

UKRAINE: Autocephaly for the Ukraine Orthodox Patriarchy a step closer?

Odessablog (17.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/1Xqs2k2> – (...) It has come to light that following Easter, President Poroshenko made a personal appeal to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) during a seven hour meeting to free the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarch from its chains to that of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarch.

Naturally the UOC KP is absolutely unanimous in its support for autocephaly, and as is to be expected, the ROC MP is very much against.

President Poroshenko it is claimed, has stated that he hopes that the “local autocephalous church in Ukraine may appear before the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus” – namely this year.

A reader will recognise no doubt that following what has been a complete policy disaster by The Kremlin when it comes to keeping Ukraine in its orbit, that it has in fact very few effective political, economic, or social levers and influence channels with which to attempt to control or influence the Ukrainian constituency, or “political Kyiv”. The Church however remains one such avenue for so long as the Kyiv Patriarchy is perceived to be what is in effect subservient to the Moscow Patriarchy.

It is not only a matter of the Kremlin infiltration and any pre-existing allegiances of the clergy, nor any such national security issues that may therefore be relevant within the Moscow Patriarchy. Undoubtedly The Kremlin would not be particularly keen to see the Kyiv Patriarchy officially be set free from the shadow of Moscow as it would be perceived as far

more than a symbolic or bureaucratic exercise by the faithful.

Nor is it simply a matter of perception or acceptance by the Orthodox followers, or a battle to shepherd those tens of millions of Ukrainian souls toward godly enlightenment – Kremlin leaning war-clerics with subversive holy hand grenades aside.

There is the matter of some serious earthy riches too. Thousands of churches, thousands of very valuable religious icons, church income, church expenditures, church finances – and its ability to raise finance, tens of thousands of loyal clergy *etc.*

Naturally should autocephaly be granted, that will not mean the end of the ROC MP in Ukraine. A newly attained autocephaly for the UOC KP does not turn it into a State church at the expense of another Orthodox schism – at least not immediately and not under State direction. The believers will undoubtedly remain free to choose whether their souls are tendered by the UOC KP or ROC MP. It is they that will ultimately remain or migrate.

The issue of the earthly treasures however, may be a little more difficult to resolve. How to deal with a congregation, or clergy, or both that move across, but with a church (as in the building) and its inventory belonging to a different patriarchy? Are ungodly legal battles awaiting over earthly riches? What will happen to antiques and ancient icons if autocephaly is to occur and the Moscow Patriarchy decides to bring all that can be moved across the border to be moved prior to such a decision?

While the Kingdom of God may bring enlightenment and serenity (or not), the kingdoms of men (and a particularly irked Kremlin/Moscow Patriarchy) is far less likely to be forgiving or tolerant – not that pandering to The Kremlin has ever done Ukraine any good, so to do so now would be complete folly.

All very interesting, and perhaps not entirely unsurprising this seven hour meeting between Head of State and Head of Church occurs now that the electioneering for the office of president in 2019 has openly, albeit unofficially, started.

The question is whether Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (and the Synod) will bestow gifts of autocephaly to the UOC KP in a timely electoral manner for President Poroshenko.

A reader will have noted that President Poroshenko, whatever his pluses and minuses, is not especially good at predicting timelines when it involves external actors. He was really some way off with his predictions for the introduction of the Schengen Visa-free (albeit it did indeed arrive eventually), and he seems extremely ambitious with regard to EU membership timelines too.

Nevertheless, this appeal is something to watch that will have repercussions across the Ukrainian constituency should it come to pass. It will also be interesting, should it come to pass prior to Verkhovna Rada elections in October 2019, as to which clergyman a politician will seek to recruit for their reelection campaign (and their Facebook and Instagram accounts will be replete with photographs of politicians with their "chosen" clergy as those elections draw near).

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