



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

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REMEMBERING METROPOLITAN MEFODIY

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On Saturday, January 17, 2015, I had the pleasure of meeting with Metropolitan Mefodiy, primate of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The Autocephalous Church is one of Ukraine's two sovereign Orthodox Churches representing the spirituality in an autonomous national Ukraine. We discussed the situation in Ukraine, the interest in dialogue between the three Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, and the possibility of recognizing a historic Kyivan Patriarchate.

As Head of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church worldwide, Mefodiy is Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine. Since his elevation, he has worked towards global visibility for the Church. He has fostered continued positive relations with the Ukrainian government and other religious communities. When I asked whether it is a possibility that the three Churches merge in the future, Metropolitan Mefodiy responded that he had previously discussed unifying the Autocephalous Church with the Kyivan Patriarchate in 2005, and that his Church, today, is still open to the idea. In the 2005 discussions to merge the two Churches, the negotiation committee decided that Filaret would send 200 delegates and the Autocephalous Church 100. This seemed fair given the size of both Churches, but some Autocephalous Church leaders believe that the Kyivan Patriarchate would absorb the Autocephalous Church and impose its views. The Autocephalous Church proposed the election of a hierarch allowing both communities to present various candidates, but Filaret insisted that the election would be between him and Mefodiy only. Subsequently, Metropolitan Mefodiy stated that he does not wish to be the head of the new Church.

If a new national Ukrainian Orthodox Church were to be formed, it must be recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople. At a convention attended by all three Churches, clergy will nominate and determine a new Church head after it is agreed that a new unified Church is to be established. The Metropolitan added the convention's objective is to unite the Churches and to only be recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch, currently Bartholomew. Filaret's self-declared status might complicate matters, as he was deprived of his official priestly powers when he left the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1992 to form the (uncanonical) Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate. Should he win the leadership,

these powers could be reinstated by a Synod of Bishops upon the new Church's entrance into the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Beginning in 1992, Filaret started venturing to eliminate the Autocephalous Church and acquire for the Kyivan Patriarchate its own autocephalous status. There can only be one autocephalous Church recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch in each state.

Along with Patriarch Filaret, Metropolitan Mefodiy supported Viktor Yushchenko throughout the Orange Revolution because of his pro-Ukraine stance and his promotion of religious pluralism and inclusivity. Unlike Yushchenko, his 2004 opponent for the office of president, Viktor Yanukovych, previously exhibited pro-Russian attitudes publically.

As a Ukrainian national, Metropolitan Mefodiy, Born March 11, 1949, at Kopychyntsi, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR), has been staunchly pro-Ukrainian throughout the ongoing crisis and publically links himself to the idea of an autonomous and national Ukraine, distinct from Russia. He supports the idea of recognizing a historic Kyivan Patriarchate based on the legacy of the conversion of Kyivan-Rus' in 988. He is a graduate of the Moscow Theological Academy in Zagorsk. In 1981, he became a priest and was a part of the Lviv and Ternopil diocese of the Ukrainian Exarchate - Moscow Patriarchate. In 1990, he joined the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Because of the action, there followed a decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate banning him from undertaking any priestly duties and activities in the jurisdiction of Lviv and Ternopil. He was later excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church. Between 1995 and 1998, he was the Bishop of Khmelnytsk and Kamenets-Podilsk and Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchy. In 1998, he rejoined the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. This church was resurrected at the end of the Soviet period by Metropolitan Ioann (Bodnarchuk) and Bishop Vikentiy (Chekalin). On October 16, 2000, Mefodiy was elected Primate of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and successor of Patriarch Dymytriy (Yarema). Through his positions in both the Autocephalous Church and the Kyivan Patriarchate, Mefodiy has displayed his commitment to a Ukrainian spirituality as being separate from the influence of Moscow.