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Peace formula for the Orthodox jurisdictions of Ukraine

The situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy reminds me something of a divorce in a marriage. Let's imagine that a woman, who by force and coercion, or of her own free will, being afraid to get into the arms of another man, when her husband was far away, went under the protection of his brother through inviting him to her house. However, the new alliance was not what it seemed to be. Her husband's younger brother wanted her fully. And then it turned out that his vision of marriage and relationships in it was quite specific: violence and humiliation came soon. Although, even in such unequal union, there is not only the bad that takes place. For example, children are born or the general household (buildings, sheep, etc.) grows. And thus, at a certain point, under certain circumstances, when the opportunity comes forth, the woman asks her owner to make her free. When she receives a refusal, she decides to leave on her own and asks her first husband for help, the marriage with whom has not even been properly ended. The first husband decides to help, despite the fact that the woman does not want to go back to him, but wants to be free and to live independently with her own head, maintaining equal relationships with both brothers. Definitely, she needs a divorce certificate from her first husband, so that her independence is legitimate, and she also claims to have a part of the property that, partially, has originally been hers. The man, from whom the woman wants to leave, begins to threaten both her and his brother. The last has not been willing to quarrel with the brother, who although younger, was richer and mightier, but now has decided to help his ex-wife. I think you have understood who is who in this parable.

All of you have heard loud statements that granting Tomos of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine should lead not only to a split in the World Orthodoxy, which can be compared to the big schism of 1054, but also to bloodshed, civil war in Ukraine and even a military operation of Russia to protect the Orthodox. In my opinion, those, who use the language of war and "predict" war, are already ready to conduct a war and to provoke it.

Although, it should be noted that they also have a peace formula. It looks in the following way: do not do anything (in this case, do not ask and do not provide Tomos of auto-

cephaly) and there will be peace. And if one talks with the images of our parable, than this means: you, the elder brother, do not interfere or you are not my brother any more. And you, wife, come back and everything will be as before.

Nevertheless, the purpose of my report is not analyzing the statements of the “prophets” of the war. I want to present you the proposals of the people of peace from Ukraine, Russia and Europe, and I have been personally involved to formulating some of them. We proceed from the perspective that if Tomos of autocephaly is granted, we should have a peace formula, which would make impossible not only the mistakes of the early 1990’s, but also would prevent everything, what we are warned about. And for this, certain principles must be formulated and certain options suggested.

Example one. The Network of Open Orthodoxy

On August 21-23, 2018, the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia – the Wisdom organized a round table “What Orthodox Church of Ukraine should be like: its place in the society”. One of the results of this round table’s activity was the Statement of the Open Orthodoxy Network¹.

First, I will clarify what is the Open Orthodoxy. The very idea, as well as a marker of self-identification, appeared in 2014-2015 among Orthodox Christians, who, starting from the 1990’s, were actively involved in religious teaching, education and publishing.

THE OPEN ORTHODOXY is:

- Orthodoxy, that is open to the society and to the people;
- Orthodoxy, that is open to knowledge and technology;
- Orthodoxy, that is open to the dialogue and the search for answers;
- Orthodoxy, that is open to other denominations and religions;
- Ukrainian Orthodoxy, which is open to the World Orthodoxy.

In August of this year [2018] in these circumstances that a principle has emerged, which can serve as a basis for a peace formula, alternative to the tough confrontation, both between the Orthodox within Ukraine and between the powerful Christian centers of the world. Its essence is formulated in one sentence: “Instead of war between jurisdictions we propose peaceful co-existence, cooperation and concelebration”.

¹<https://www.facebook.com/groups/mereza/permalink/1987940344837901/>

Respectively, in a more detailed form in other parts of the Statement of the Open Orthodoxy' Network: "We are open to a dialogue and call on Orthodox Ukrainians, who belong or will belong to different Orthodox jurisdictions, to renounce the language of hostility and violence towards any person in solving any problems, including administrative and property's ones ... We support the efforts of the President of Ukraine and other Orthodox faithful who are elected by the people of Ukraine to higher state positions or are active members of the civil society, to contribute to the process of obtaining a Tomos of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. At the same time, we urge the state authorities to ensure the strict observance of Ukrainian legislation and protect the constitutional right to freedom of thought and religion, thus, preventing violence and ensuring a peaceful and legal solution to all contentious issues. We call upon politicians, experts, and journalists to refrain from aggressive rhetorics, and to avoid inciting violence and threats, regardless of their personal opinions on the processes taking place in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy".

It is indicative that the priests in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate have been the first to sign this statement, and then the representatives of other Christian denominations and jurisdictions have started to join them. And this message has been confirmed also in the next statement of the Network, already after the harsh statements of the official representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Example two. Whom does the church building belong?

And now let me offer you some specific proposals from the participants of the Open Orthodoxy' Network. It is known that the conflict occurs not only at the level of Patriarchs and Hierarchs, when the exchange of statements takes place or participation in joint activities is terminated, up to the refusal of joint communion. In reality, conflicts take place at the level of concrete communities and, primarily, because of the question: who should own a church building or a monastery?

Since the 1990s we have already seen how the conflicts around church buildings occur, to which the athletically built "seminarians" are involved, that are looking more like notorious "thugs for hire" ("titushki"), and how the trials and their decisions are not implemented and continue infinitely.

Usually, the conflict around the church building is explained, on the one hand, by the community's desire to change its jurisdictional affiliation and, on the other hand, by the sei-

zure of the church by another denomination. But in fact, in the absolute majority of cases of conflict and confrontation, not a transition or seizure take place, but the division of the once united community into two parts. And each of these parts states “the church building belongs to us”.

We had the aim to show that the heavy-handed approach is not the only possible way of the events development, but there are other ways as well. That is why we have offered the questions to the participants of the Network, the number of whom has increased five times within a month after the publication of the first Statement. Without a claim to sociological representativeness, but in the community, which can be considered as expert and concerned. Our question was: “If after granting of Tomos the community of the UOC is divided into supporters and opponents of the autocephaly, to which part of the community should the church building belong?”

We have offered five possible answers to this question, but we have given an opportunity to the community’s members to add their own variants as well. As a result, we have got 6 more ways to solve the dilemma. One of them has turned out to be the most popular one among those, who have participated in the survey.

I want to give all 11 answers here in order to show that, as opposed to the forceful development of events, there are in fact many peaceful ways of resolving contentious issues. In the first case we are sometimes tried to be convinced there is lack of options. But the new ways are possible if one has good will to give up hate speech and to recognize one’s right for his or her own choice. What matters to me is not the number of percentage points that have been answered, but each option as an opportunity and as the beginning of a public synodical dialogue on this irritating topic. I will me also allow short comments on each of the options to the question: “If after granting of Tomos the community of the UOC is divided into supporters and opponents of autocephaly, to which part of the community should the church building belong?”

The first possible answer, which has been supported by 31% of the respondents: “1) to introduce fixed membership in the community; 2) to interrogate real members; 3) if 2/3 or more have determined themselves – the property belongs to them, otherwise – alternately”.

Commentary: Nowadays, there is no concept of fixed membership among the Orthodox communities of Ukraine. It can be introduced at the level of a separate community, but

for this purpose the corresponding changes to the community statute should be made. In order for the fixed membership to be introduced for all communities, we need changes of legislation.

Option II (29%): “Alternate worship of both communities (one after another) in the same church building and a legal agreement between both communities about it”.

Commentary: The possibility of alternate worship exists in the Ukrainian legislation, but the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate have always been categorically against this option, explaining it by the fear of seizure and by the inability to provide the church to the unrecognized “schismatics”. If both churches in Ukraine are recognized by the World Orthodoxy, the situation will change in some way. But still, there is no certainty about a change in the position of the Moscow Patriarchate. That is why this option will require the goodwill of both parts of the community itself and the legal registration of agreements.

Option III (12%): “The church building should become the property of the community of the Ukrainian Local Church, because it is the very church of the Ukrainian nation”.

Commentary: This option can be considered the most radical and dangerous one, because it provides no alternative and can provoke conflicts. Although here, too, there is a peaceful option: on the experience of Estonia we can see that in one country there are jurisdictions of the Moscow and Constantinople patriarchates. At the same time, all property is legally owned by the Estonian Church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which has refused any attempts to “evict” the parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate, which continue to use church buildings on the rights of symbolic lease.

Option IV (10%): “The wishes of those, who are actually maintaining a church property, should be considered, in order to avoid “church raiding”.

Commentary: It is a very important remark from those, who have participated in the survey. Because, really, there is a community or a person, whose participation in the construction or decoration of the church has been more tangible than of others. In the history of Orthodoxy there are examples of beneficent (donated by benefactors/ktetors) churches and monasteries. Also in Ukraine, not only parish churches have been revived, but also house churches; not only on the territory of private estates, but also in the institutions of state and collective property.

Option V (7%): “If 2/3 of the members of the congregation have voted for a change of denomination in open discussions, the church building goes over to them, if only 50%, the worships are alternated”.

Commentary: The main question is how to organize these open discussions (probably, the discussions were meant, in which not only permanent parishioners, but also a wider range of local residents could take part). But how to make the abuses impossible, as it happened during the elections, or during the seizure of the church buildings of the Constantinople Patriarchate by the Moscow Patriarchate in France.

Option VI (4%): “This should be outlined in the agreement on peaceful co-existence, cooperation and concelebration between the communities”.

Commentary: This option was added and it can be considered as an interpretation of Option II, but with the specific title of the Agreement in the spirit of the statements the Open Orthodoxy Network.

Option VII (3%): “The church building should remain the property of a community of the jurisdiction, to which it has belonged before. And let the new church build new building”.

Commentary: A small percentage value for this response, which has been suggested as the first by the authors of the survey, shows that the part of the community, that wishes to change jurisdiction, will not be ready just to leave the church and build a new one.

Option VIII (2%): “The church building should be given to the majority. And the minority should look for another premises”.

Commentary: This option was proposed by the authors of the survey. At first sight, it is an absolutely logical option, but it has received almost no support. The only explanation is that among the respondents there is more a request for peaceful co-existence and concelebration of communities than for their complete separation.

Option IX (2%): “Church buildings that are cultural monuments of Ukraine or are located in state institutions, should go to the Local Churches, and others – based on the decision of the community”.

Commentary: Except for the fact that the option has not immediately been added, such a low percentage of support can be interpreted as the reluctance of the survey participants to see the state as the institution that will decide who owns the church, even when this church is a cultural monument. On the other hand, a significant number of monuments, es-

pecially, the churches in the state institutions belong to the state and have been made available for use to this or that community. We hope that, based on the examples of such churches, the state will be able to prove itself as an effective moderator in preventing and resolving conflict situations.

Option X (1%): “A temporary moratorium on church transfers to other jurisdictions”.

Commentary: This option has also been added among the latest ones. But, if one does not take this into consideration, it is possible to see that nobody is going to postpone the question “Whom belongs the church building?” until better times and it will be necessary to look for an answer.

And the last option XI (1%): “The church building should be owned by the part of community, with which the priest will stay”.

Commentary: Despite the fact that this answer has been proposed by the authors from the very beginning, it has proved to be the least popular. Perhaps, this can be explained by the fact that the Open Orthodoxy’ Network gathers people who seek to restore the conciliarity in the Church, and this means that the voice of the community is as important to them as the voice of the senior priest. But still, I believe that whether the community is able to overcome the conflict situations peacefully and in Christian spirit, will depend, in particular, on the position of the priest and his ability to serve as a facilitator in the community.

Summing up this information, I would like to believe that in the last 30 years since the fall of the godless atheistic regime, we have learned something and our mindset has become more Christian than Bolsheviks. And we are able to perceive the words “The church building belongs to us” not as a battle cry before the beginning of the battle for it, but as evidence that the church in one way or another belongs to all who come to it. And most importantly, the church is a God’s house, where those people gather, who remember Christ’s words: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love between yourselves”.

And what is more, it is worth not to forget, that the Church is not a building made of stone, but a community of people. “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people”.

Example three. The seminar of the Commission “Truth, Justice and Reconciliation between Russia, Ukraine and the European Union”

The idea of holding the seminar, which would unite historians, philosophers, theologians, public figures and media persons from Ukraine, Russia and Europe, belongs to the French philosopher Antoine Arzhakovsky. Two sessions of this seminar have already been held. The first one, called “Dialogue about the past to stop the war”², took place in May in Paris, and the history issues were discussed there. The second session, which was held in Kiev two weeks ago, in early October, had the title “Churches, War and Peace”. Based on its results, a joint memorandum “Church peace between Russia and Ukraine is possible” has been published.

In particular, it says: “Following the Gospel commandments, the Churches are called to be peacemakers between the opposing parties and states. This task cannot be accomplished without the desire to speak the unfeigned truth in a language, understood by the societies on both sides of the conflict ... In a situation, when the official representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church both in Russia and Ukraine are unwilling to hold an equal dialogue with the Ukrainian side, this responsibility is taken up by the Christians as the faithful to the Church of Christ and the representatives of the civil society ... Aware of our responsibility for the future of our peoples and churches, we are called upon to use all opportunities for dialogue with the faith that the road to reconciliation and reliable world is through the joint search for truth and justice”.

After that comes: “Dialogue needs to be continued between the influential centers of the Christian world – Rome, Constantinople, and Moscow, which, in turn, should consider Kyiv not as a subject of dispute, but as an equal participant in relations, and Ukraine not as a territory of war, but as an opportunity for dialogue and constructive cooperation ... We hope to hear from the Local Church of Ukraine, which wants to free itself from the shackles of the past, the words “forgive and ask for forgiveness” regarding the Sister-Churches in Ukraine and beyond. We are sure that the unfeigned repentance and forgiveness of offenses should replace the current official rhetoric of the Moscow Patriarchate ... In order for the peaceful co-existence, cooperation and joint communion of the Churches to become a reality, we will have to deal with the intricacies of the history of relations between the churches, states and peoples together, casting aside ideological myths, in a Christian and scientific

² <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29265297.html>

manner. The experience of reconciliation between churches and peoples of France and Germany, Germany and Poland can serve as an important example in this direction. We are convinced that reconciliation between the Churches is a reliable basis for peace between Russia, Ukraine and all peoples of Europe”.

By the way, among those, who have signed this document, are Orthodox Ukrainians of the Kyiv and Moscow Patriarchates, as well as the “Autocephalous church”, Greek and Roman Catholics from Ukraine and Europe, as well as Orthodox Russians of the Moscow Patriarchate and those, who are outside the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as the faithful to the Russian exarchate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Paris.

Example four. The official position of the Ukrainian state

Another real peacekeeper could be and is the Ukrainian state. In the address of the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko to the Parliament of Ukraine “On internal and external situation of Ukraine in 2018”, the head of the Ukrainian state and the upholder of observance of constitutional rights and freedoms clearly stated: “I guarantee that the state will respect the choice of those, who decide to stay in that church structure, which will retain unity with the Russian Orthodox Church. And we will title it in the same way for clear understanding. But at the same time, I guarantee that the state will protect, and no need to scare them, the rights of those priests and laity of the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate, who will voluntarily decide to come out from under Moscow to create a united local Orthodox Ukrainian Church together with other Orthodox”.

The same is constantly declared by the chief state official of Ukraine on religious affairs, the head of the relevant department of the Ministry of Culture Andriy Yurash, as well as the author of most legislative drafts on ways to resolve conflicts in religions, the deputy chairman of the Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Spirituality Viktor Yelensky, as well as a man who is called the chief on the church issues in the Presidential Administration Rostyslav Pavlenko, who now serves as the director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies. I am sure that the state bodies, charged with ensuring law and order and the observance of the rule of law, also have a peace formula.

Power

With this title the great Ukrainian philosopher and freedom glorifier Hryhoriy Skovoroda summed up his stories. It seems always strange to me, because we are used to the words “conclusion”, “sum-up” or “moral”. But now I want to use this very word as an example of another understanding of power which is peaceful and wise.

To conclude this important and serious consideration, I propose you to return to our parable about the woman who wants to be free. What is the way out for her? There is an option of medieval “rigidly patriarchal family life”: to obey, to humble and tolerate, even if you don’t love, and even when you are beaten.

There is an evangelical parable, told by Christ that the reason that kills marriage is adultery. And in our case adultery is obvious – with atheist power and its security services in the Soviet times, and nowadays with neo-imperial ideology of the “Russian world”.

We can add also laws and norms of the modern society (by the way, both previous versions also are founded on the traditions of the society of that time). Today a woman has not only the right not to obey violence and to decide her own destiny with her own mind, but this right is also protected by the law. And those, who use force, apply moral pressure or do not respect her dignity, must be stopped, reeducated or punished if they go too far in their words and actions.

The state has the power to stop and to punish, but in the case of re-education, one should turn to mediators, facilitators and specialists in non-violent communication. There are very few of them in our country, and that is why we need the help and experience of European churches and international organizations, which also have a peace formula for us.