

**Message from His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
to the Devout Ukrainian People
on the Occasion of the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Kyivan
Rus'**

Your Excellencies, the political and ecclesiastical leaders of the Orthodox people of Ukraine, beloved and precious Orthodox Ukrainian faithful,

The Holy Mother and Great Church of Christ, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, learned with great joy about your joint decision regarding the celebration of another milestone, the 1025th anniversary since the collective baptism of your predecessors. For, indeed, the acceptance of the Christian faith by the people in the region of Ukraine constituted a supreme event in its history, through which it was grafted into the body of Christ, the Church, and entered into the community of Christian Churches of Europe.

In recollecting this event, it is crucial for us to call to mind the emissaries of St. Volodymyr, who came to know God's glory through the man-made Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, as well as the missionary evangelists of the Orthodox faith from Constantinople and enlighteners of the Slavs, Saints Cyril and Methodius, and the educational and cultural service through preaching, teaching, sanctity and the translation of many liturgical, ecclesiastical and other books into the Slavic language. Thanks to their work, the transmission of the boundless Orthodox treasure was realized from Constantinople to the entire Slavic world, especially in Ukraine.

At the same time, the Mother Church of Constantinople – through its ongoing emissaries under its jurisdictional and pastoral care until the 17th century, by sending illumined Hierarchs and various individual clergy and lay representatives with intellectual, scientific and artistic skills – contributed in a unique and universally professed service and knowledge, a spiritual and wider service, for the organization of its church life, the construction of many sacred temples, their iconography, and the cultivation of an Orthodox ethos, also providing through the centuries for the unity of the Ukrainian people and their conscious Orthodox identity, resulting in the fact that Kyiv became the spiritual center of Christianity in this wider region of Eastern Europe.

Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate contributed to the progress of your Church and your Nation, while the Christian faith improved the spiritual and social life of your People, offering very generously to its development and advancement. We are delighted that this great contribution of the Christian faith to the progress of your country is rightfully recognized.

Following the Christianization of your land, the Ukrainian Nation has raised numerous Saints of international reputation and recognition, who constantly pray for the people of Ukraine and the whole world, attracting the grace and blessing of God, while averting trouble and affliction through the ages. The Saints of each place are its genuine protectors, while their prayers are greatly efficient, especially when individuals and peoples invoke their assistance.

Today's people are often distracted by secular criteria, judging the power of nations on the basis of economic data or other factors of worldly power. However, in this way, **they overlook the power of God, which the Saints realize on behalf of the faithful.** God's strength is often invisible, coming as a beneficent breath or gentle breeze, which is precisely why it is not perceived by those living amid the noise of contemporary events and preoccupation, although it surely leads to the Resurrection.

It is, then, admirable and exemplary that your nation has decided in unison with its civil and church leaders to celebrate this anniversary of the Christianization of its predecessors, which demonstrates the significance that you attribute to the Christian faith and the Orthodox Church as integral factors, which preserve the unity of the people as well as reflective of the sources from which it always drew its most noble and creative inspiration. The great importance, which all of you give to this spiritual event, also proves the awareness of the need to return to these sources, as witnessed in any case eloquently by the entire ecclesiastical renewal in Ukraine.

Indeed, if in the past everything possible was done in order to forget the anachronistic "ghost" of religion, those who remained faithful to the Ukrainian soil – nourished by the ascetic sweat and tears together with the blood of the martyrs during difficult times for the Church – demonstrated that the Christian faith is strong and continues to exist today thanks to their sacrifices, winning over the hearts of the people in both the political and intellectual sphere. The Church follows its Leader, who came as victor in order to be victorious. (*See Rev. 6:2*) It does not defend itself anachronistically, but rather speaks directly to the soul, revealing the reality of God's presence and His kingdom, in accordance with the sacred truth that "the kingdom of God is within us." (*Luke 17:21*)

The Founder of the Church and Saviour of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, passionately desired and continues to desire that all who believe in Him "may be one." (*John 17:11*) In our age, when differences of opinion divide people, it is very timely for us to remember that we are all called to unity and that differences of opinion should not lead to division, but instead to an emphatic and conscious effort for the unity of all people. It is only through unity that we can encounter the problems and provocations of history. Of course, it is very difficult to achieve concord of opinion in all matters, but the inevitable difference of opinion on various matters **should never lead to deep division**; instead, those with differing opinions must come to an agreement always based on the criterion of **the benefit of the people and the truth.**

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is saddened and concerned for the existing and emerging divisions in the field of Orthodox Ukraine. We believe, endeavour and labour, in many and various ways as well as through all spiritual and ecclesiastical means and methods available to us, aiming at transcending differences through love and dialogue, so that destructive division may desist inasmuch as it is never in agreement with the Lord's will. It is the prayer and desire of us all that there will be in this blessed Land one flock under our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who unites all things divided and directs everything in history.

The true unity of a people can be achieved through the Church, but only when we do not treat it as an individual, nationalistic or ethnic instrument foreign to its spiritual goals, but rather as a divine-human institution, which has as its sole purpose the deification and salvation of all people in Christ Jesus. When we reduce the Church to a place for the fulfillment of individual interests and nationalistic expectations, then we deprive it of its spiritual purpose, secularize and disorientate it. The Church is an icon of the salvific presence of Christ in the world for all time until the end of the ages, and all the Ukrainian Orthodox faithful are members of the same body.

The ultimate goal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is for every believer to experience the unity of all human nature in Christ, irrespective of ethnic difference between Greek and non-Greek, slave or freeman, where “Christ is all in all.” (*Col. 3:11*) To the Mother Church of Constantinople belong faithful of diverse ethnicities, languages, regional traditions, peoples and races, all with the aim of experiencing in one body and “in the same place” the presence of God. A characteristic example of the unifying, transnational and supra-ethnic role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the world is again the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, peers of the Apostles, who did not impose the Greek language and Byzantine civilization on the Slavs, but rather respected their linguistic and racial specificity, labouring to create a superb, new and united Christian Slavic civilization.

In this way, the Ecumenical Patriarchate embraces the *oikoumene* with the “*eschata*” as its vision; it bears the truth of the living body of Christ as an ecumenical treasure; and it constitutes an eschatological community on a journey, praying to the Lord: “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as in heaven” (*Matt. 6:10*) and awaiting “a new earth and a new heaven.” This spirit and witness of the Ecumenical Patriarchate preserves unity within a “limited” diversity, assuming various ethnic forms and respecting local elements. Without losing sight of the thread of the common Orthodox tradition, it sees upon the particular expressions of the people in the light of the age to come.

Consequently, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine can and must constitute a tangible sign of harmonious coexistence for those believing in an Orthodox manner and being Orthodox Christians in the body of Christ. Every ethnic distinction, competition and division is foreign to the ecumenical spirit of the Church. We pray, then, and believe that the people of Ukraine will be united through their common faith, as well as through respect for their origins, identity, ethnic conscience and linguistic particularity.

The Mother Church shares your joy on the 1025th anniversary since the Christianization of your predecessors and wholeheartedly prays that you will advance more deeply in the Christian faith and the virtue of unity. This spiritual progress will also bring about a corresponding general progress for the Ukrainian people because, without a doubt, the disturbance of moral order precedes any political or financial crisis. Thus, a society that wishes to avoid financial crisis must remain stable from a moral perspective and respect the moral codes.

We are convinced that the beloved people of Ukraine, from the highest leader to the last citizen, accept the need for ethical uprightness in individual and social life. We fervently pray that the Lord will bless you all and grant you every gift, both earthly and heavenly.

Since we were unable to attend personally in order to share with you these celebrations, through our Patriarchal Delegation, we bless from this Sacred Center of Orthodoxy all the efforts of the local Church, the State and Ukrainians throughout the world so that you may transcend the problems and achieve the unity desired by and demanded of all. Moreover, we assure you that, as Ecumenical Patriarchate and your Mother Church, we shall continue our efforts for the unity and prosperity of the Orthodox people in their majority in cooperation with the State, our sister Church of Moscow, the local ecclesiastical leadership there, and with all capable persons, in order to reach this sacred goal.

Beloved children of the Lord in Ukraine,

The light of Christ has enlightened you. Stay in the light. Avoid divisions. Pursue unity in truth, which is Christ. And in His light, you shall see light, just as the countenance of Ukraine is bright and a united Orthodoxy must shine brightly “for all in its house to see.”

May the God of mercy and all consolation save and bless Ukraine, Orthodoxy and its people. Amen.

Your beloved brother in Christ
and fervent supplicant before God,

† Bartholomew of Constantinople

July 28, 2013