Press conference on results of Bishops' Council of Russian Orthodox Church took place

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Press conference on the results of the Holy Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church held in Moscow from 2nd to 5th February 2013 took lace on February 6. Taking part in the meting with the journalists in press centre of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Metropolitan Pavel of Ryazan and Mikhailov, head of the Council's Drafting Committee; Metropolitan Antoniy of Borispol, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev diocese and first vicar of the Kiev Metropolia; Archimandrite Savva (Tutunov), deputy chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations; and Mr. Vladimir Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Information Department, who opened press conference and introduced its participants to the journalists.

Metropolitan Hilarion addressed representatives of the mass media, saying in particular, "This Council was the most representative in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Neither in the pre-revolutionary epoch, nor in modern times had so many hierarchs gathered for Divine services at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour or in the Hall of Church Council to discuss topical problems of church life.

"According to the Statute, the Bishops' Council must be convened no less than once in four years, but actually it is convened once in two years being thoroughly prepared. Therefore, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill initiated the Inter-Council Presence following the example of the Pre-Council Presence that worked during preparation for the Local Council of 1917-18. There are several commissions in the Inter-Council Presence. They discuss various topic of church life, including the controversial ones. This body prepares agenda for the Bishops' Council which takes decisions on the discussed matters.

"On the first day of the Council's work, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill presented a penetrating report on the major problems of church life at home, her external relations, and relations with society, which could be different as our Church is multinational and fulfils her ministry in different countries.

"I would like to note the unanimity that prevails at the Bishops' Council. This fraternal and constructive atmosphere was greatly conducive to its success.

Many archpastors participated in such a high gathering for the first time, as they have been consecrated bishops only recently. The process initiated by the Patriarch has led to the so called “sub-division” of diocese. For instance, in the territory in which one diocese existed earlier, - two, three or four dioceses were established and united into a metropolitan area because the Church is giving a new impetus to her missionary ministry and her relations with society.

“This process concerns mostly the so called ‘province’, as the revival of the Church can be seen in large cities and regional centres with magnificent cathedral, theological schools and active church life. The situation is different in little towns and villages. The enemies of the Church and sectarians use it to their advantage. The establishment of new dioceses and the diocesan centres is aimed at bringing bishops closer to the people. There were dioceses with 500-600 parishes located in great distance of one another, while now, after the Council has taken certain decisions, all bishops will know all priests personally, visit parishes and exert real influence on their life.

“A visual symbol of these processes was the presence of many metropolitans in white cowls at the Council, but the most important thing and result of the Council was the unanimity manifested in discussions.

“I believe that all bishops have had good impression and would heed to recommendations and implement concrete decisions of the Council.

“I am confident that these decisions will give a fresh impetus to successful development of our church life.”

Other participants in the press conference told the press about the documents adopted by the Council, and the journalists asked many questions.

While answering them, Metropolitan Hilarion underscored the importance of the documents on the Church’s position on the current problems of ecology, on the reform of family legislation and on the problem of juvenile justice.

Metropolitan Hilarion mentioned a forthcoming visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Estonia and expressed his hope for the solution of the problem relating to the Moscow Patriarchate’s property in this country, adding that the main goal is the Patriarch’s visit to his flock.

As to theological education in secular higher educational institutions, Metropolitan Hilarion said that this matter had been considered by the Council and reflected in its decisions.

He continued, saying, “There are certain problems, for instance, a prejudice of some scholars against an idea of teaching theology in secular institutes. They ask, ‘We live in a secular society, so why theology?’ We have given answers to this question many times. It is enough to look at the situation in Western Europe and the USA, where the Church is separated from the state, while theology is a recognized specialty and theological departments exist at secular universities. There are many problems related to the reform of education system in the Russian Federation, and a working group on theology in secular universities recently set up by the Holy Synod will do concrete work for their solution.”

Also covered at the press conference was the perpetuation of the names of the new martyrs and confessors of Russia. The journalists were told about concrete steps the Russian Orthodox Church will make for implementing major provision of the documents adopted by the Bishops’ Council.

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