Metropolitan Hilarion: We very much hope that the unity of unversal Orthodoxy will be preserved

On September 1, 2018, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, during his Church and the World talk show aired on the Russia-24 TV channel on Saturdays and Sundays, answered questions from the channel anchor Yekaterina Gracheva.

Ye. Gracheva: Your Eminence, you have just come back from Istanbul where there was a very important meeting covered by all the world mass media – a meeting between Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. There have been many speculations on this subject, especially in the Ukrainian mass media. Then refutations of these statements have followed. To separate seeds from thorns, tell us what was actually discussed at the meeting and what was not stated at it.

Metropolitan Hilarion: In the first place, I would like to say that Patriarch Bartholomew and Patriarch Kirill have known each other since 1977, when neither was a Patriarch. The both worked in the sphere of external church relations. Metropolitan, at that time still archbishop, Kirill used to help his spiritual father Metropolitan Nikodim, while Metropolitan Bartholomew helped his spiritual father Metropolitan Meliton and Chalcedon. That is, they have a very old history of relationship, and this history continued after they, first one of them and later the other, become Patriarchs. And it has to be said that it was rather a difficult relationship, many events have happened in these years to darken our inter-church relations.

Perhaps, the most unpleasant of them was the event of 1996 when the Patriarchate of Constantinople unilaterally established its own jurisdiction in Estonia by creating there a parallel jurisdiction, thus provoking a conflict between the faithful. It led to a rupture of communication between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople for several months. Then the communication was restored; compromise ways were found to solve the problem. Although the problem of Estonia, from our point of view, has not been solved, and the existence of two parallel jurisdictions, again from the point of view of church

canons, is an anomaly.

The relations were also darken of course by other developments as well as different views of the situation in Ukraine. Since recently, namely since this April, Constantinople has begun saying that Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, should be granted autocephaly. And we wondered: to whom, properly speaking, does Constantinople intend to grant autocephaly? Because the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry has not asked for autocephaly, and during the recent Bishops' Council it was clearly stated that the status, which this Church enjoys today, satisfies her absolutely and she does not seek any other. On the other hand, there are two schismatic groupings, each acting under the banner of autocephaly and each states that an independent state should have an independent Church. But the two of them themselves are not in communion and are unable to come to an agreement. This schism, which was initiated by former Metropolitan Philaret (Denisenko) of Kiev in 1992, continues to be a schism. None of the Local Orthodox Church recognizes the so-called Kiev Patriarchate. And if autocephaly is to be granted then to whom exactly? For the canonical Church does not ask for it while giving it to the schismatics means to legitimize the schism.

There have been many speculations and statements on this topic, and, certainly, it appeared very important that the Patriarchs should meet face to face and talk from heart to heart and discuss actually the whole range of problems existing today on both the agenda of bilateral relations and the inter-Orthodox agenda. I cannot tell you what the two Patriarchs discussed, though I was present at that meeting from beginning to end, for if they had wished to make the content of their negotiations public, they would have certainly talked with each other before TV cameras. But they decided to talk tete-a-tete, from heart to heart, and I can say that it was a warm and sincere talk of the two persons who have known each other for over forty years; and the most important thing is that they are aware of their responsibility for their Churches and for the whole universal Orthodoxy.

Ye. Gracheva: It should not be forgotten either that the Patriarchs can talk between themselves but a final decision is still to be made not by them but by the whole council.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Quite right. There is conciliar governance in a Church, that is, each Local

Church is governed by her Bishops' Council. In the interim between Bishops' Councils, the Holy Synod acts, and any church decision is always collegiate. Many ask: the Patriarchs did meet, so did they make any decision? But they cannot make any decision on their own on behalf of their Churches, for each Patriarch is responsible for the conciliar governance in his Church. Of course, it may be assumed that the discussion, which took place, was fruitful, very frank, and it will influence the decisions of the Synods of respective Churches. I think it is very important that we have covered our own part of the way, that is, we clearly stated the position of our Church on all the issues on which there had also been a polemic by correspondence between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow until very recent times.

Ye. Gracheva: After Ukraine politically stated her wish to be granted autocephaly, there was another significant event – the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. It should be recalled that in Ukraine it was marked by a large-scale procession with the cross with the participation of over 200 thousand people – which has shown once again the might, power and unity of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. A question arises: Why the Ukrainian political leaders have set on having autocephaly precisely now? And secondly, when exactly in the history of Ukraine as an independent state were there precedents when the political state developed a wish for autocephaly?

Metropolitan Hilarion: When political authorities interfere in church issues, then it often inflicts harm on a Church. In this case, we should realize of course that the present power in Ukraine has only half a year left before the next elections. There are no real success; the economic situation is grievous; the political situation is extremely unstable; the people's discontent is growing; and they need a raging success to uplift their rating. That is why they have decided to go for it – to bring to fruition the project initiated by schismatics a quarter of a century ago. But this project has been no success primarily due to the solidary stand of Local Orthodox Churches which have expressed their position one after another. It happened in the course of a recent tour of Local Orthodox Church made by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

On the very eve of Patriarch Kirill's visit to Istanbul, the Greek mass media cited extracts from a letter of the Serbian Patriarch Irenaeus to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. It clearly states that the legitimization of the schism in Ukraine is an unacceptable scenario, that the unity of Orthodoxy should not be shaken and that a schism cannot be healed through creating another schism. And it is exactly the point here. Because if, God forbid, a development of this kind happens – of which some in

Constantinople are dreaming – that is, if a Tomos of Autocephaly is granted it means that a majority of the church people will not accept such an autocephaly; it will be accepted only by a handful of schismatics while the schism will thus be legitimized. It will be a heavy blow to Orthodoxy in Ukraine; actually, another schism will be created. And most importantly, it will divide the whole body of world Orthodoxy. And we are stating it quite clearly.

You have mentioned the procession with the cross, which took place on the day of the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. Dozens, hundreds of thousands of people took part in it – an enormous multitude. In fact, they were those who came to Kiev in defiance of a powerful pressure put upon them. Buses were stopped; people were forced to get out and called to refuse to participate in the procession. As for the alternative procession held by the schismatics on the following day, it was ten times as fewer. People were forced to attend it, and there was a pressure from authorities insisting on the necessity to come to it in order to organize everything. That is to say, people were brought by an order and still they managed to assemble less than one-tenth of the participants. All these facts speak for themselves.

Here is simple statistics. The canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church is 12 thousand parishes, over 200 monasteries including the largest Lauras, those of Kiev Caves, Our Lady of Pochaev and Holy Mountain, and tens of millions of believers. Whereas the schismatic groups, even taken together, do not make up even a half of this number of parishes, and as for the monasteries, they very few of them because there is no real monastic life. There are people who today cannot not even distinguish between the canonical Church and the schism because it is impressed on them that there is the Moscow Patriarchate and there is the Patriarch of Kiev. Certainly, there are those who are just propaganda victims and they tend to move to the schism. But an absolute majority of the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine is the flock of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the Church which did not ask for autocephaly and which will not accept any Tomos from the Patriarchate of Constantinople issued and written against their will.

Ye. Gracheva: We will not talk about statements which, first of all, we are not acquainted with, and secondly, which is a result of the talk of the two Patriarchs, but we will analyse the statements made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople officially. What does it mean in the statement 'to implement the need to search for ways of granting autocephaly'? Does it mean that it is possible to find out a certain

archives document and with a reference to it (and it is always possible to find a convenient document if there is a wish) to grant autocephaly under this pretext?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We have worked over archives documents. Through the efforts of the Department for External Church Relations and with the participation of 'Orthodox Encyclopaedia', we have taken out of freeze all the archives, all the correspondence which has been maintained between Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople, between Patriarchs of Constantinople and Ukrainian rulers, between Patriarchs of Constantinople and Russian tsars. We have in our possession an enormous corpus of documents. There are about 900 pages. We have now begun publishing these documents. I think, it is only a part of them that is known to Constantinople. But we are ready to put them all above board because there is nothing secret in them.

Now in Constantinople they say that the transfer of the Metropolis of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate in the end of the 16th century was allegedly a temporary one and that Constantinople was only temporarily transferred the Metropolis of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate for governing while continuing to consider the Metropolis of Kiev to be a party of its canonical territory. But the documents testify to the contrary. And when Patriarchs of Constantinople wrote to the Patriarch of Moscow they called him 'Patriarch of Great, Minor and White Russia'. This title speaks for itself. That is, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has made no claims to the Metropolis of Kiev for over 300 years. And suddenly it turns out that all these years the Metropolis of Kiev has been a part of Constantinople that was only temporarily handed over to the Patriarch of Moscow. It is an absolutely ungrounded thesis.

However, the most important thing is not even that any interference in this situation now – on the wave of the political crisis happening in Ukraine, on the wave of a strong rejection of autocephaly by the church people – will not be able to heal the schism. To the contrary, this interference will only provoke new schisms. For this reason we very much hope that the Patriarchate of Constantinople will manifest responsibility and take into consideration all the voices of Local Orthodox Churches, which have been clearly sounded in this period, and that the unity of world Orthodoxy will be preserved.

Ye. Gracheva: I cannot help addressing also the Patriarch's agenda. He may be now already on the

way to the north of our country. I know for sure that on his agenda there is a visit to the city of Norilsk and a number of other cities. Why does the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church give so much attention to this region of our country? Generally, what is the situation of the Church there?

Metropolitan Hilarion: For almost ten years of heading the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness has visited most of our dioceses including in such remote places as no Patriarch stepped on in history. His Holiness is interested, in the first place, in the life of people including those who live in severe conditions. He will not consider the number of these people. What is important for him is that the Church should be present in their lives. Therefore, he actually walked end-to-end through the Arctic way, visiting northern ports. Now he will visit first Kogalym, in which a new church, a second one, has been built with the funds of the Lukoil company, a city-forming one, and will consecrate this church. The Patriarch will also meet with the faithful. Then he will go to Norilsk in one of the many visits planned in his program and already carried out. Not so long ago the Patriarch visited the Volgograd region, Veliky Ustyug. He tours these dioceses because, first, he should see the life of ordinary people and, secondly, people should understand that the Patriarch is not a certain church official who sits in Moscow and rules the Church, but a man who seeks to see people's life with his own eyes.

As for the reform of church governance, which was designed and carried out by the Patriarch with the participation of the Holy Synod and which has resulted in the establishment of new dioceses and metropolises, I think that the idea of this reform was born by the Patriarch when he visited remote parts of our country. Indeed, before this reform our dioceses were too large, and the ruling bishop had no resources, power and time enough to take part personally in the life of his cathedral city and in the building of churches. But the farther from the center the less time a bishop could (because of great distances) pay attention to parishes and communities. And when new diocesan centers have been established, it has given a second wind to the process of church rebirth which has continued for thirty years now. Because where there was no cathedral but only a diocesan administration, now all this is being created. People come to God, showing a completely new interest in the Church. At the same time, the Patriarch does not simply creates these centers on paper but chooses a man and send him to a new place, saying, 'Go and begin everything from scratch. In many cases he himself seeks funds for this. That is, a young bishop comes to his diocese not just to build something in it through his own efforts but receives from the Patriarch not only spiritual but also material support.

Ye. Gracheva: Finally, Your Eminence, I cannot help touching upon the subject of the Day of Knowledge. We are now on the eve of this feast. Quite recently, a regular International Orthodox Youth Forum took place in Moscow. With each year it gets together ever more people. Why does His Holiness the Patriarch pays attention to it? Why is it so important for him to have a direct channel of communication with the youth?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Very often the Church is primarily considered to be a so-called funeral home. The Church is allegedly needed only to baptize, marry and bury. Or the Church is considered to be a certain system of bans: no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, one cannot live a free life, etc. Or the Church is seen as a museum exhibit. The Patriarch always says to people, 'You need the Church so that your life may be beautiful, modern and bright'. And he addresses his words to auditoria of various ages including young people, children and schoolchildren. For him everything is interesting and everything is important.

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