



## **Holy Synod takes a number of decisions concerning external church relations**

During the session which took place on 22 October 2015 under the chairmanship of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considered a number of issues pertaining to the sphere of external church relations.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, presented a report concerning the work of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference which had been held in Chambésy, Switzerland, on 10-17 October 2015. With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, led by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, took part in the meetings. The delegation also included Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia); archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Archimandrite Irinei (Steenberg), cleric of the ROCOR's diocese of Western America; and Rev. Anatoly Churyakov, DECR interpreter.

The conference was convened following up the decision of the Synaxis of the Primate of the Local Orthodox Churches, which had taken place in Istanbul on 6-9 March 2015, and considered a draft document on Autonomy and the Ways of Proclaiming It, worked out at the meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission in 2009. The participants in the conference also examined the work of the Ad-Hoc Inter-Orthodox Commission which had revised the documents of the Pan-Orthodox Council at its session, held in Chambésy on 30 September-3 October 2014, 16-20 February and 30 March-2 April 2015.

The participants in the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference approved the draft document of the Pan-Orthodox Council on Autonomy and the Ways of Declaring It, and edited and approved the following documents: "Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today" and "The Orthodox Church's Relations with the Rest of the Christian World."

The document "Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Establishment of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Brotherhood and Love among Nations and Elimination of Racial and Other Forms of Discrimination" received a new name, "Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Modern World." In compliance with the decision of the Holy Synod as of 13 July 2015 (Minutes 52), the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church presented important amendments to the document. Due to the fact that it was impossible to reach a consensus on a number of pivotal issues, the document was not signed by the heads of the

delegations of the Russian and the Georgian Orthodox Churches.

The position of the Russian Orthodox Church at the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference was met with approval by the Holy Synod. The Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission was commissioned to examine the draft document “Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Modern World” in the light of the discussion, held at the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference, and to present the conclusions at the next meeting of the Holy Synod.

The members of the Holy Synod expressed their profound concern over the fact that no conciliar draft decision on the Orthodox Diaspora had been taken and that consensus had not been reached on the following draft documents of the Pan-Orthodox Council: “Calendar Issue” and “Impediments to Marriage.” These topics have been developed for decades already. The members of the Holy Synod noted a particular significance of the pan-Orthodox consensus regarding the draft document on Autocephaly in the Orthodox Church and the Method of Its Proclamation, and of the inclusion of this document in the agenda of the Pan-Orthodox Council.

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Having heard a report by the DECR chairman regarding the visit to Russia of His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa, the Holy Synod expressed its satisfaction over a brotherly meeting of the Primates of the Russian Church and the Church of Alexandria.

The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria was on pilgrimage in Russia on 19-29 August 2015, at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros visited the Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration in Solovki and venerated the shrines of the dioceses of Irkutsk and Yekaterinburg. On August 28, the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria and All Africa and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Assumption Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin. After the Divine Service, the Primates of the Russian Church and the Church of Alexandria held a brotherly meeting.

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Among other issues considered at the session of the Holy Synod was the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. In compliance with the agreements reached at the meeting of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV on 28 May 2014, during a visit of the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East to Russia, a working meeting took place in Moscow on July 21. Participants in the meeting discussed the

preparation of the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East and approved the proposals aimed at setting up the Bilateral Dialogue Commission. Among the issues on the agenda of the commission are joint scholarly and theological consultations, promotion of cooperation in the academic sphere and in opposing various manifestations of Christianophobia, as well as in the information sphere and in social ministry. The Holy Synod approved the proposal concerning the establishment of the Bilateral Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

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The Holy Synod took a decision concerning the establishment of a joint commission of the Russian and the Bulgarian Orthodox Churches on the canonization of Archbisihop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Boguchar. A letter proposing to set up such commission was sent by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to His Holiness Patriarch Neofit of Bulgaria on 5 May 2015. On September 2015, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church considered the proposal of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and approved the list of the commission members representing the Bulgarian Church.

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The DECR chairman presented a report on his working trips to Italy, Vatican and Greece.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk visited Milan and Rome with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia from September 14 to 19, 2015, and met with Cardinal Angelo Scola, Archbishop of Milan. They discussed issues of mutual interest. Also, Metropolitan Hilarion took part in the opening of the 'Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World' photo-exhibition at the EXPO-2015 and in the presentation of the works of St. Ambrose of Milan in the Russian language.

While in Rome, the DECR chairman attended a session of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. A draft document on conciliarity and primacy was approved and will be presented at the next plenary of the Joint Commission due to take place in September 2016.

Metropolitan Hilarion presented the book written by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, 'A Pastor's Word. God and Man. History of Salvation, in the Italian language' at Vatican on September 18.

On October 19, Metropolitan Hilarion took part in the 'Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East' International Conference in Athens, Greece, and delivered a report in

which he presented position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the problems, paying special attention to the spreading of extremism under religious slogans and to the persecution of Christians in the contemporary world.

That same day the DECR chairman met with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and with Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East. Discussed were the preparation for the Pan-Orthodox Council, the situation in the Middle East and other topic of mutual interest.

On October 20, the DECR chairman attended as an observer from the Russian Orthodox Church the plenary session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church on 'The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World' and addressed the audience with greetings.

On October 21, Metropolitan Hilarion was received by Pope Frances. They discussed issues on the agenda of bilateral relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

That same day Metropolitan Hilarion met with Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

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The Holy Synod resolved to send a delegation to the joint conference of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II.

The conference, which will take place in Munich on December 10-11, 2015, will be attended by the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church headed by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), and consisting of Archbishop Feofan of Berlin and Germany; archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; archpriest Vladimir Khulap, prorector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy; archpriest Valentin Vasechko, associate professor of the St. Tikhon Orthodox Humanitarian University; hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations; Rev. Antony Borisov, prorector of the Moscow Theological Academy; Mr. Valery Burega, prorector of the Kievan Theological Academy; Ms. Margarita Nelyubova, a staff member of the DECR; Mr. Alexander Rahr, director of the Russia-Eurasia Centre and honorary professor of the Moscow State University of International Relations; and ms Yelena Speranskaya, a DECR consultant and lecturer of the Moscow Theological Academy.

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The Synod resolved that Archbishop Mark of Yegorievsk, vicar of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, will be Archbishop of Ryazan and Mikhailov, head of the Ryazan metropolitan. He will be relieved of his duties of administrator of the diocese of Vienna, Austria and Hungary and of head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad.

Archbishop Mark will be replaced by Bishop Tikhon of Podolsk, vicar of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, as administrator of the diocese of Vienna, Austria and Hungary, and by archimandrite Antony (Sevryuk), secretary of the Administration of the Moscow Patriarchate parishes in Italy and rector of St. Catherine's church in Rome, as head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad. The Holy Synod nominated archimandrite Antony Bishop of Bogorodsk, a vicar of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and charge him with archpastoral care for the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes in Italy.

Among other resolutions of the Holy Synod on the clerics were nomination of archpriest Gennady Andreyev of the Sourozh diocese as bishop of Skopin and Shatsk and appointment of Rev. Alexy Mashkov from the Kasimov diocese as rector of the Intercession church in Panama to replace Rev. Valery Isayev, who will be placed at the disposal of Metropolitan Viktor of Tver and Kashin.

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