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Ukrainian Clergy from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) Want Patriarch Kirill to Appear Before an Ecclesiastical Court¹

More than 400 clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), who belong to the Moscow Patriarchate, have signed a call, to put Patriarch Kirill before an Ecclesiastical Court. What they have in mind is a gathering of the leaders of the ancient eastern churches, also the heads of the Orthodox churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The heads of the ancient Patriarchates, during church history had exercised numerous times the function of a supreme ecclesiastical court for Orthodoxy.

In light of the “open support” of Patriarch Kirill for the Russian war against Ukraine, the writers of the appeal hope for a “just decision,” of the ancient churches. They charge Kirill with two key violations. First, he has been preaching the doctrine of the “Russian World,” that contradicts church teaching, and should be considered as heresy. Secondly, Kirill has committed “moral crimes” in that he declared the war against Ukraine good and supported “the aggressive actions of the Russian troops.”

In a second section the clergy turn to the heads of the local Orthodox churches, describing for them the war’s events in the Ukraine. In light of the brutality of the war, they sense as spiritual leaders their pastoral responsibility, to appeal to world Orthodoxy. They point to the profound disappointment of the clergy and believers of the UOK toward Patriarch Kirill’s stance, the co-signers of the appeal support the refusal of some bishops and priests, no longer to commemorate Patriarch Kirill in their prayers. But that does not suffice, it is “impossible for us, in future to be in any form canonically subordinate to the Moscow Patriarch.” It is their “Christian conscience” that requires it, the signers explain. They declare their solidarity with the people and their full support for the Ukrainian state and its military. In the concept of the “Russian World” the Ukrainian clergy see the ideological basis for the actual war. This is what Patriarch Kirill has personally fostered over the course of many years.

In closing the clergy declare their faithfulness to world Orthodoxy and their wish, to stand in full communion with it, and reject every effort, to restrict or limit such membership. All of Orthodoxy should examine Kirill’s statements and actions with great care and with ongoing responsibility. The clergy call on the heads of the local churches, to condemn the Russian war against Ukraine with full clarity, to call upon the Russian President, to end the war, and to return

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all occupied territories to Ukraine. In addition they should examine Kirill's public statements about the war and the doctrine of the "Russian world," and assess it on the basis of historic church teaching.

On April 7, 2022, the European Parliament passed a resolution, over the "growing Repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalnyi. In that connection the role of Patriarch Kirill as head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was condemned, who had provided "a theological cover for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine." In addition, the resolution praises the courage of Russian priests, who had condemned the war in a letter, and had called for ending the war.

The laity of UOK also called for distancing from the Moscow Patriarchate. Around 240 faithful call upon Metropolitan Onufrij (Berezovskij), head of the UOK, and its entire group of bishops no longer to commemorate Kirill, and further to place him and all supporters of the Russian invasion in a churchly ban. They beg Metropolitan Onufrij to focus on church teaching, and to protect the UOK from the "politicized Orthodoxy" of the Moscow Patriarchate--the "Russian world." In support of that the Holy Synod of the UOK should support the declaration of Orthodox theologians condemning "Russian World." In addition, the Metropolitan should undertake consultations with the local churches, in order to issue a call for a Panorthodox Council, to condemn the heresy. Further the laity call for a dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OKU), in order to overcome the split between Orthodox believers and citizens of Ukraine. For this difficult task, the President of Ukraine could serve as example, who has made a major effort on behalf of the good of the people, for a dialogue of peace with the entire world, even with the enemy. Finally, the signers of the appeal, request Metropolitan Onufrij to condemn the break of eucharistic communion between the ROC and the Oecumenical Patriarchate.

Translated by Walter Sawatsky