

„Synodality and its implementation in Ukrainian Orthodox Church and in Byelorussian Orthodox Church”

After a speech of the representative of the Russian OC it is more convenient to explain the situation in Ukraine and Belarus through its comparison to the situation in Russian Church. First I would like to remind some moments that relate the statute of the **Russian OC**.

In 1988, in the situation of increased freedom for church existence in the later Soviet Union a new statute of the Russian OC was adopted. Twelve years later, in 2000 the new statute was adopted and till now it remains the canonical document for the life of the whole Russian OC. There were several changes in years 2008, 2011, 2013, 2016¹.

In this statute of 2000 we can find chapter XI that describes the status of the self-governed Church as a part of Moscow Patriarchate², it relates the Ukrainian OC. The next chapter XII describes the special rules for “exarchates”, and it concerns the Byelorussian OC³.

It is important to make difference between this kind of statute and the formal civil statute that existed in the Russian Church in several editions and is a juridical document to define position in the context of state legislation. The short civil statute of 1991 is easy available⁴. The access to the new civil statute that was adopted in 1997 is restricted⁵.

The similar complex situation with two different statutes exists also in Ukraine. On the one hand there is a “Statute about administration of Ukrainian Orthodox Church”, adopted at the end of November 1990. It was written on the basis of statute of the Russian OC of 1988⁶ and represents the canonic status of Ukrainian OC. With several changes of 1992 and 2007 it exists till now⁷.

On the other hand there is a civil statute of the Kievan Metropolis, i.e. Metropolitan office. In the framework of civil legislation our Church as a whole has no status of juridical person and nowadays that brings difficulties in our relationships with the state bodies. Only parts of our Church – diocesan centers, theological seminaries, parishes, monasteries etc. have juridical status.

In 2011-2012, in the time of severe illness of the Primate of our Church Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) there were several attempts to change the status of Ukrainian OC from the perspective of its relationships to the Russian Church. It is a special political theme that has different aspects but it does not concern directly the theme of synodality in our Church.

¹ See <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/document/133114/>

² See <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/133132.html>

³ See <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/133136.html>

⁴ See <http://www.pagez.ru/olb/327.php>

⁵ See <http://ustav.livejournal.com/17100.html>

⁶ See http://www.e-vestnik.ru/analytics/ukrainskiy_statut_i_2748/

⁷ See <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/statut-upts>

What concerns Belarus, the Orthodox Church as a canonical structure has here no separate statute. The only statute it has is in the framework of civil legislation which was adopted in 2003⁸. It means that in canonical questions it depends mostly on the above mentioned chapter XII of the Statute of the Russian OC.

As a whole it means that the principles of synodality in Ukrainian OC are clear to see through its canonical statute of 1990. For the Church of Belarus it is more difficult. In both cases it is helpful to see practical dimension of synodality from concrete examples from the real life of the last years.

1) The title of the Primate

The difference is to see already in the titles of both Primate. The Metropolitan in Ukraine has a title “of Kiev and all Ukraine”. It reflects the status of our Church as a “self-governed Church with the right of wide autonomy” and responsibility of the Metropolitan for the whole Ukraine. The title of the Primate of the Church of Belarus is “Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavye”, without formal claim for the whole country⁹.

2) The election/appointment of the new Primate

In August 2014, after the death of the previous Metropolitan Volodymyr there was election of the new Primate. Metropolitan Onufriy was elected by the Council of Bishops of Ukrainian OC and short after it was confirmed by the Patriarch of Moscow.

In December 2013 the similar change was in Belarus. Because of the illness of the previous Metropolitan Filaret the new Metropolitan was appointed. Instead of process of election inside the country it was made through decision of the Synod of the Russian OC. Since that time Metropolitan Pavel is the Primate of the Byelorussian OC.

3) Participants of the Holy Synod

In both Ukrainian and Byelorussian Churches there are own Holy Synods. They take part regularly – from three till five times per year. Now the number of bishops in Ukrainian OC is 84, that is why it is not possible for all of them to participate regularly at the synods. The number of the constant members of the Holy Synod is 9, they represent four main geographical parts of Ukraine. For every meeting there are also temporary members of the Synod that represent the groups of bishops, archbishops and metropolitans.

The number of bishops in the Church of Belarus is only 16. It makes possible that every meeting of the Synod is a kind of Bishop’s Council.

4) Decisions of the Holy Synod

An indicative factor for synodality is the question of initiatives that come from different members of the Synod and other invited bishops. Here is the situation amazingly different. I have analyzed the situation with last three meetings of the Synod.

In the case of Ukraine from 24 items only five were in a style of report of the Primate. Much more of them (12) were initiated by other members of the Synod. Almost a quarter of the

⁸ See <http://exarchate.by/resource/Dir0009/Dir0048/Page0055.html>

⁹ Till 2014 the title was “of Minsk and Slutsk” but was changed because of the opening the Minsk Metropolis as a group of four eparchies analogically to the tendency in Russia.

issues were in the form of “reflections”. It seems to be a good form of common decision-making.

In the case of Belarus the situation was much more in sense of vertical power: only two of over 50 items were initiated not by other members of Synod. 48 of 50 were the items in the form of the speeches of Metropolitan Pavel about his activities in different fields.

5) Historical explanation

The principle of synodality in the life of Ukrainian OC has an important function in the face of concurrence with the schismatic structure “Kiev Patriarchate”. Since the schism of 1992 in the situation of pressure of political factors and state interests our Metropolitan Volodymyr searched for support on the local level. Multiplicity of cultural and historical background of different parts of Ukraine became a factor for granting large rights for the local bishops. Now after the election of the new Metropolitan of Kiev in 2014 the same tendency remains actual. One of the main factors of cooperation are frequent visits of the Primate to different eparchies of our Church.

As soon as I can see, the situation in Belarus is other. Because of his previous life outside of the country the new Metropolitan of Minsk has tendency to cooperate intensive with the structures in Russia. From several representatives of Byelorussian Church I have heard the opinion about tension between the Metropolitan Pavel and local authorities, both in state and church structures. That is why we can speak about difficulties in synodal cooperation in last four years.

6) The pressure of politics in Ukraine

Nowadays the political conflict in Eastern Ukraine has a large impact on the stable development of Ukrainian OC as a church institution. On the one side there is a pressure to break off links to the canonical center in Moscow. There are several legislative initiatives of Ukrainian Parliament that has a goal to represent our Church as a part of the state-aggressor. On the other side there is sometimes misunderstanding of multiplicity of the Church life in Ukraine from the people that look at the situation from outside.

Nowadays the most dangerous factor for our Church is involvement in political confrontation. There are extreme positions on both parts of the conflict and we should look for reconciling position. First of all it means for the Church to be over the political conflict and to serve the unity of the Church and the country through appeals to turn to the spiritual aspects of our life. The words of Jesus to Martha correspond good to the position of our Church today: “You are careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41-42).

Thank you very much!