



Metropolitan Hilarion: Editing of liturgical books is a complex problem that needs tactful solution

On 24 June 2011, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church (DECR) gave a press conference during which he spoke about the editing of liturgical books at the request of the journalists. The objective of editing is to make the understanding of Church Slavonic texts easy to people going to church. On 15 June 2011, the presidium of the Inter-Council Presence resolved to send out to the hierarchs a draft of "The Church Slavonic language in the Life of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 21st century" for consideration and discussion.

Metropolitan Hilarion underscored that the question of the Church Slavonic language has been raised over one hundred years ago and it was impossible to withdraw it from the agenda. This theme needs discussion and solution.

"First of all, we should emphasize that the Church Slavonic language has been the main liturgical language of the Russian Orthodox Church, though there are other liturgical languages, for instance, the Moldavian and Japanese. That is why we cannot on any account liken the Church Slavonic language to the Latin in the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council," His Eminence said.

Metropolitan Hilarion drew the listeners' special attention to the fact that the Church Slavonic is not a dead, but a living language, which has developed during centuries and continues to develop. The liturgical books of the Russian Orthodox Church have been edited for this reason. If we compare liturgical texts in the Slavic manuscripts of the 10th-12th centuries and in the books, which are used in the Church today, we shall find many differences. "An attempt was made before the Revolution with the blessing of the Synod to simplify the Slavonic text. It is considered expedient to reissue that version of the liturgical books at present as it was made easier to comprehend only at certain moments and, as a matter of fact, did not ruin the structure of the Church Slavonic."

The DECR chairman reminded the audience that over a century ago St. Theophanes the Recluse wrote about the necessity to edit Slavonic texts in order "to explain" the liturgical books.

On the other hand, Metropolitan Hilarion doubts that the problem of understanding certain liturgical texts can be resolved by their translation into Russian. "There are texts that will remain not very comprehensible even in Russian, if a reader is not introduced to church subjects. For instance, the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is replete with the biblical allusions and references to various

biblical characters whom many of us do not remember. The listeners of the 8th century, while hearing the words, had immediately comprehended an associative field, but we do associate these words with anything because we have a poor knowledge of the Bible and do not read it much.”

The DECR chairman is confident that the editing of the liturgical books is a complex problem that needs tactful solution. He pointed at the danger of careless decisions and reminded the audience that the correction of books in the 17th century had brought about a profound schism in Russian Orthodoxy. “I believe, - he said, - that we should learn a lesson from this in order not to repeat it ever again.”

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