

The Whole Truth About the Ukrainian Church Issue, Mount Athos, 2020

In the most significant ecclesiastical matter of recent decades, the **Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP)** established the fifteenth Orthodox independent Church by granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church. In response, however, the **Russian Church (ROC)** has refused to recognize the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine and has terminated commemoration of and communion with all other Orthodox Churches that do recognize it, including numerous Greek Metropolises. As the largest church by population, the ROC's refusal to recognize the Church of Ukraine creates an ecclesiastical schism which undermines the canonical rights of the EP and cuts off millions of Russian Orthodox from communing with the rest of the Orthodox World.

While the ROC claims that the EP's decision "intrudes on its territory," evidence dating back to the 14th century proves that both the Metropolis of Kyiv and the **Patriarchate of Moscow (PM)** belong under the canonical jurisdiction of the EP. Yet on numerous occasions, the ROC has acted without permission from the EP, and has in fact intruded upon the EP's territory. In 1945, for example, it annexed the Autonomous Church of Ukraine on its own, and then again in 2000, it attempted to integrate the Church of Ukraine into its jurisdiction by relegating it to the status of self-governed Church. When Ukraine became an independent state in 1991, its Church asked the PM for autocephaly; refusing to give up its influence in the region, the PM declined the request and launched an ecclesiastical schism. After repeatedly communicating to the PM the need for a resolution, the EP now grants autocephaly to Ukraine both as a result of Moscow's failure to offer a solution over the past several decades and in order to return millions of previously "schismatic people to canonicity."

The ROC argues that the former schismatics "showed no repentance" and that the EP's recognition of them is invalid, but the Ukrainian schism is notably not a result of doctrinal disagreements, but of administrative ones. After being restored to their positions by the EP, for example, the Metropolitans Philaretos of Kyiv and Markarios have dissolved the schismatic "Patriarchate of Kyiv" and their "ecclesiastical factions" accordingly. There also exist a number of historical examples of the church's acceptance of former schismatics, most recently in 1945, when, after the resolution of the schism with the Bulgarian Church, Bulgarian clergy were accepted as part of a continuous Orthodox tradition and not made to be reordained. The ROC itself has recognized former schismatics, e.g. when it accepted the Russian Church Outside Russia (ROCOR).

The ROC's position that the EP does not have the canonical right to consider an appeal from other patriarchates, and that it therefore behaves like a Pope of the East (a "first without equals"), similarly has no basis in history or canon. Not only does the EP have jurisdiction over Ukraine, but the Fourth Ecumenical Council also granted the EP the privilege of hearing appeals from local churches, intervening decisively in their matters whenever necessary, and granting autocephaly. Ignoring ecclesiastical practice and tradition, the ROC asks that requests for Autocephaly be granted by consensus among all local churches through a Panorthodox Synod, and it has met, unsuccessfully and independently, with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in Amman for this purpose. At the same time, it has threatened churches that recognize Ukraine's independence with expulsion from communion, withdrawal of economic support, and illegal intrusion into their territories by founding parishes without the blessing of local Archpriests. By ceasing communion with those that recognize the Ukrainian Church's autocephaly, the ROC again threatens intrusion into the affairs of all churches under the EP's jurisdiction.