



**УКРАЇНСЬКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА В КАНАДІ
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CANADA
L'ÉGLISE ORTHODOXE UKRAINIENNE DU CANADA**

9 St. John's Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2W 1G8
Tel. (204) 586-3093 (204) 582-8709 Fax. (204) 582-5241
web site: www.uocc.ca e-mail: consistory@uocc.ca

**TO THE CLERGY AND FAITHFUL OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX
CHURCH OF CANADA ON THE PRESENCE OF THE
HOLY RELICS OF GREAT KNYAZ' VOLODYMYR OF KYIV
IN CANADA**

Slava Isusu Khrystu!

Reverend Fathers, Venerable Monastics, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We pray that Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ blesses all of you with good health, wisdom and understanding during these trying times.

Recently we received a letter from the Archdiocese of Canada, Orthodox Church in America with the offer to make available to us the Relics of the Holy Great Knyaz' Volodymyr of Kyiv, that have been in Canada for some weeks.

We have chosen to communicate in this form so that our Clergy, Faithful and all concerned, may be thus informed about the reasons as to why the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada is unable to accept this offer.

The access to Holy Relics is an occasion to deepen one's faith through reflection, prayer and veneration of those who have manifested great service to God and His people. It ought to be a time when the Clergy and Faithful draw nearer to each other and see the "image and likeness" of Jesus Christ. However this most recent arrival of sacred objects from Ukraine, as was the case on previous such occasions, causes concern and divisiveness in our Church.

The core of the problem is that we are being offered sacred objects from our spiritual and ancestral homeland, Ukraine, for veneration by those who have historically been oppressors of the Ukrainian Nation and the Ukrainian Church. This has been the case particularly since the Treaty of Pereyaslav (1654) and the un-canonical incorporation of the Metropolia of Kyiv into the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686.

His All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew, in one of his addresses during his visit to Ukraine in 2008, spoke of "the eminent among the daughter Churches, namely the Church of Ukraine, which was under the Ecumenical Patriarchate's canonical jurisdiction for seven centuries, that is, from the Baptism of the Grand Duchy of Kiev (original transliteration - +Y) 988 until her annexation under Peter the Great (1687) to the Russian State." Further on, he said: "[A]fter Ukraine's annexation to Russia and

under the pressure of Peter the Great, the Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysios IV judged as necessary for the circumstances of that time the ecclesiastical subordination of the Church of Ukraine to the Patriarchate of Moscow (1687) lest the troubles of the pious Ukrainian people worsen under the Orthodox political leadership – even though the Ukrainian Hierarchy opposed strongly and unanimously that decision”.

Our historical memory of the relationship with the Tsarist and Soviet regimes and the Russian Orthodox Church includes political enslavement, russification, execution, deportation, ethnic cleansing, various famines, including the Great Famine, the Holodomor-Genocide of 1932-33, repression of Ukrainian ecclesiastical traditions and numerous bans on Ukrainian-language religious and secular publications.

The present Russian State and the Moscow Patriarchate have had 19 years, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to disassociate themselves from the policy of persecution and repression of Ukraine by the Tsarist and Soviet regimes and to propose, not only to the Ukrainian State and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but to all the repressed peoples of the former Soviet Union, a new relationship of normal, dignified and respectful neighbourliness. The Moscow Patriarchate should have acknowledged the transfer of the Church of Ukraine (1686) into its jurisdiction as uncanonical and, together with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, cooperated to recognize the Ukrainian Church as an Autocephalous Church in a sovereign state. In his address in Ukraine His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew stated: “[T]he Mother Church concurred with the demand of the governments of the newly established states of the Orthodox people of the Balkan peninsula regarding the autocephaly of those Churches that were taken from her canonical jurisdiction, namely the Church of Greece (1850), the Church of Serbia (1831), the Church of Bulgaria (1945), and the Church of Albania (1937), for the sake of their national coherence”. We await such a request for recognition of an Autocephalous Church by some future Government of Ukraine, a sentiment expressed in the resolutions of nearly every Sobor of our Church since the fall of the Soviet Empire.

What we see instead is the absurd attempt to re-create the old Russian Empire through the determined and consistent propagation of a delusional and misguided ideology of a “Russkiy mir” or “Russian World”. It is not for us!

In light of this, how could we not view with suspicion and scepticism any proposal either directly from the Moscow Patriarchate or through its affiliate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), as anything other than an attempt to pull the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada into its sphere of influence or to falsely represent that such is the case, and thereby create or exacerbate divisions among us?

Unfortunately, the Holy Relics are accompanied with supporting literature such as liturgical texts that reference Russia and an informational article, entitled, “Equal of the Apostles Great Prince St. Vladimir, in Holy Baptism Basil, the Enlightener of the Russian Land Commemorated on July 15”, written from a pro-Moscow, Tsarist and Soviet historical point of view. Its intention seems to be to give the impression that the historical personages and events presented there bear a direct relationship to present-day “Russia” – a term co-opted for the Grand Duchy of Muscovy by Tsar Peter I of Moscow following the Battle of Poltava in 1709, in order to usurp for the Moscow Empire

that he was building, the history and legacy of Kyivan-Rus'. Even the names – Vladimir, Kiev, Olga, Gleb, Chernigov, Belgorod, Pecheneg, Dniepr - are transliterated from the Russian and not from the Ukrainian language, which thankfully has been the official language of sovereign Ukraine for 19 years. Furthermore the article speaks "of the Russian Church, down to the last of the Rurikovich, Tsar Theodore Ioannovich, under whom (in 1589) the Russian Orthodox Church became the fifth independent Patriarchate in the diptychs of Orthodox Autocephalous Churches". This clearly refers to the Church of present-day Russia with its centre in Moscow and not the Church of Kyivan-Rus' established by Great Knyaz' Volodymyr in Kyiv, capital of Ukraine, which was annexed by the Church of Moscow in 1686. Our historians are invited to analyze and comment on the accompanying article about Great Knyaz' Volodymyr.

We do indeed revere the memory of the Holy Great Knyaz' Volodymyr of Kyiv, the Baptizer of our people, and would not impede the veneration of his Relics by anyone, wherever they may be presented for their reverent attention. However, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada will not agree to have its name associated with the propagation of tendentious interpretations of the history of the peoples of Ukraine and Russia, nor to collaborate with those propagating political ideologies and ecclesiastical projects, which are detrimental to the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian State and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

This letter is intended to inform our Clergy and Faithful, and all concerned, as to the sensitivities awakened by this latest proposal. We hope and are confident that it will be accepted in that spirit.

With love in Christ and
Hierarchical blessing,

+YURIJ, Archbishop of Winnipeg and the Central Eparchy
Metropolitan of Canada

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