



Metropolitan Hilarion: There are no grounds for speaking of any division in the Orthodox world

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk gave an interview to the RIA Novosti.

- **Your Eminence, prominent in the recent statement of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church are the following three principal proposals: to postpone the Pan-Orthodox Council set for June 18-27 in Crete for settling differences first, to hold with the same aim an inter-Orthodox discussion and to ensure that all the hierarchs (as many as 700 persons in the Churches) can participate in the Council. When and where could such a discussion really take place to be really followed by a Pan-Orthodox Council and with which participants and what agendas?**

- I believe if there is a will it would not be difficult to organize fairly soon the process of such discussion. Indeed, none of the Local Churches has spoken against the Pan-Orthodox Council as such. The differences are only about the degree of the Council's preparedness at the present moment. It is not so important where exactly appropriate inter-Orthodox consultations will be held. The most important thing is that they do take place. As for the discussion format, a platform for it could be provided by the already established Pan-Orthodox Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council, as the Holy Synod states. However, it is possible only if the working principal to be adhered by this body will be considerably reviewed, since its work has proved ineffective so far. As for the new date of the Council and the documents it will consider, it can be dealt with only after a successful completion of the pan-Orthodox preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council is achieved.

- **What are the odds that the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church will go to Crete in the time set for the Pan-Orthodox Council?**

- We hoped until the last moment that the reasons, which have made a number of Local Church refuse

to attend the Council, would be overcome. We proposed on our part a possible way of solving the existing problems through the convocation of an extraordinary pan-Orthodox pre-Council conference. Regrettably, the problems voiced by autocephalous Churches were ignored. And now, it is impossible to solve them in the remaining time. In this situation, I do not see any reasons that could make the Russian Church change her decision.

- What response to the decisions of the Russian Orthodox Church Synod do you expect to receive from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and when?

- Certainly, there must be a response to the statement of our Holy Synod and to the letters sent out to the Primate of Orthodox Churches. What will it be is to become known within the next few days. I hope that the reaction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, just as other Local Churches, will be based on our common desire to preserve the unity of the Orthodox Church, to foster mutual understanding and confidence among all the Local autocephalous Churches.

- Does it mean that what has happened is a schism in the Orthodox family?

- As I already said at the briefing after the Synod's session, the situation as it has developed around the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council can be described as normal, extremely delicate though. To call what has happened a schism is groundless at present.

- What, in your view, are the core and deep-laid causes of the differences around the Council? What else should have been done, from the viewpoint of the Russian Orthodox Church, in the process of preparation of draft documents?

- To my mind, the principal cause of the present situation lies not so much in differences among

Churches as in a lack of an effective standing mechanism for an honest and comprehensive discussion on them. The format of the pre-Council process, which has been in place in the recent years, made it difficult to carry out a meaningful serious work on the documents as the opinions of autocephalous Churches have not been duly taken into account. Eventually all this has led to the refusal of four local Orthodox Churches to participate in it. I believe we all should learn a lesson from what has happened so that in the future it would be possible to convene such a Holy and Great Council in which all the Local Churches without exception will participate and which will become what it should be – a witness to our unity.

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