



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill takes part in the meeting of Primate and delegations of Local Orthodox Churches in Amman

On 26 February 2020, Primate and delegations of Local Orthodox Churches met in the capital of Jordan, Amman. During his visit to Moscow, on 21 November 2019, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem put forward an initiative to hold a meeting for discussing the situation in the inter-church relations and the preservation of Orthodox unity.

Participating in the meeting were His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, as well as delegations of the Romanian Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste, and of the Polish Orthodox Church led by His Eminence Archbishop Abel of Lublin and Chelm.

The official delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church consisted of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman; Archimandrite Aleksandr (Yelisov) head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem; and Mr. Vladimir Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media.

The meeting began with common prayer in several languages.

The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem greeted the participants and said: We know that unity is a God's gift and we are aware of our responsibility for the preservation of unity left to us by the apostles.

We have gathered here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our dialogue is based on Christian love which is the only way to reconciliation. Answers to all our questions must be found in dialogue and fraternal love.

Patriarch Theophilos underscored that the meeting in Amman is not a Council, but an informal fraternal gathering with a view to initiate a dialogue on the problems in the Orthodox world at a difficult time. He

added: We hope that this gathering will lay the basis for the search of decisions. We should fight the divisions and direct our efforts to the preservation of unity and dialogue.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia began his address with thanks to His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos for gathering the meeting and underscored: 'It is a courageous and right step, and I am confident that it will go down in history. At a time so difficult for Orthodoxy, the apostolic see which was the first to emerge is again fulfilling its historic mission as one of the key centre of world Orthodoxy.'

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed his cordial gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Hussein al-Hashimi for his generous help in organizing this meeting.

'Great credit should also be given to the Primates and representatives of the holy Local Churches who have come for this meeting, for the very consent to attend it has taken a certain courage in some cases. However, the concern for the preservation of the unity of the Holy Church has impelled us to reject all other considerations and, responding to the call of His Beatitude, to come here.

'Today, the Orthodox Church has found itself in face of a threat of a schism unprecedented for nearly a thousand years. The boundaries of canonical territories are being unilaterally reconsidered. The centuries-old church documents are being revoked. The schism in Ukraine is not overcome but rather aggravated. The Uniatism is holding up its head. There is a visible beginning of dangerous processes in the canonical territory of the Serbian Patriarchate – in North Macedonia and in Montenegro.

'I see the cause of this crisis in the loss of a common understanding of the order of the Church and the nature of primacy in it. A thousand years ago, in 1054, the Church encountered a similar challenge and we can feel the consequences to this day,' His Holiness said.

Patriarch Kirill is confident that to oppose this threat we need to begin a pan-Orthodox discussion on the accumulated acute problems and enumerated them in the order of importance:

First. The problem of understanding primacy in the Church; attempts to justify the claims to universal leadership through specially created theological argumentation; the absence of a system of conciliar control over the actions of the primatial see, the need for consensus in decision-making on the pan-Orthodox scale.

Second. The threat to the institute of autocephaly in the Church; the lack of a common Orthodox mechanism, indisputable for all, of granting autocephaly; attempts to introduce inequality among "senior" and "minor" autocephalous Churches.

Third. Attempts to challenge the canonical boundaries of autocephalous Churches, to review and revoke the once adopted documents of historic importance defining these boundaries.

Fourth. The claims of the first among equals in the family of Local Orthodox Churches to a right to receive appeals from any Church, the threats to use these appeals as an instrument of interference in the internal life of other Local Churches, which, I believe, demand comprehension and discussion.

Fifth. The development of an abnormal situation in which the primatial hierarch, contrary to the basic principles of canon law, acts as a judge in a matter in which he is one of the sides and presents himself as the last instance in considering the matter, and

Sixth. The problem of creating the so called 'stavropegic structures' in the territories of other Local Churches without their consent or against their will.'

His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia mentioned a task to fight for the unity of all Orthodox Churches. The only solution is the Council, to say all necessary words and solve the problems in the spirit of Orthodoxy.

He added that the Serbian Church is for the preservation of canonical principles and Christian heritage. "May God help us and bring unity to our Church, because a schism is a tragedy for the Church," he said.

Metropolitan Nifon talked about the importance of pan-Orthodox discussion of the current situation and the solution of problems in accordance to the holy canons. He suggested to hold a conference prior to a possible Council of the Primates or a pan-Orthodox meeting and thoroughly discuss the agenda and hope that such a meeting will bring about the real unity in the Orthodox world.

Archbishop Abel of Lublin and Chelm said that the Polish Orthodox Church is deeply concerned about the dramatic situation in the Orthodox world and is praying for the solution to the problem. He noted that the lack of unity among the Orthodox Churches stands in the way of their witness before the non-Orthodox world.

Rastislav, Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, thanked Patriarch Theophilos for the invitation to dialogue and said that it is possible to find a solution fully corresponding to the Holy Scriptures and church order only if we meet and talk.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine told the participants about the events happening in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church UOC).

He reminded that that UOC was formed in 1990 by the charter of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia granting it independence in administration. He said that the process of bettering ecclesiastical life and ministry have led to *de facto* autocephaly as we have our Holy Synod, the Bishops' Council and the independent church court. We elect and consecrate bishops, open new dioceses. We have our own theological schools, and various Synodal departments, for instance, of social ministry and external relations.

Metropolitan Onufry also told the participants about the situation with schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy and noted it aggravated due to the so called process of unification initiated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2018-19. He spoke in detail about actions of the Ecumenical Patriarch and added that they depart from church canons. The crisis can be solved when a remedy of these transgressions is found. He underscored that sayings about the autocephalous status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be a strong remedy for healing the schism. 'I would like to be honest before God and my conscience and say: I am confident that it will be not so. Some schismatics may return to the canonical Church, but not all of them. Autocephaly does not guarantee the absolute unity. There are schisms in the autocephalous Churches,' he emphasized and continued to say:

'The conciliar church administration is needed that will be in demand and effective for salutary ministry of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Orthodox Church in a new world space. We will be able to solve this problem when we renounce our ambitions and act in the spirit of humility and fraternal love.'

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill expressed his wish for this gathering to be the first of such and asked His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem to initiate holding of the next fraternal meeting in the Holy Land.

That same day the participants met with His Majesty Abdullah II, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In the evening the Primate of Local Orthodox Churches and heads of delegations agreed a press release.

The delegations are of the same opinion on the necessity to hold a new meeting for the sake of strengthening fraternal relations by prayers and dialogue before the end of this year. They hope that Patriarch Bartholomew will join the dialogue with his brother Primate.