

What is the Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church

On October 24, 2019, the Ministry of Justice of Latvia registered the legal entity “Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople” (the administration of the Patriarchate itself has not yet reacted to this event). The LOAC has existed since the early 1990s, but it managed to get registration only almost 30 years later. Let us try to figure out what kind of structure it is and where it came from.

The LOAC - a small organization of the so-called “Alternative Orthodox”: it is claimed that it includes 11 parishes, but there are only three priests, and its followers gather at home to pray. The organization lives according to the Gregorian calendar and uses Latvian together with Church Slavonic in worship. Recently, the LOAC considers itself the successor to the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC), which in 1936, after the assassination of John (Pommer), the archbishop of Riga under pressure from the authorities transferred to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (in 1940 returned to the Russian Orthodox Church as a diocese).

Is there a connection between the 1936 the LOC and the LOAC today? Not. This typical remake took shape when the USSR went into oblivion, and new states appeared on its fragments. At that time, three priests of the Moscow Patriarchate announced that they would not remember Patriarch Alexiy I during the services, because, in their opinion, he collaborated with the KGB. The leader of the association

was Victor Konturozov, ex-hegumen of the Russian Orthodox Church, subsequently deprived of dignity and anathematized.

In 1994, Victor Kontuzorov entered the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC), which in 1995 split from the ROCOR (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia). Kontuzorov received the dignity of bishop from the head of the ROAC, Valentin Rusanov, the former archimandrite of the Moscow Patriarchate, who was subsequently erupted from the rank of Bishops' Council in 1997 (even earlier, in 1996, he was also deprived of the rank of Bishops' Council of the ROCOR).

In 1996, Viktor Kontuzorov created the “Latvian Free Orthodox Church”. Subsequently, he submitted documents to restore the status of the successor of the LOC of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (although the ROAC, which ordained him, considered and continues to consider the Patriarch of Constantinople to be a heretic and apostate from "true Orthodoxy"). What did it give? With the sympathy of the local authorities, one could count on re-registering the property of the Latvian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, already recognized by the authorities as the legal successor.

Considering themselves to be part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the followers of Kontuzorov began to commemorate Patriarch Bartholomew, and, as the media write, in 2011, the head of the Constantinople Orthodox Church graciously

allowed them to do this, although he did not recognize the LOAC as belonging to his jurisdiction (no evidence of “permission”, of course, has not been published).

All this time, the LOAC eked out a truly miserable existence, huddling around the house "churches" and gathering anyone, up to Catholics and Old Believers, to its "services", as Filaret Romanov, Viktor Kontuzorov's right hand, admitted,. The number of parishes of jurisdiction located in Riga, Tukums and Daugavpils is still extremely small - only 11. Thus, the only positive moment in the life of the LOAC was the recognition of its existence by the state. However, now the norm of the Constitution, according to which there can be only one religious organization representing a certain denomination in the country, does not apply in Latvia, so this recognition in itself does not give special advantages.

It is significant that the Latvian "alternative Orthodox" has a sincere sympathy for the Ukrainian colleagues: in his interview, Filaret Romanov admitted that he had immense respect for Filaret Denisenko, as a very important figure in the Orthodox world of the post-Soviet space. Moreover, these confessions were made shortly after Romanov's trip to Kiev in 2012-2013, when it was still far from the “Bartholomew's Tomos”.

Such a touching affection of the LOAC leaders for their senior “spiritual mentors” makes one think about the extent to which it honors the traditions laid down by Valentin Rusanov, who ordained the head of the LOAC. It is known that Valentin himself was condemned for pedophilia in the early 2000s and received four years

and three months conditionally for “coercion to acts of a sexual nature” (the first criminal case against Rusanov for sodomy was initiated back in 1973).

In conclusion, we can speculate on what fate awaits the LOAC even in the most favorable situation for it - full recognition by Constantinople. We will not talk now about the catastrophic consequences this will have for the religious situation in Latvia and inter-church relations within the Orthodox world.

It is not necessary to go far for examples - the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (EAOC) operates in neighboring Estonia, which Patriarch Bartholomew in 1996 established in parallel with the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in the country. Despite the fact that because of the assistance of the authorities of the republic, the EAOC gained rights to church property owned by Estonian Orthodox before its territory was included in the USSR, this structure showed its insolvency: if 170 thousand people belong to the EOC (MP) in the country, then the EAPC is almost 6 times smaller - only about 30 thousand. It is proved by official data from the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is hardly inclined to “tighten up” statistics in favor of Moscow.

Apparently, the LOAC also expects the same fate, which neither state registration nor even Constantinople’s recognition will help. No external support is able to fill the parishioners with temples of structures that are created for political purposes and by characters with a dubious past.