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***De Facto* or *De Iure*? Ukrainian Autocephaly as a Contentious Issue in Orthodoxy¹**

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the contentious issue of Ukrainian autocephaly in today's Orthodox Church. The topic is developed in four sections. Firstly, the method of proclaiming autocephaly in the Orthodox Church is presented. Then the history of establishing Ukrainian autocephaly is shown. The third section presents the problems related to the recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly in the Orthodox world. The final section sums up the results of the reflection and draws conclusions. They demonstrate that the Orthodox Church does not have unambiguous canonical regulations on the establishment of autocephaly, resulting in controversies surrounding Ukrainian autocephaly. The controversies consist especially of three theological-canonical issues: (1) the jurisdictional affiliation of the Kyiv Metropolitan See; (2) the manner of establishing Ukrainian autocephaly; and (3) the validity of the ordination of certain clergy of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Finally, it is concluded that a definitive solution to the contentious issue of Ukrainian autocephaly requires agreement at the level of the whole Orthodox Church.

Keywords: autocephaly, Orthodox Church, Ukrainian autocephaly, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Orthodox ecclesiology

In recent years, the question of Ukrainian autocephaly has aroused and continues to arouse great emotion and lively discussion in the Orthodox Church.² The divergence of positions on this issue

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

² The term “autocephaly” (from Greek *autos* – alone/self; *kephalē* – head) denotes the full autonomy and administrative independence of the local (national) Orthodox Church. The autocephalous Church remains at the same time united with the other Orthodox Churches by the unity of faith, sacraments and canonical principles. Cf. Bogolepov, “Conditions of Autocephaly,” 13–14; Znosko, *Prawosławne prawo kościelne*, I, 172–173.

mainly concerns the assessment of the “canonicity,” and consequently the recognition of the new ecclesiastical structures in the Orthodox world. This raises a fundamental question: does Ukrainian autocephaly constitute only a *de facto* reality existing in the Orthodox world, or can it be recognised as existing also *de iure*?

In view of the above question, this article will attempt to provide an overview of the key issues related to the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly. The presentation of the topic will consist of the following sections: (1) The way of establishing autocephaly in the Orthodox Church; (2) The establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly; (3) The main problems on the way of recognising Ukrainian autocephaly; and (4) Final conclusions.

1. The Way of Establishing Autocephaly in the Orthodox Church

It must be stated that there are no separate canons – either of the universal and local councils or of the Church Fathers – which define how autocephaly is to be established. These principles can only be worked out on the basis of canon law and the legal consciousness of the Church. However, this is not an easy task, and its realisation depends, on the one hand, on the interpretation of certain legal rulings and, on the other hand, on the will of the individuals or local Churches shaping these principles in the present time.³

This task is not made any easier due to the varied practice of obtaining autocephaly. Indeed, throughout history the Orthodox Churches have achieved the status of autocephaly in different ways. In the earliest centuries of Christianity, this was done through the provision of universal councils. Since convening universal councils became impossible, in the practice of the Church we encounter two methods of establishing autocephaly: by the mother Church to which the part of the Church was subject at the time of seeking independence, or by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which considers that it has special competence in this regard as the mother Church in the highest degree (*par excellence*). In both

³ Cf. Tofiluk, “Autokefalia,” 20.

cases, there is a need for the other autocephalous Churches to confirm such a decision.⁴ The resulting autocephaly is perceived by Constantinople (the Greek Churches) as a temporary solution (according to the principle of *oikonomia*) and should be ratified by the next All-Orthodox Council. In contrast, the other Churches consider that such a decision (*tomos*) on autocephaly has legal finality and does not require ratification by an All-Orthodox Council.⁵

In the process of seeking autocephaly, three fundamental elements were considered: 1. Motives for the establishment of autocephaly. Of fundamental importance are the motives such as: a) gaining independence by the state on the territory of which the part of the Church seeking autocephaly is located (e.g. the case of Bulgaria or Poland); b) territorial remoteness of the local Church striving for independence (this motive was used, among others, by the Churches of Russia and Serbia in their efforts to seek autocephaly); 2. The will and ability of the local Church seeking autocephaly to function independently, namely to have an independent authority and judiciary (at least four active bishops), a community of believers and a territory; 3. Legal acts related to its proclamation, performed by competent ecclesiastical authorities, among which the decision of the mother Church is essential.⁶

However, it should be observed that the mother Church was, as a rule, reluctant to grant the status of autocephaly to a Church under its jurisdiction. In practice, there was usually a unilateral declaration of independence, which was accompanied by the penalty of excommunication imposed by the mother Church. The situation was only normalised when the new autocephalous Church was formally recognised by the mother Church and other autocephalous Churches.⁷

⁴ Cf. Bogolepov, "Conditions of Autocephaly," 22.

⁵ Cf. Tofiluk, "Autokefalia," 20–21; Anapliotis, "Kirchenrechtliche Bestimmungen," 222–223.

⁶ Cf. Tofiluk, "Autokefalia," 18–20; Zyzykin, *Autokefalja*, 18–33; Kałużny, *Nowy sobór*, 261–264.

⁷ Cf. Bogolepov, "Conditions of Autocephaly," 35; Przekop, "Wschodni model," 208. Examples of such independence include the Churches in Russia and Romania. The Metropolis of Moscow became independent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate when

Taking into account the conflicts and disputes that the issue of the proclamation of autocephaly used to generate in the Orthodox Church, an attempt was made to reach a common position on the issue during the preparations of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church of 2016. Accordingly, a preliminary draft of the document *Autocephaly and the manner of its proclamation* was produced, in which agreement was reached on a number of important issues concerning the matter. Unfortunately, in the absence of full agreement on the content of the prepared draft, the topic of autocephaly was withdrawn from the list of topics submitted for consideration at the Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete (2016).⁸

2. The Establishment of Ukrainian Autocephaly

After the Ukrainian independence was declared in 1991, Metropolitan Philaret (Denysenko) convened the Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (1–3 November

the bishops of the Metropolis – without the consent of Constantinople – elected and seated Metropolitan Jonah (1448) on the See of Moscow. The autocephaly of the Moscow Metropolis was recognised by the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1589 and by the Council of Constantinople in 1590 (after more than 140 years). The Romanian Church arbitrarily became independent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1865. Its autocephaly status was recognised by Constantinople in 1925 (after 60 years). Cf. Kałużny, *Nowy sobór*, 265–266; Roberson, *Chrześcijańskie Kościoły*, 68–82.

⁸ Cf. “Decyzja Zwierzchników,” 7–9; “Komunikat Synaksy Zwierzchników.” The fifth 1993 draft document of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission provides for the following stages in the establishment of autocephaly: a) The Mother Church evaluates the request for autocephaly received from a dependent local Church. In the event of a positive evaluation, it directs an appropriate proposal on the matter to the Ecumenical Patriarchate; b) The Ecumenical Patriarchate informs the other local autocephalous Churches and seeks all-Orthodox approval on the matter; c) After the consent of the mother Church and the all-Orthodox approval, the autocephaly of the requesting Church is officially proclaimed by the publication of the Patriarchal *tomos*. In the course of the conciliar preparations, full agreement was not reached with regard to point three; c) concerning the competent entity for the proclamation of autocephaly and, more specifically, the signing of the *tomos* of autocephaly. Cf. Commission Interorthodoxe Préparatoire, “L’autocephalie,” 23–24; Kałużny, *Nowy sobór*, 367–372; Pańkowski, “Aktualny stan przygotowań,” 173.

1991), which asked the Patriarch of Moscow Alexy II to grant the Ukrainian Church full canonical independence (autocephaly).⁹ The Russian Church firmly rejected this request and demanded Metropolitan Philaret's resignation. Philaret initially agreed, but on his return to Kiev stated that he had done so under the pressure exerted on him in Moscow and refused to resign from his post. He also made a second request to Moscow in April 1992 for the autocephaly to be granted. This time, however, not all the bishops supported his petition, which led to a split in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Opponents of Philaret and autocephaly – with the support of the Moscow Patriarchate – held a Council in Kharkov on 27 May 1992, which removed Metropolitan Philaret from office and appointed Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan) in his place. These provisions were approved by the Council of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate, removing Philaret from the clerical state.¹⁰ Philaret did not recognise this decision and, in June 1992, convened a Council in Kiev at which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, independent of Moscow, was established. Philaret also came out with a request, this time addressed to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, to recognise the autocephaly of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople refused to recognise the Ukrainian autocephaly at that time.¹¹

Efforts to achieve full independence for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church gained momentum in 2014. The events in Maidan, the annexation of Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in eastern Ukraine led to a rise in anti-Russian sentiment and resentment towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, associated with hierarchical dependence on Moscow. A few days before the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete (2016), the Parliament and the President of Ukraine appealed

⁹ On earlier attempts to obtain autocephaly by the Kievan metropolis, see Blaza, "Proces autokefalicizacji," 18–19.

¹⁰ In 1997, by decision of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church, Philaret Denysenko was furthermore excommunicated and reduced to the secular state. Both of these decisions by Moscow were accepted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Cf. "Заявление Священного Синода," [15 октября 2018].

¹¹ Cf. Pawluczuk, *Ukraina*, 131–132; Jędraszczyk, "Cerkiew prawosławna," 193–195.

to the Patriarch of Constantinople to recognise the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The topic of autocephaly was not considered during the 2016 Cretan Council. However, it reappeared after the end of the Cretan Council. The situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church began to change radically when the request for autocephaly was submitted by the Supreme Council [Verkhovna Rada] of Ukraine in April 2018. This request was supported by the bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.¹²

This time, Constantinople's response was positive. The Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate during its meeting on 19–20th April 2018 decided to consider the issue of granting the status of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.¹³ On 7th September 2018, it sent two exarchs to Kiev to prepare the process of granting autocephaly. Constantinople's action encountered opposition from the Moscow Patriarchate. On 8th September 2018, the Russian Church issued a statement saying that the decision had been taken without agreement with the Russian side and considered it a violation of Church canons and interference in the internal affairs of its Church.¹⁴ Moreover, during a meeting of the Holy Synod on 14th September 2018 Moscow Patriarchate decided to suspend official contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.¹⁵

Key decisions on the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were taken at the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, held in Istanbul on 9–11th October 2018. First of all, Constantinople decided to revoke the ecclesiastical penalties imposed by the Moscow Patriarchate on the hierarchs of the two hitherto non-canonical Orthodox Churches, Philaret (Denysenko) and Makary (Maletych), thus legalising both Orthodox Churches of Ukraine not subordinate to Moscow. Moreover, the Ecumenical Patriarchate revoked the 1686 synodal act granting the Moscow

¹² Cf. Pawluczuk, *Ukraina*, 132–133; Jędraszczyk, “Cerkiew prawosławna,” 199–206; Kuczara, “Między Kijowem a Konstantynopolem,” 86–87.

¹³ Cf. “Communique of the Holy and Sacred Synod.”

¹⁴ Cf. “Заявление Священного Синода” [8 сентября 2018].

¹⁵ Cf. “Заявление Священного Синода” [14 сентября 2018].

Patriarchate the right to confer ordination (*chirotonia*) on the Metropolitan of Kiev. Thus, after more than 300 years, Ukraine was again officially recognised as a canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The “Announcement” also included the declaration of the renewal of the “stauropegion” in Kiev, that is a structure directly subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.¹⁶ These actions encountered a harsh reaction from the Moscow Patriarchate, which decided at the Holy Synod meeting on 15th October 2018 in Minsk to break Eucharistic unity with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.¹⁷

On 15th December 2018, the Unification Council of the Kyiv Orthodox Metropolis was held in the Cathedral of Divine Wisdom in Kiev. It was attended by representatives of all three Churches: all the bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (42) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (12), and 2 bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (Alexander Drabyenko and Simeon Shostackyj). The proceedings were presided over by Metropolitan Emanuel (Adamakis), the representative of Constantinople. At the Council, the United Orthodox Church of Ukraine was established. Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko) was elected as its head.¹⁸ On 24th December 2018, Patriarch Bartholomew informed all local Churches of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. On 6th January 2019, in Constantinople (Istanbul), Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko) received from the hands of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the official act (*tomos*) granting the autocephaly.¹⁹

This act formally closed the difficult process of Ukrainian Orthodoxy becoming independent. However, it did not close the discussion on the subject. Indeed, the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly has encountered varying reactions from the Orthodox Churches: Ukrainian autocephaly has not yet been recognised (in January 2023) by seven autocephalous Churches (Moscow, Antioch, Jerusalem,

¹⁶ Cf. “Announcement” [11th October 2018].

¹⁷ Cf. “Заявление Священного Синода” [15 октября 2018].

¹⁸ Cf. Moskałyk, “Autokefalia prawosławia,” 172–173; Olszański, “Historyczne zjednoczenie,” 1.

¹⁹ Cf. Kuczara, “Między Kijowem a Konstantynopolem,” 89; Moskałyk, “Autokefalia prawosławia,” 173–174.

Serbia, Poland, Albania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia); four autocephalous Churches (Constantinople, Alexandria, Greece, Cyprus) have recognised it; three autocephalous Churches (Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia) have not taken an official position on the issue.²⁰

3. The Problems on the Way of Recognising Ukrainian Autocephaly

In the debate concerning Ukrainian autocephaly, three closely related issues come to the fore: 1) the jurisdictional affiliation of the Kyiv metropolis; 2) the manner in which the Ukrainian autocephaly has been established (the canonicity of the actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople); and 3) the validity of the ordination of certain clergy of the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The first problem can be expressed as a question: is the former Kyiv metropolis within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate or the Moscow Patriarchate? In other words: which Church is the mother Church for Ukrainian Orthodoxy?

In response to the question, each Patriarchate states that the former Kiev Metropolis remains within its jurisdiction and that it is the mother Church for Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The discrepancy in the assessment of the jurisdictional dependence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is due to a different interpretation of the history of the Kiev metropolis and, more specifically, of the 1686 synodal act which placed the metropolis under the administration of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Russian Church believes that Constantinople handed over the Kiev metropolis to it forever. Until the beginning of the 20th century – as the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate emphasise – no one questioned this historical fact.²¹ As a consequence, the area of the former Kiev metropolis constitutes the canonical

²⁰ Cf. Kałużny, “Ukraińska autokefalia,” 202–209.

²¹ In this respect, reference is made to the statute of temporal limitations for claims, citing, *inter alia*, canon 17 of the Universal Council of Chalcedon (451), which sets out a 30-year appeal period for administrative or jurisdictional changes. Cf. Никофор (Киккотис), Современный украинский вопрос, 42–43.

territory of the Russian Church. Therefore, Constantinople's actions related to the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly are seen by Moscow as interference in the internal affairs of the Russian Church and a violation of its "canonical territory."²²

On the other hand, the Ecumenical Patriarchate maintains that the incorporation of the Kiev metropolis into the Moscow Patriarchate was done in a non-canonical manner (the arbitrary ordination of Metropolitan Gideon as Metropolitan of Kiev). In 1686, Constantinople recognised the validity of this ordination and, taking into account pastoral reasons and the difficult political situation in the region, consented to Moscow ordaining any subsequent Metropolitan of Kiev, who was to commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch and remain his exarch. This concession – as the Ecumenical Patriarchate emphasises – was made in accordance with ecclesiastical *oikonomia*. It was therefore temporary and did not imply a transfer of the right to the Kiev metropolis forever; Constantinople retained this right nonetheless.²³ For this reason, the Ecumenical Patriarchate considers that the principle of limitation of claims does not apply to the Kiev metropolis.²⁴ Its rights to the Kiev metropolis were invoked by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the context of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Poland in 1924.²⁵ This was recalled in early 1991 by Ecumenical Patriarch Dmitri

²² Cf. "Заявление Священного Синода" [14 сентября 2018]; "Заявление Священного Синода" [15 октября 2018]. On the position of the Moscow Patriarchate, see: Желтов, "Историко-канонические основания," 29–95.

²³ Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate, *The Ecumenical Throne*, 9–10; Getcha, "О українській автокефалії." On this subject, see also Tchentsova, "Une métropole," 351–352; Ченцова, "Синодальное решение," 93; Vetochnikov, "La «concession» de la métropole de Kiev," 780–784.

²⁴ The document of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, *The Ecumenical Throne and the Church of Ukraine*, further points out that the said canon 17 does not refer to the diocese as a whole, much less to the metropolis, but to the parishes located on the border of the diocese. Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate, *The Ecumenical Throne*, 15–16. A similar position on this issue is presented by Constantin Vetoshnikov: "The See of Kyiv"; Getcha, "О українській автокефалії."

²⁵ Cf. "Patriarszy i synodalny «Tomos»," 168–169. Accordingly, in a paper presented to the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on 3th November 1924, Kallinik, the Metropolitan of Kizyk, states: "The subordination of the Kiev

in a letter sent to Moscow Patriarch Alexy II, in which he stressed that he recognised the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church only within the borders of 1593.²⁶ On 11th October 2018, the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople revoked the 1686 act. The Kyiv Metropolis – as emphasised by the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – therefore constitutes the canonical territory of Constantinople and it can decide on the granting of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.²⁷

The position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate presented above is based on the most recent study of documents concerning the matter of the transition of the Kiev metropolis to Moscow jurisdiction. The works of Constantin Vetoshnikov, a professor at the Sorbonne and the University of Thessaloniki, and Vera Tchentsova, an academic in the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, are groundbreaking in this regard.²⁸ On the basis of their research, we can unequivocally conclude that Constantinople's decision of 1686 contained only permission to ordain metropolitans of Kiev; it did not imply the perennial transfer of full jurisdictional powers to the metropolis of Kiev, which remain unceasingly within the competence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.²⁹

Church was an absolutely non-canonical and invalid act. Even the passing of time did not legitimise this act, because, according to the general axiom of Roman law, also confirmed by the St. Canons, 'what is from the beginning uncanonical will not be validated even by the passing of time.'" "Historyczno-kanoniczny raport," 162.

²⁶ Cf. "Послание Святейшего Патриарха," 5.

²⁷ Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate, *The Ecumenical Throne*; Getcha, "O ukraińskiej autokefalii"; Hovorun, "The cause of Ukrainian autocephaly," 180–191; Blaza, "Proces autokefalizacji," 13–17, 21.

²⁸ Cf., among others, Vetochnikov, "La «concession» de la métropole de Kiev," 780–784; Tchentsova, "Une métropole," 305–370. The Constantinople document *The Ecumenical Throne and the Church of Ukraine* also points to the publication of a Russian philosopher and historian, Basil Lourié, who was the first to note that an analysis of the documents relating to the 1686 event does not warrant the thesis that the Kiev metropolis was handed over to Moscow. Cf. Лурье, Русское православие.

²⁹ Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate, *The Ecumenical Throne*, 15. These findings – as well as the Ecumenical Patriarchate's position on the matter – have been met with sharp criticism from representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. Cf. Желтов, "Историко-канонические основания," 29–95; "Комментарии к документу." In order to obtain decisive arguments in the ongoing discussion, the Moscow Patriarchate

This brings us to the second problem, which concerns the canonicity of certain actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople directly related to the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly. The Moscow Patriarchate and some Orthodox Churches raise objections in this respect. They refer specifically to the following issues: 1) the decision of Constantinople to revoke the ecclesiastical penalties imposed by the Moscow Patriarchate and to restore the “schismatic” bishops of Ukraine to the Church community; 2) the granting of autocephaly on the basis of the request of only a part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; and 3) the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly without the decision or prior consent of the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches.³⁰

The Ecumenical Patriarchate does not subscribe to these objections. Against the Russian side’s argument that excommunication can only be revoked by the entity that imposed it, or by an all-Orthodox council or an assembly of the heads of autocephalous churches, the representatives of Constantinople point primarily to the canonical prerogatives of the Patriarch of Constantinople, including the right to accept appeals. In doing so, they state that the bishops in question fell into schism not for dogmatic, but for disciplinary and political reasons.³¹

published a collection of documents (translated into Russian and annotated) on the history of the ‘reunification’ of the Kyiv metropolis with the Russian Church. Cf. *Воссоединение Киевской митрополии*. A comprehensive and convincing response to the objections raised by the Russian side was published by Constantin Vetroshnikov. Cf. Ветошников, “Ответ на аргументы.”

³⁰ Cf. “Заявление Священного Синода” [15 октября 2018]; “Святейший Патриарх Кирилл”; “Послание Предстоятеля”; “Заявление Синода Украинской Православной Церкви,” 14–15; “Communiqué of the Holy Assembly of Bishops”; “Komunikat Kancelarii”; Ławreszuk, “ПАКР і uznanie ukraińskiej autokefalii,” 13–17.

³¹ Cf. “Announcement” [11th October 2018]; Stephanos (Charalambides), “À propos de l’Église autocephale”; Tsetsis, “«Invasion»”; Хоменко, “Константинополь отменил.” In this regard, some note that the Kharkov Council (27th May 1992), at which Kyiv Metropolitan Philaret was deprived of his office and ordination to the priesthood, was held in violation of canonical norms (the Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church), as it was convened without consulting Philaret, then the head of the Ukrainian Church. Cf. Pawluczuk, “Kościół prawosławny,” 138.

They further note that Metropolitan Vladimir's (Sabodan) attempts at dialogue and rapprochement with the non-canonical Orthodox Churches in Ukraine were blocked by Moscow.³² An attempt to resolve the Ukrainian schism was also made by Philaret Denysenko. On 16th November 2017, he sent a letter to the Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, and all the bishops of the Russian Church, asking for forgiveness and to revoke the excommunication imposed on him in 1997. In response, the Council of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate (29th November – 2nd December 2017) limited itself to appointing a commission to consider the case. This was perceived by Philaret as a negative response or an indefinite postponement of the case. In this situation, he turned to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to resolve the case.³³

As for the second objection, it is noted that all the bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, including the Bishop of Chernivtsi and Bukovina Onuphry (Berezovsky), gathered at the Local Council of the Ukrainian Church in November 1991, supported the request for autocephaly addressed to the Patriarch of Moscow Alexy II.³⁴ Although the request later addressed to the Ecumenical Patriarch came from part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Bartholomew on 12th October 2018 sent a letter to the head of the Ukrainian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate inviting also Metropolitan Onuphry and

³² So, for example, the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Vladimir Sabodan – as Fr Kirill Hovorun maintains – decided at its meeting on 9th September 2009 to resume the work of the Commission for Dialogue with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and to set up a commission to explore the possibility of dialogue with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. However, this initiative was not accepted by Moscow. Cf. Hovorun, “Pastoral Care,” 43–44.

³³ Cf. Hovorun, “Pastoral Care,” 44–45. Philaret's letter ends with an explicit request for forgiveness. This fact is worth bearing in mind when assessing the charge put forward by some that Philaret's lack of repentance is a necessary element for his restoration to the community of the Church. With regard to this, see: Филарет (Денисенко), “Предстоятелю”; “Определение Освященного Архиерейского Собора.”

³⁴ Cf. “Определения Собора,” 3–4; Getcha, “O ukraińskiej autokefalii.”

the rest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Local Council of the Kyiv Orthodox Metropolis (15th December 2018).³⁵

In turn, with regard to the third cited objection, it is emphasised that the Patriarchate of Constantinople fully appreciates the importance of the consent of the other autocephalous Churches to Ukrainian autocephaly. However, it considers it an open question whether the consent should precede or follow the decision to grant autocephaly. Taking into account the particular situation of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, the lack of a definitive agreement on the matter at the all-Orthodox level and the conviction of its special prerogatives in the issue, Constantinople decided – referring to ecclesiastical *oikonomia* – on the second option. After the declaration of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew made simultaneous efforts for the new Church to be recognised in the Orthodox world.³⁶

Closely related to the canonical aspect of the issue is another problem, namely the issue of the validity of the ordinations conferred by excommunicated Ukrainian clergymen restored to the Church community by Patriarch Bartholomew. From the perspective of the Moscow Patriarchate, three specific issues are at stake: 1) the issue of the validity of the ordination of clergymen deprived of episcopal ordination by the decision of the Moscow Patriarchate and demoted to the role of monk or transferred to the secular state, including in particular Philaret Denysenko;³⁷ 2) the issue of the episcopal ordination of deacon Viktor Chekalin;³⁸ 3) the situation of clergymen

³⁵ Cf. Stephanos (Charalambides), “À propos de l’Église autocephale.”

³⁶ Cf. Getcha, “The Reasons.”

³⁷ Between 1992 and 2018 – standing at the head of the non-canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate – Metropolitan Philaret Denysenko (1929–) ordained many bishops, presbyters and deacons who today belong to the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. In 2009, Metropolitan Epiphanius was also ordained by Philaret.

³⁸ Cf. “Заявление Священного Синода” [15 октября 2018]; [Секретариат Синодальной библейско-богословской комиссии Русской Православной Церкви], “О недействительности хиротоний.” Viktor Chekalin (1952–) was ordained deacon in 1982 by Bishop Germanus (Moscow Patriarchate). In 1988, he was stripped of his diaconate and transferred to the lay state. According to Moscow, he was not ordained as a priest or bishop at all, and later only claimed to be a bishop

(including Bishops Aleksandr Drabynko and Simeon Shostatsky), ordained in the Russian Church, who were declared “schismatic clergy” by the Moscow Patriarchate after their transfer to the new autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine.³⁹

The last issue is the least controversial in Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Churches, including the Moscow Patriarchate, are in principle ready to recognise the validity of the ordination of “schismatic clergy” upon their return to the community of the Church.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, also on this issue, we encounter divergent positions in the Orthodox Church, which are largely due to different interpretations of certain canons or differences in the practice of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* and are expressed in different practices of receiving converts.⁴¹

In contrast, the first two situations raise serious objections in the Orthodox world. Indeed, the Moscow Patriarchate and some other Orthodox Churches (e.g., Serbia, Albania and Poland) insist that ordinations performed by persons who are excommunicated and deprived of ordination, including Metropolitan Philaret, are invalid and violate the continuity of apostolic succession.⁴²

In the assessment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, according to the decision on 11th October 2018, the consecrations given by

(Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church). Cf. ШУМИЛО, “Самозванный «епископ»,” 240–273. On the other hand, according to Kiev, Viktor Chekalin was to be ordained a bishop “in secret.” Cf. Горевой, “О хиротониях в УАПЦ.” It is worth noting that Metropolitan Makary Maletych also received consecration from the hierarchy of Chekalin.

³⁹ Cf. “Do the Sacraments.”

⁴⁰ Cf. “Do the Sacraments.” In the history of Orthodoxy, we find a number of examples of this approach to the question. Examples of this principle include the resolution of the schism in the Bulgarian Church in 1998, the restoration of canonical communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in 2007, and, more recently, the resolution of the Macedonian schism, which allowed for the establishment of the autocephaly of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which was recognised (25th August 2022) by the Moscow Patriarchate. Cf. “Журналы Священного Синода.”

⁴¹ Cf. Larchet, *Kościół*, 194–223; Kałużny, «*Oikonomia*» *kościelna*, 155–170.

⁴² Cf. “Послание Предстоятеля”; [Секретариат Синодалной библейско-богословской комиссии Русской Православной Церкви], “О недействительности хиротоний”; “Communique of the Holy Assembly of Bishops”; “Послание Архиепископа Анастасия”; “Komunikat Kancelarii.”

Ukrainian bishops while they belonged to non-canonical Churches are valid. Hence, there is no need to impart them again or repeat other sacraments celebrated by the said clergy.⁴³ The Ecumenical Patriarchate does not give any further justification for its ruling. Nevertheless, the published communiqué and the explanations by the representatives of Constantinople draw attention to the fact that the Russian Church – as mentioned above – did not have sufficient reasons to impose ecclesiastical penalties (deprivation of ordination) on Metropolitan Philaret. This may suggest that the Ecumenical Patriarchate considered these punishments simply invalid. Adopting such a perspective – whatever its assessment – would give grounds for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to view Philaret's situation in a manner similar to all other cases of "schismatic clergy." And if one accepts the credibility of Kiev's assertions, the same would apply to the case of Viktor Chekalin.⁴⁴

In fact, in Constantinople's approach to this issue, all three situations mentioned are treated similarly and reduced to the first one, i.e. "schismatic clergy," whose ordination can be recognised as valid by appealing to the principle of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* upon their return to the community of the Church. In their statements on the subject, representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate emphasize that the problem of the validity of the sacrament of ordination of Ukrainian clergy has been resolved in a manner analogous to the recognition of the baptism of converts to Orthodoxy. With regard to this, they also point to the analogy of the "Ukrainian question" with the fourth-century Meletian schism, the schism of the Bulgarian Church (1872–1945), or the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, which united with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007.⁴⁵

Reservations to this interpretation are formulated, among others, by Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, head of the Orthodox Church of Albania. He points out the different nature of the Ukrainian

⁴³ Cf. "Announcement" [11th October 2018]; Stephanos (Charalambides), "À propos de l'Église autocephale."

⁴⁴ Cf. "Announcement" [11th October 2018]; Фидас, "Синодальный акт 1686."

⁴⁵ Cf. "Ответ Вселенского патриарха"; Stephanos (Charalambides), "À propos de l'Église autocephale."

question in relation to the cases indicated by Constantinople. He explains that the dissolution of the Meletian schism was accompanied by specific stages, namely: a) repentance, b) the imposition of hands by the canonical bishop, c) prayer, d) reconciliation. He emphasises that the Meletian schism was not cured by the decision of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, under whose jurisdiction Meletios remained, but by the decision of the Council of Nicea (325). Anastasios also sees no analogy between the Ukrainian schism and the Bulgarian schism and the case of the Orthodox Church outside the Russian Borders.⁴⁶ Both the Russian Church and other Churches presenting a negative position on Ukrainian autocephaly do not see the possibility of recognising the ordination cases in question (Philaret and Chekalin) by appealing to the principle of ecclesiastical *oikonomia*.⁴⁷ They also question the possibility of referring in this matter to the teaching developed in Roman Catholic theology on the “indelible mark” (*character indelebilis*) left in the soul of an ordained priest, which is not generally accepted in the Orthodox Church.⁴⁸

4. Final Conclusions

This article has attempted to provide an insight into the complex and controversial issue of Ukrainian autocephaly in the Orthodox Church. The research allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. First of all, it should be observed that Orthodoxy does not have common, universally accepted canonical regulations on the way

⁴⁶ Cf. “Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana’s 2nd Reply”; Стойчев, “Вопрос о признании,” 35–40. It is uncontentious that Patriarch Bartholomew’s way of dealing with the process of resolving the “Ukrainian question” undoubtedly presents itself differently from the situations cited above. However, when it comes to the issue of the validity of the ordination of “schismatic clergy” returning to the community of the Church, one can see some similarities at least between the Bulgarian schism and the “Ukrainian question.” Cf. Zzyzkin, *Autokefalja*, 35–36; Popok, “Mała kwestia wschodnia,” 82–86.

⁴⁷ Cf. [Секретариат Синодалной библейско-богословской комиссии Русской Православной Церкви], “О недействительности хиротоний”; “Послание Архиепископа Анастасия.”

⁴⁸ Cf. “New «attack» by the Church”; Felmy, *Współczesna teologia*, 274.

autocephaly should be established. In this situation, any attempt to achieve full canonical independence by a given local Church gives rise to tensions and conflicts within the Orthodox Church. The current dispute within the Orthodox Church, especially between Constantinople and Moscow, over Ukrainian autocephaly, also fits into this context. All this points to the urgent need to work out regulations at the all-Orthodox level on how autocephaly is to be proclaimed.

2. The first contentious issue related to Ukrainian autocephaly concerns the interpretation of the history of the former Kievan metropolis, which is important for establishing the jurisdictional affiliation of the Ukrainian Church. The historical, canonical and philological research carried out in recent years on the documents concerning the 1686 decision – as stated above – resolve this issue in favour of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. However, the results of these studies are not accepted by the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate. In order to reach a full agreement on Ukrainian autocephaly, a constructive dialogue is therefore necessary to definitively clarify the remaining discrepancies on this issue.
3. The second problem results from discrepancies in the assessment of certain actions of the Ecumenical Patriarch related to the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly. The objections raised in relation to this issue largely boil down to an understanding of the supreme authority in the Church or the role of Constantinople in the Orthodox world, and they are closely linked to a different interpretation of certain canonical rulings. The Patriarchate of Constantinople believes that its role is not only limited to the “primacy of worship,” but also implies certain rights and administrative powers in relation to other Orthodox Churches, including the right to make the final judgement on appeals. As a result, Constantinople rejects the model of “absolute autocephaly,” in which there would be no place for the realisation of its special role in Orthodoxy. The Moscow Patriarchate, on the other hand, maintains that the primacy of Constantinople is purely honourable, and no administrative powers derive from it. In this way, the Russian Church emphasises

the equality of all Orthodox Churches and favours a model of “absolute autocephaly.”⁴⁹

4. The greatest difficulty on the road to the recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly – as noted above – is the issue of the validity of the ordinations performed by some Ukrainian clergy. This is also due to the existing divergence of views within the Orthodox Church on the boundaries of the Church, the validity of sacraments administered in schism and the possibility of their recognition according to *oikonomia* upon conversion to Orthodoxy. Despite the differing views on this issue, it should be noted that in the history of the Orthodox Church we find cases of the application of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* to schismatics who were once canonically ordained. However, Orthodoxy excludes recognizing as “valid” a sacrament that was never administered.⁵⁰
5. It is beyond question that the most appropriate forum for resolving the issues related to the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly remains the All-Orthodox Council or the assembly of the heads (*synaxis*) of autocephalous Orthodox Churches. However, in order for such a meeting to produce the expected results, the willingness (readiness) of all autocephalous Orthodox Churches to take part in a constructive dialogue on this topic is essential. Unfortunately, the current debate around Ukrainian autocephaly seems to be dominated by a very polemical, often extreme, and aggressive approach to the problem under examination, which leaves little room for genuine dialogue. Such dialogue is certainly not served by the “retaliatory” measures taken by the Moscow Patriarchate, such as the rupture of the Eucharistic community with the Ecumenical Patriarchate or the establishment of a rival ecclesiastical structure in the canonical area of the Patriarchate of Alexandria.⁵¹ Such a dialogue seems to be explicitly ruled out by the categorical declarations by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow that the Russian Church

⁴⁹ Cf. Шишков, “Спорные экклезиологические вопросы,” 246–247; Kałużny, *Nowy sobór*, 269.

⁵⁰ Cf. [Секретариат Синодалной библейско-богословской комиссии Русской Православной Церкви], “О недействительности хиротоний.”

⁵¹ Cf. Moskałyk, “Od ortodoksyjnej do «neokolonialnej» eklezjologii,” 170–175.

will never agree to the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.⁵²

6. At the same time, such declarations and actions indicate that the dispute over the Ukrainian autocephaly is not only about the perception of canons or subtleties of Orthodox theology, but there are also socio-political factors at play here, which makes dialogue on this issue even more difficult.⁵³ Hence, the Ecumenical Patriarch harbours serious doubts about the possibility of reaching a quick agreement on the “Ukrainian question” at the all-Orthodox level and remains cautious about calls for a gathering to resolve this dispute.⁵⁴

In conclusion, it must be said that the issue of autocephaly encapsulates a number of problems that have not yet been resolved at the level of Orthodoxy as a whole. All this makes the resolution of the contentious issue of Ukrainian autocephaly very difficult. The research has made it apparent that there is no simple and unambiguous answer to many of the specific questions in this matter. And this results in the differing assessment in the Orthodox world of the canonicity of Ukrainian autocephaly. It is to be hoped that, despite the various difficulties, the Orthodox Churches will enter into a genuine dialogue in order to work out regulations on the manner of proclaiming autocephaly at the level of the whole Orthodoxy and to formulate a common position on the “Ukrainian question.”

⁵² Cf. “Патриарх Кирилл.”

⁵³ This issue is beyond the scope of this article and could be the subject of a separate study. At this point, it should only be noted that the political factor comes to the fore in the approach of both Moscow and Kiev to the issue of Ukrainian autocephaly. From the perspective of the Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian autocephaly violates the vision of “Russian unity” and, more specifically, the concept of a “Russian world” (*Russkiy mir*) of which Ukraine is an integral part. For a large part of Ukrainian society, the establishment of autocephaly means the reduction of Russia’s political influence in Ukraine and constitutes an important element in the construction of a state-national identity. Cf. Hovorun, “Autocephaly,” 273–274, 277.

⁵⁴ Cf. “Патриарх Варфоломей отказался.”

***De facto* czy *de iure*? Ukraińska autokefalia jako kwestia sporna w prawosławiu**

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest prezentacja spornej w dzisiejszym prawosławiu kwestii ukraińskiej autokefalii. Temat został rozwinięty w czterech częściach. Na początku przedstawiono sposób ogłaszania autokefalii w prawosławiu. Następnie ukazano historię ustanowienia ukraińskiej autokefalii. W trzeciej części zaprezentowano problemy związane z uznaniem ukraińskiej autokefalii w świecie prawosławnym. W końcowej części zestawiono wyniki refleksji i sformułowano wnioski. Wynika z nich, że prawosławie nie posiada jednoznacznych regulacji kanonicznych co do ustanawiania autokefalii i z tym łączą się kontrowersje wokół ukraińskiej autokefalii. Składają się na nie zwłaszcza trzy kwestie teologiczno-kanoniczne: 1) przynależność jurysdykcyjna metropolii kijowskiej; 2) sposób ustanowienia ukraińskiej autokefalii; 3) ważności święceń sprawowanych przez niektórych duchownych nowego Kościoła Prawosławnego Ukrainy. Ostatecznie stwierdzić należy, że definitywne rozwiązanie spornej kwestii ukraińskiej autokefalii wymaga porozumienia na poziomie całego prawosławia.

Słowa kluczowe: autokefalia, Kościół prawosławny, ukraińska autokefalia, Kościół Prawosławny Ukrainy, eklezjologia prawosławna

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