian Geopolitics. *Future Human Image*, Volume 17, 60-66. <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/17/8>

This article will deal with the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in the restoration of independence of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and a struggle with those, who do not want this independence. Nowadays we are witnessing cardinal changes in Ukraine. These changes are connected with the restoration and struggle of Ukraine for its independence both in the political arena and in the arena of the national church project. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has given invaluable help to Ukraine in this direction. Therefore, the article will highlight the way which Ukraine has come to receive Tomos. The questions, which are painful for both Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Ukraine, will be brought up. The presentation of Tomos to Ukraine is a solution of the global scale that has lasted for centuries. Tomos rises as a kind of cord against the encroachment of Russians on Ukrainian lands, church, culture. The events of 2018 at the Council of bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are important from the geopolitical point of view. Patriarch Bartholomew says about the spiritual care of the Ukrainian church, confirms the status of the Constantinople Patriarchate, that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has the right to resolve conflicts of the clergy and grant the status of autocephaly and nobody else. The consequence of this was the restoration of independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In fact, Patriarch Bartholomew violated a “common opinion” which is not supported by anything that Kyiv and Ukraine are in canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate. Secondly, a deep, for many century established tradition according to which Moscow and Constantinople made agreements behind Kyiv back about its destiny. All this will be discussed in this article.

Keywords: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Ukraine, Thomas, Orthodox Church in Ukraine, struggle, independence, freedom, culture, war, geopolitics.

Received: 17 November 2021 / Accepted: 25 February 2022 / Published: 29 May 2022

Introduction

Recently Ukraine has had the honor to host an important guest – Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who visited Ukraine on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the restoration of state independence. In his speech, Patriarch Bartholomew expressed his support for Ukraine in its struggle with those who did not want the independence of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and stressed that everything that the Orthodox Church of our country suffers from, Ecumenical Patriarchate experiences itself. “Unfortunately, some people are used to telling lies and making a sort of religious mockery, thinking that this way they may be able to intimidate Ecumenical Patriarchate, local autocephalous churches and the very newly built Orthodox Church of Ukraine. However, Christianity cannot be under threat. The Church cannot be terrorized. Lies and defamation do not upset us, vice versa, they strengthen our faith in the Canons, traditions and the True Church”, he said (Budnyk, 2021) “By some people” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew means Moscow and its allies in Ukraine, as Moscow has always created obstacles to prevent the Ukrainian Church from gaining possibilities to speak independently for itself on the international level. Russian invaders are still dreaming of solving all church matters of Ukraine only by Moscow. At first, the Moscow Patriarchate did everything to make Ukraine renounce the ideas of autocephaly, the ideas of the national church, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate was just that force that seemed to unite the whole Ukraine. But this domination has come to an end. And Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has played an extremely great role in obtaining Tomos.

“On September 3, 2018, Patriarch Bartholomew delivered a speech at Synaxis – the Council of Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which meetings lasted on September 1-4 at the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George in Constantinople. In his speech, Patriarch recalled the Ukrainian issue and also joining the Orthodox Kyiv Metropolia of the Constantinople Patriarchate to the Moscow one and the fact that the controversial document was issued under the pressure of difficult historical circumstances Patriarch emphasized that the Mother Church (Patriarchate of Constantinople) did not cede its canonical rights over Ukraine (...) Ecumenical Patriarch took the initiative to settle the Ukrainian issue” (Shhotkina, 2019). Having studied the church canons, the canonists of the Ecumenical Patriarchate came to the conclusion that only the Constantinople Patriarchate has the right to “judge and resolve conflicts of bishops, clergy and metropolitans of other patriarchs” (Shhotkina, 2019).

Such action was preceded by certain events connected with Moscow Patriarchate, which behaved defiantly and provokingly, ignoring the All-Orthodox Council on Crete. And this was despite the fact that Patriarch Bartholomew agreed to all requirements of Moscow, only with the aim that the Council could meet for the first time in 1,000 years. And Moscow then demanded that Bartholomew freeze the Ukrainian question. From the Moscow point of view, the question of granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian church did not have to be raised at the Council. Despite the agreements, Moscow did everything to thwart the Council. Why did Moscow do that? Since Patriarch of Constantinople convened it, that proved his priority, but Moscow Patriarchate wanted this priority to belong to it. In the air, there was the tiredness of impudence and hybrid church policy of Moscow Patriarchate. At this time, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine addressed to Ecumenical Patriarch with a request to consider the question of granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church.

The Russian-Ukrainian war is still continuing in Ukraine. Therefore, the question of Ukrainian autocephaly was important and now is important in the struggle for the independence

of Ukraine. Besides, Ukraine has deep Christian roots. Referring to history of spreading Christianity on the Kyiv hills, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine reminds that it has its long history. Everybody knows that Kyiv Metropolia was completely founded after Christianization of Rus-Ukraine in 988. It is clear that the Christianization of Rus-Ukraine became the moment of spiritual birth of Ukraine, so it is impossible to underestimate the merits of the Saint Prince Volodymyr the Great, thanks to which Christianity became the national religion. It was an impact for the rapid development of spiritual life, trade routes, and education, it helped the development of diplomatic contacts with the whole Christian world. But one has to remember that before St. Volodymyr in 955, his grandmother St. Equal-to-the-Apostles Princess Olga, was baptized. Even before the Christianization of Rus churches were built all over pagan at that time, Kyiv state by her command, and she herself, as a zealous Christian woman, spread the word of God among people. "And a century before St. Faithful Prince Askold accepted Christian faith, suffered for the faith and became one of the first Kyiv martyrs..." (Galinfo, 2021). That is, Christianity was widespread in the Kyiv state even before its christianization.

Why does only the Constantinople Patriarchate have the right to "judge and resolve conflicts of bishops, clergy and metropolitans of other patriarchs"? Let's work this question out. The thing is that the Orthodox Church order is both Synodal and hierarchical. The Ecumenical See, which is the first *see* and dominates over all Orthodox Churches, has a lot of power and responsibilities. So, some history. The first Churches were founded by Apostles who appointed permanent bishops. The recognition of Christianity by the Roman authorities helped to change the administrative structure of church life. The bishops, who were in the same civilian provinces, formed large ecclesiastical units – metropolias. The bishops who were in the main towns of the regions were responsible for capitals and they were called metropolitans. The metropolitans, who were in the same administrative units, formed patriarchates or Autocephalous Churches. The latter was headed by the metropolitans of the largest cities, and they were called patriarchs or archbishops. One must understand that the term "Autocephalous Church" *does not indicate* that the Church is independent and supposedly has no connection with the Ecumenical Church. It is not correct to think so. The Autocephalous Church is the single church administration that deals with church matters of the local church. But it is connected with the Mother Church, that is, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and is a part of it. It is not a completely autonomous and independent part. It is a part of the single body of the Church. Thus, the autocephaly of the Churches is connected with the synodal structure of the Church. Every autocephalous Church is under the direction and protection of Protos, who is the Ecumenical Patriarch at the top of the church pyramid. Therefore, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who presides at All-Orthodox Synods, makes the first proclamation of the church as autocephalous, but the final recognition of the autocephalous church remains with the Ecumenical Council. "Thus, it is clear that autocephaly is not granted for the independence of the Local Church, but for the preservation of the unity of all Local Churches under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch" (Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, 2019).

One must remember that in the system which stood above metropolis was the power of the most leading sees, such as Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. At the Ecumenical Councils the Fathers of the Church organized visible unity of the Church via sacred Canons, so that it would be One, Holy, Ecumenical and Apostolic. Thus, beginning from the first Apostolic Churches there were development and evolution of the organization of the church system and the Fathers moved from the metropolitan system to the above-metropolitan prerogative, then to the patriarchal system, and eventually to the "Pentarchy of sees." The

Pentarchy of sees is a system of presidency in the Christian Church of five patriarchs: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The first see was Old Rome and a see of New Rome – Constantinople had equal prerogatives with it. Beginning from the 11th century (1009), when the Church of Old Rome seceded from the Pentarchy, the Church functioned as a tetrarchy. The Church of New Rome – Constantinople became the church of the first see and had all powers of the Church of Old Rome. You can find out about the system of forming local churches and the development of the institute of pentarchy in work by professor Vlassios Pheidias “Institute of Pentarchy of Patriarchs”.

The Moscow Church seeks to take the place of the “Third Rome”. It has been cherishing this idea since the 15th century. It strives to be the first Church; it undermines the unity of the Universal Mother-Church, and the status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the Protoss in the canonical system of organization of the Orthodox Church. But the Church of the first see is the Ecumenical Patriarchate who has the right to judge and resolve conflicts of bishops, clergy and metropolitans of other patriarchs’ and grants the status of autocephaly, because it is for historical reasons and recorded at Councils. It is necessary to note that the Moscow Church had nothing to do with the Pentarchy, because it was not on the world map at that time.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is struggling to resolve the Ukrainian question. He thinks that Ukraine has the right for autocephaly, like any other existing autocephalous church. In fact, the Patriarch of Constantinople is restoring the legitimacy of the ancient centers of Slavic Christianity (along with Ukraine, the question of Macedonia was also raised) and the unity of these centers with Constantinople. Moreover, Patriarch Bartholomew, “as the first among equals,” having special rights, returns to the Patriarchate of Constantinople the role of guarantor of the unity of the entire Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact, Patriarch Bartholomew has a unique mission – to unite all Orthodox Churches around their historical center, to pull them out of self-isolation. Bartholomew had criticized the autocephalous churches, which closed themselves within their borders and lost the unity with the Mother Church, when every church was left alone with its world’s problems and challenges.

On August 31, 2018, Patriarch Bartholomew and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow met in Fener. The meeting was held for the first time after the breakdown of the Council by Moscow Patriarchate and, strangely enough at the request of Kirill, because at stake there was not just a question about the autocephalous Church of Ukraine, but, in fact, about the very independence of Ukraine, its maximum moving away from Moscow. This meeting was a kind of battle that lasted for several centuries, and Constantinople has won it. At that time, Kirill found out that a questing of granting Tomos to the Ukrainian Church had been resolved, and therefore, Moscow lost its position in Ukraine. Patriarch Bartholomew himself was supposed to present Tomos to Ukraine, emphasizing that this is the Ecumenical Patriarch who has the right to resolve conflicts of clergy and to grant the status of autocephaly. Bartholomew criticized the “canonical total lawlessness,” which in its time led to a schism of Ukrainian Church and which lasted for nearly a quarter of a century. At that time, Ukraine happened to be in the center of a large chessboard of Christian geopolitics; Patriarch Bartholomew solved not only the question of Ukraine but also the question of the whole Orthodox world. We became witnesses of solving the question on a global scale, which lasted centuries. Moscow ran into the Ukrainian idea, which is a kind of cord against the encroachment of Russians on Ukrainian lands, church, and culture.

When the exarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate were sent to Kyiv, that is, the granting of Thomas to Ukraine reached its final stage, the Moscow Patriarchate started to shout that

Constantinople intruded on the “canonical territory of Moscow.” The latter one has been a fabrication of Moscow for 25 years. Why did it happen so? Why did this myth become so widespread?

A little bit of history. The Ecumenical Patriarch offered all branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy to sit down at the negotiating table in order to get over the division of churches and create a Local Church. In November 2001, responding to the Ecumenical Patriarch’s proposal for constructive negotiations, Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan was not concerned by getting over the division of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, but “obtaining in the private property the historical shrine of Kyiv Orthodoxy, first of all, Kyiv-Pechersk and Pochayiv Lavras.” Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan could not help but understand that Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was not even an autonomous Church, but only and exclusively Metropolia of the Russian Orthodox Church. Taking into consideration its special relationship with the Russian authorities, the privatization of Ukrainian shrine by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), in fact, would have meant their privatization by Russia. But the head of UOC (MP) tried to fulfil the tasks of his Moscow bosses precisely and scrupulously (Gorbyk, 2008). UOC (MP) did not help understanding between the branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and was hostile to the very idea of autocephaly. “The activity of “Patriarch” Filaret about attempts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to establish a dialog to resolve the crisis in Ukrainian Orthodoxy was equally problematic and toxic. (...) Filaret thwarts all attempts of a constructive dialogue with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church about unification, insisting only on taking over this jurisdiction without providing any guarantees to its bishops and priests. Altogether, analyzing the attitude of the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate to Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church from 1995 to 2004, a conclusion can be made that he did everything possible for destroying this jurisdiction. And it was a conscious decision, because granting autocephaly by Constantinople with the existence of two branches which sought for it was impossible” (Gorbyk, 2008), Protoiereus Serhiy Horbyk stresses in his article “Lost opportunities. Why did not Ukrainian Orthodoxy get autocephaly in 2008?” In 2008 the terms of legitimization of Ukrainian Orthodoxy via liquidation of the UAOC and UOC-KP were agreed with the Ecumenical Patriarch. These terms received the full support of both the bishops of Ukrainian jurisdictions and the Ukrainian authorities. Metropolitan Mefodiy, Primate of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, writes in an “Open Letter from Primate of the UAOC to Primate of the UOC-KP” that even Filaret at first agreed on joining the UOC-KP, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, that is a temporary refusal from autocephaly and the patriarchal rank of Primate. However, when You found out that election of Primate of the Ukrainian Church would take place on an alternative basis, and you do not have a 100% guarantee of election to this position, the negotiations were actually sabotaged” (Methodius, 2009). At that time, the President of Ukraine V. Yushchenko, prepared a “Solemn Agreement,” which he, as the head of the state, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Primates of the UAOC and the UOC-KP had to sign. But that did not happen. The Moscow Patriarchate and Kirill Gundryaev did everything possible to sabotage it. Metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan intentionally invited Moscow Patriarch Oleksiy II to Kyiv in 2008, when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had to visit Kyiv. It was done to frustrate the unification of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

In other words, to unite the UAOC and the UOC-KP and obtain autocephalous status, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine needed to take a few steps, but it was hampered by Moscow supporters, who followed the instructions of the Kremlin. Thus, Ukraine lost nearly 10 years, which it could use for the development and strengthening.

It is necessary to note that a notion of “canonical territory” exists only in modern Russian theology and is one of many Moscow myths, and it is criticized fiercely by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In such an interpretation, Bartholomew sees a threat to the One Orthodox Church. And it is exactly so. In fact, Moscow henchmen use a hybrid approach to the annexation of territories of different states, and they also behave the same way toward the Orthodox Churches. That is why Moscow’s influence on the Orthodox Church has to be limited as possible. The “canonical territories” were invented during the collapse of the USSR at the end of the 20th century and the Russian Church made efforts to leave under its influence those parts which found themselves within the borders of the new states. A principle of jurisdictions indeed exists in Orthodoxy, which is stated in the Apostolic Rules, but these jurisdictions have a general subordination to the Mother Church (it has been written above). And the See of Metropolitan of Kyiv has always been in Kyiv despite all efforts of Moscow to appropriate it via the myth of “transferring the Kyiv See to Moscow.” Sees are not handed luggage; the See of Metropolitan of Kyiv has been, is and will be in Kyiv.

Conclusions

So, let’s get back to the events of 2018. At the Council of bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarch, which was held after the departure of Kirill, Bartholomew announced the spiritual care over the Ukrainian Church. Also, Patriarch Bartholomew sent a letter to the Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church MP Onufriy that a Council will be held where the Metropolitan of Kyiv will be elected and Onufriy will respectively lose this status. It was a bold and fair statement as it confirmed the status of Patriarchate of Constantinople and restored the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Essentially, Patriarch Bartholomew infringed “a tacit, unsupported “collective opinion” that Kyiv and Ukraine are at a canonic subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate. Secondly, a deep-seated tradition according to which Moscow and Constantinople agreed over the head of Kyiv on its destiny. In a dialogue with Constantinople, Kyiv suddenly became not a subject but a party of negotiations and acquired political identity...” (Shhotkina, 2019). Thus, historical justice was restored.

On December 15, 2018, an Ecumenical Council was held within the walls of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, where a creation of the Local Orthodox Church in Ukraine was declared and Metropolitan of Kyiv Epiphanius Dumenko was elected. And on January 5, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed Tomos about the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, and the next day Tomos was handed over to Epiphanius in Fener. It is necessary to pay tribute to President P.O. Poroshenko, who made every possible effort so that Ukrainian Orthodox Church could receive Tomos; he breathed this idea, and he aimed for it with his whole heart. Now we are witnesses of the fundamental change of Ukraine, the restoration and struggle for its independence both in the political arena and in the arena of the national church project. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has provided invaluable assistance in this direction for Ukraine; it is a kind of a ticket to the future, which is unlikely to be easy because, unfortunately, UOC-MP has preserved its structure and internal influence on believers of Ukraine; it is waiting for its time. So, to maintain their independence, Ukrainians have to educate themselves as much as possible, not be indifferent, know their own history, love their culture, appreciate their independence and struggle for both in political and religious life.

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