



STATEMENT OF HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN TIKHON ON HIS TRIP TO CONSTANTINOPLE

March 23, 2016
No. 03/016

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

I have just returned from a visit to Constantinople, where I was invited to concelebrate with His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, for the Feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy at the Ecumenical Patriarchate. One of my central responsibilities as Primate is to represent the Orthodox Church in America in its relations with other Orthodox Churches. This most recent trip is the latest in a series of official visits I have undertaken since my election as Metropolitan, including visits to the Churches of Russia, Georgia and Finland.

A concelebration by the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America with the Ecumenical Patriarch has historically never taken place and was made difficult primarily because of the differing understandings of autocephaly, and its granting, held by our respective Churches. Those different understandings remain, but since 2009, the new context of the Assemblies of Bishops has opened up opportunities for renewed dialogue about Orthodox unity in North America, which is a core commitment of the Orthodox Church in America and central to our vision for North American Orthodoxy.

The Eucharistic communion and concelebration on the Sunday of Orthodoxy showed visibly and publicly the often-expressed conviction of His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, that the Orthodox Church in America, her bishops, clergy, and people are included in the family of canonical Orthodox Churches, while at the same time maintaining the position that the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America is not recognized.

The Russian Orthodox Church, together with the Churches of Georgia, Bulgaria, Poland, and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, affirm and recognize the autocephaly of our Church.

Since the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America is not universally recognized, our Church has not been invited to the Inter-Orthodox conferences preparing for the Great and Holy Synod. We are not invited to the Great and Holy Synod itself. It is our hope and expectation that the Orthodox Churches will find an appropriate way to include our Church in the inter-Orthodox process in the future.

The Orthodox Church in America has maintained a consistent position on the subject of canonical unity in North America from the time of the Tomos [the official decree] of Autocephaly granted in 1970 by the Russian Orthodox Church, whose desire was to work towards "the normalization of relations among the various ecclesiastical jurisdictions in America," with the hope that the granting of autocephaly "might serve the good of the Orthodox Church in America and the glory of God." At the same time, we are called to "abide in brotherly relations with all the Orthodox Churches and their Primates as well as with their bishops, clergy and pious flocks, who are in America and who for the time being preserve their de facto existing canonical and jurisdictional dependence on their national Churches and their Primates."

This most recent visit, at the invitation of His All-Holiness, was an opportunity to express our brotherly love and good relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, while nevertheless humbly remaining steadfast in our vision for Orthodoxy in North America. In this, we are maintaining the ecclesiastical balance which is expressed by the conciliar nature of

the Orthodox Church which, in the words of His All-Holiness, "recognizes only one authority: the Council of her canonical hierarchs. Beyond a conciliar decision, the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy is not possible. The Church's dogmas and holy canons bear the seal of conciliarity. Orthodoxy is the conciliar Church."

I ask for the prayers of all the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America for all the Orthodox Primates and their Churches, together with their bishops, clergy and faithful in North America, so that we may fulfill the words of the Lord's prayer: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" [John 17:21].

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Tikhon", preceded by a small cross symbol.

†Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada