Metropolitan Hilarion addresses plenary session of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission

Report of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, at the plenary session of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission on 23 March 2012.

Your Eminences, dear reverend fathers and brothers!

I am happy to greet all members of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission at its regular plenary session.

As you know, the Holy Synod appointed me chairman of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission last October after Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and |Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus, who headed the Commission for many years, decided to resign as its chairman.

The Holy Synod expressed profound gratitude to Metropolitan Philaret for his long permanent chairmanship, "thanks to which the inter-Church and international theological discussion on a high level and a serious dialogue between the church scholarly community and the world of secular science have developed, and theological problems presented to the Commission by church authorities have been solved.

Indeed, Metropolitan Philaret's contribution to the fruitful work of the Commission and its creative development is immense, as the Commission led by Metropolitan Philaret has always found wise decisions of the doctrinal and theological questions and of topical problems of church life. These decisions were motivated by faithfulness to Orthodox Tradition and to pastoral care for church peace.

We have gathered to the plenary session today to discuss tasks and prospects of the Commission's work at the new stage.

There have been several stages in the Synodal Theological Commission's work since its establishment in 1993.

Its first task was a theological ensuring of the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the work of international Christian organizations and in bilateral theological dialogue. The doctrinal summing up of this work was a document elaborated by the Commission and entitled "Basic Principles of the Attitude of

the Russian Orthodox Church toward the Other Christian Confessions." The document was adopted by the Bishops' Council in 2000.

Later, one of the most important tasks of the Commission set by the supreme church authorities was an examination of different individual theological opinions spread in church milieu.

At the same time, the scholarly and theological work in the form of international conferences, seminars, research and publications projects was developed under the Commission's auspices. The Commission began to cooperate not only with church structures, but also with the representatives of secular science and culture and with the Russian and foreign scholars and theologians.

In 2009, the questions earlier in the competence of the former Patriarchal Synodal Commission were included in the sphere of action of the Synodal Theological Commission.

Besides, at present the Commission bears responsibility for the two doctrinal projects, such as the compiling of a new Catechism and the elaboration of the Russian Orthodox Church's position on the primacy in the Universal Church.

So, there are several lines of the Commission's work at present.

As to the **doctrinal** line, the Catechism is being compiled. The basic text is ready, though it needs editing for reasons of stylistic uniformity. After the completion of the first draft, it will be considered by our Commission, and after responses from all its members, the finishing touches will be put to the text.

The same is true as far as the document on the primacy in the Universal Church is concerned. The document is being brought to an end and soon enough we shall consider and discuss it together in terms of its finalizing.

The **church-wide conferences** is another line of the Commission's work. The 6th International Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church on "Life in Christ: Christian Ethics, Ascetic Tradition of the Church, and Challenges of Modern Epoch" took place in November 2010.The material are being prepared for publication. Earlier, such conferences were held once in two years as a rule.

Today we should define the format of the next conference, discuss its theme and time of convening and present our consideration to the Holy Synod.

We should also discuss the forms of the Commission's work in **biblical** line.

The inclusion of such tasks as the preservation, translation and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures in our Commission's frame of reference because Bible studies in the Orthodox tradition have never been and cannot be an autonomous and self-sufficient field of theology and scholarship. The Holy Scriptures belong to the Holy Tradition of the Church and should not be taken and considered out of touch with it.

This specific field of church scholarship demands special competence and erudition. Unfortunately, our achievements in this field are not great so far. Therefore, the development of Orthodox Bible Studies within theological knowledge remains one of the most important tasks.

Dialogue with secular science is yet another line of the Commission's work.

The principal purpose of this dialogue is an intellectual witness and mission of the Church in the realm of science and culture and active participation of the church representatives in the life of secular academic community and – wider – in the life of intellectual and cultural community. This will affirm the status of theology as an integral part of the modern scholarly complex and cultural realm as a whole.

Dialogue with secular science presupposes a permanent working interaction of the church representatives with those of the natural and social sciences on the basis of universities and secular scientific structures.

The Commission has gained good experience in this field. The Commission's representatives have actively discussed the relationship between religion and secular science in the Moscow and St. Petersburg State Universities. Also, they discussed the status of theology with the representatives of secular science.

The two-week courses for teachers from the theological schools took place recently at the National Research Nuclear University (MIFI) with support of the Templeton Foundation. Twenty leading Russian scientists delivered lectures on the modern achievements and on the problems of different natural disciplines.

The Commission can promote the establishment of partnership centers from the dialogue with science in Russia on the federal and regional levels, in Ukraine, Belarus, and in the far abroad.

The centre of this kind has been established at the St. Petersburg State University; another will soon begin its work at the MIFI in Moscow. The work is being done for establishing such centers in the other secular universities, including the Moscow State University and the Higher School of Economics.

I would like to draw your attention to the importance of developing a dialogue between theology and

natural sciences as well as with the humanities, including social sciences in the first place.

Our church scholarship has traditionally maintained close relations with historians, art critics, philologists and linguists, and lately also with psychologists. This cooperation is quite understandable, as theology not only intersects with these sciences, but often enough works in one and the same domain of research, actively using methodology and concrete achievements of secular science.

The situation with social sciences as sociology, politology, including political philosophy, law social and cultural anthropology, and. Last but not the least, religious studies, is quite different. Theologians do not pay adequate attention to these disciplines, but there are sound reasons for paying attention to them. Social sciences have been rehabilitated and developed after the collapse of the old ideology in our country; various theories and knowledge accumulated in the world science in the 20th century, as well as modern trends have been studied and assimilated. Today, theology should master modern social sciences in order to assess them from its point of view. Otherwise, it will be hardly possible to develop Orthodox social teaching, the foundations of which were adopted by our Church at the turn of the century.

Members of the Commission will exchange opinions and prepare a report for His Holiness the Patriarch on the long-term outlook of our Commission's work and also will propose a plan of activities for the next year.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/54380/