Metropolitan Hilarion: The rupture with Constantinople has not damaged either the Russian or the Ukrainian Church

The chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, gave an interview to the TASS News Agency

- **Most contradictory reports are coming, mostly from anonymous sources, about the Bishops' Council of the Greek Church held last Saturday. Could you explain what decisions were made at it and how they are assessed by the Russian Church?**

- So far, it is from the press that we have learnt what the Greek Church decided at its Council. The Council's communique has been published and the speech of Archbishop Hieronymos has been published. All this has to be thoroughly analysed of course, before we can make any conclusions. A reaction to this event will follow, and this reaction will be formulated by the Holy Synod of our Church, which will meet in the nearest future to consider this and other issues.

- **For the ten years that you have headed the Department for External Church Relations, much has changed in the Russian Church's relations with non-Orthodox Christians, with other Orthodox Churches, with foreign states. What tasks were faced by the 'church diplomacy' ten years ago and how do see them now? Generally, how the building of the Church's dialogue with the world differs from secular diplomacy?**

- The tasks facing the DECR are always the same. However, as the surrounding world changes, the situation changes and some events happen that need a reaction, so the accents in the work of the Department shift accordingly. For instance, a considerable part of our time and attention was given to the preparation of a Pan-Orthodox Council. We expected it to be really a Pan-Orthodox Council to settle issues important for the Orthodox Church, but since a number of churches refused to attend the council, we had to refuse too. After that, events in the Orthodox world began developing sweepingly and, regrettably, in a negative direction. In the end of the last and the beginning of this year, there have been developments that actually implied a schism in the family of the Orthodox Churches.

What happened in Athens on Saturday is a deepening of this schism. It is difficult to say now how far it may go. When in 1054, the papal legates came to Constantinople to clarify the relations with the Patriarch of Constantinople and the clarification of the relations led to a break of the Eucharistic

communion between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople, nobody could have foreseen that this division would last for a thousand years and how grave its consequences would be.

I think it is very important now to try to look ahead. Among those who play chess, there are those who are able to calculate the situation in only one move in advance while there are those who can calculate it in many moves in advance. Now we have to determine what our next steps would be and what risks they would involve. Anyway, we should not act emotionally, under the influence of indignation and bewilderment; we should thoroughly and calmly weigh everything and with prayer make a decision for which we will be responsible afterwards.

- **The rupture of liturgical communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople was a difficult decision for the Church. How has it affected the situation of Orthodox Christian in Ukraine? Is there still a hope for the unification of the split Church, and what is the principal obstacle for it?**

- I should say that the rupture with Constantinople has not affected in any way the internal life of the Russian Orthodox Church, including its self-governed part – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, we continue living as we used to live, we continue serving as we used to serve, we continue celebrating as we used to celebrate Pascha and other great feasts. We have not felt any damage done by this rapture.

The Patriarchate of Constantinople has made a great mistake, and it continues insisting on this mistake, demanding that other Local Churches should recognize the so-called 'Orthodox Church of Ukraine' as well. However, we can see that the OCU has not succeeded as a Church. From the very beginning, it was made up of two schismatic groups; within only a few months of its existence, it has had time to divide into two parts, and the church people have not followed this group. Patriarch Bartholomew assumed that the episcopate of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church would join this group as soon as it received a tomos of autocephaly. The tomos was received but the episcopate remained rallied around His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy; the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Church have stated their desire to preserve unity with the Russian Orthodox Church and their full satisfaction with the present status of the Church. It is quite clear that the schism has not been overcome; on the contrary, there is a deepening division.

- **Unity with Constantinople has become impossible for the Russian Church not only because of the dispute over the jurisdiction of Ukraine, but also because of the views on the powers of the Patriarch of Constantinople. In this case, will the revocation of the tomos of autocephaly given to the OCU be sufficient for the restoration of unity and if not, what should take place? Can the unity be now restored at all?**

- It can hardly be expected that Constantinople will revoke the tomos it has issued. Certainly, the Patriarch of Constantinople revoked a decision that one of his predecessors made three hundred years before, but we do not take such actions seriously and believe them to be canonically void. I think it is early to speak about any improvement of the situation. Apparently, it will take some time before the Orthodox Churches will find together a solution of the situation.

- **May it require a Pan-Orthodox Conference, which was already held, or a Council? In what format may it be realized?**

- It is difficult for me to discuss the format now because I can see no readiness on the part of Constantinople to hold dialogue at all. We can only see some actions aimed to get the hasty action recognized by other Orthodox Churches, and this is a dead-end path because a considerable part of Churches will not recognize it all the same, and accordingly, these recognitions can only deepen the schism that has already been formed.

- Recently, Archbishop John (Renneto) and the clergy and laity of the Archdiocese of the Parishes of the Russian Tradition in Western Europe have been accepted in the liturgical communion. In what form will the former Archdiocese of the Patriarchate of Constantinople exist as part of the Russian Church and how will it be related to the Patriarchal Exarchate in Western Europe? Which peculiarities of its liturgy and parish life, which have developed for the decades of its existence, may be preserved?

- The parishes that serve according to the new calendar will continue serving according to the new calendar. The parishes that serve in French, German or other languages will continue serving in the language to which they are accustomed. The Archdiocese will exist as a united and integral structure headed by its archbishop in the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church. It will not be either a part of the Western European Exarchate or a part of the Russian Church Outside Russia – it will have its own structure, the same as it has developed, and will preserve its traditions.

- Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has described this reunification as the closing of the subject of the Russian Church's division with the Russian diaspora abroad. Does it mean that the catechetical tasks and areas of the missionary work of the Russian Church abroad will change? It is possible that, for instance, a worship in languages other than Church Slavonic may appear?

- We are already engaged in missionary work in various countries and the worship is held in various languages. For instance, I used to head our Church's diocese of Hungary for six years and in most parishes there, the worship is conducted in the Hungarian language, while in the Japanese Autonomous

Orthodox Church, the worship is celebration in Japanese, in Moldavia in Moldavian. The practice in the far-abroad parishes where most parishioners are Russians, Church Slavonic is used, while the sermons are delivered in Russian. In places where most parishioners belong to the local population, both the divine services are conducted and sermons are delivered in vernacular. So this practice already exists in our Church.

Our missionary strategy in the far-abroad countries is built on two principles. One principles is that we concern ourselves with the pastoral care for our flock, that is, those who already belong to our Church. The other principle is that we are open to people of other traditions who wish to join our Church; regardless of their ethnic background and language. we accept them with love. At the same time, we are not engaged in proselytism; we do not come to churches of other confessions and do not tell them that our faith is true while theirs is not. However, when people come to us, we certainly open the door to them and do not conceal that we believe that it is our faith, not any other, that is true.

- How the Patriarchal Exarchate in Western Europe and South-East Asia founded late last year are doing?

- As for the Patriarchal Exarchate of South-East Asia, it was founded in response to the needs and aspirations of our people, and it is developing very dynamically. I visited the Philippines not so long ago and took part in a divine service that was attended by quite a lot of Philippine parishioners and Philippine clergy. And certainly, not only Russian people are ordained in parishes of our Church – we have many clergymen we speak only their mother tongue and serve in their native language.

The Patriarchal Exarchate of Western Europe is developing dynamically as well; new parishes are being opened. Literall,. at every or almost every session of the Synod we make a decision on the opening of new parishes. And all this prompted by the fact that interest in our Church is not diminishing but growing; we can see it in both our motherland and beyond it.

- **In the Philippines, the situation is especially interesting, as President Rodrigo Duerte, who invited Orthodox missionaries to his country during the Valdai Forum in Sochi, in some statements positioned himself as an atheist; there were even certain conflicts between the authorities and the Catholic Church. Was it also true for local Orthodox people?**

- The missionary work is actively developing in the Philippines as there are already over 30 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church. The difficulties that the Catholic Churches has had with local authorities do not affect our missionary work in any way. The more so that the Catholic Church very mfavours our presence in the Philippines; I had an opportunity to see it when I met with Cardinal Tagle the Archbishop of Manila, who heads the Catholic Church of the Philippines.

- Are there any people of the first emigration wave remaining in the Philippines – those who came over there from China in the 1940s?

- The parishes, which are there in the Philippines now, consist of emigres of the last wave or localsl who are interested in Orthodoxy and embrace it. Today, nothing has remained from the pre-war emigration in the Philippines because the Philippines proved to be a transit point for them. There really was a large group of Russian; St. John of Shanghai stayed there for some time, but later they all went further on and a major part of them found themselves in Australia, while some of them went to America.

- Are there any conflicts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople as it considers countries included in the Patriarchal Exarchates to be their canonical territory?

- Since the 1920s, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has been developing a theory whereby only the Patriarchate of Constantinople, not various Orthodox Churches, should be present in parallel with it in the so-called diaspora. However, Local Orthodox Churches disagree with this theory as they have dioceses and parishes in the diaspora. These are the Church of Antioch, the Russian, Georgian, Serbian and Bulgarian Churches – they all have parishes in the so-called diaspora.

Generally, the very notion of 'diaspora' is very disputable and in the Orthodox world is does not have one definition. Historically, parishes and dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church emerged in places where Russian people or Russian Orthodox Church members of other ethnic background appeared. In all, our Church has over 800 parishes in the so-called diaspora, and their number is constantly growing. We have no reasons to believe that all these parishes and all this flock should move over to the Patriarch of Constantinople, the more so that we can see the attention that he gives to our flock.

For instance, in Turkey where the Russian Church was not present until recently because we see Turkey as a canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, not serious pastoral work has been carried out for our faithful. They appealed to us but we could not respond to their appeals because we believed the Patriarchate of Constantinople should have been engaged in pastoral care for these people. We have repeatedly proposed to the Patriarch of Constantinople to send Russian priests to the country with our readiness to place our priestst into his jurisdiction but he strongly rejected the proposal. And now the situation has developed so that our faithful can no longer take communion in the Patriarchate of Constantinople parishes. For this reason, priests of the Russian Orthodox Church conduct divine services in Turkey and take pastoral care of parishioners.

- Several years have passed since the meeting of the Patriarch of Moscow and the Pope of Rome in Havana. How is the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church going now and is

there a need to repeat the meetings of the Primate, for instance, in Russia, the desire to visit which was expressed by Pope Francis on several occasions, or in the Vatican?

- The meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill is a historic one, and it has opened a very broad space for cooperation in all spheres. We are now working on the ways of implementing what the Pope and the Patriarch agreed to do. So far I have not heard of any new meetings that would be planned.

We are working at the ways of helping Christians in the Middle East. This aid has been given in different ways. First of all, it is support on the political level, but also humanitarian actions aimed to improve the situation of Christians who remain in Syria and other countries of the Middle East, as they need help. The Catholic Church has carried out its charitable work for a long time now, but recently we have begun coordinating our efforts and can already see some fruits of this coordination. I think, we will enhance our interaction in this and other spheres in which there will be a demand for it.

We have a working group for cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. This group is chaired by Cardinal Koch and me and we discuss various projects to be carried out in the cultural sphere as well as in sphere of charity and social service.

As for aid, which comes from the Russian Orthodox Church acting together of representatives of other religious confession in Russia, there have already been a few supplies of humanitarian aid, once weighing 77 tons, and this aid is distributed to the Syrian population regardless of people's confessional affiliation.

- Recently, theology has been introduced in the system of academic disciplines in Russia. Has a Russian academic community of theologians already been formed? How much in demand is this discipline among secular university students who do not plan to become clergymen?

- This community is being formed. From the moment when theology was legalised as an academic discipline to the moment when we will have a community of theologians in the secular education place, a certain time is to pass. Suffice it to say that when we created the first state-recognized dissertation council on theology, it included over 20 doctors of sciences, but none of them was the doctor of theology for the simple reason that theology as a recognized science did not exist in the Russian education space. But now dissertations are already defended in this council; there were several of them and we can presume that in a few years we will see the emergence of enough number of licensed theologians

who, in their turn, will make up new dissertation councils.

The development of theological science in the secular education space is an imperative of the present time. I can see a great interest of rectors of our leading universities in this field of scientific research and very much hope that theology will develop not only in confessional theological schools but also in the secular education space.

Interviewer Pavel Scrylnikov

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/46012/