Metropolitan Hilarion: I am confident that preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council will continue in the near future

Your Eminence! You have recently led a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church at the meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission held in Chambesy near Geneva. Which questions did you discuss?

The Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission is a working body which prepares the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. It elaborates items included in the Council's agenda. The catalogue of the items was compiled in 1976 and includes ten topics demanding the elaboration of common position of the Orthodox Church. According to the regulation, proposals made by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission are to be approved by the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference.

The major part of the mentioned catalogue has been elaborated in the last decades, while in 2009 the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference approved the decisions on the ordering of cooperation among the Churches in Orthodox diaspora. That same year the Commission formulated the unanimous opinion on the method of granting the autonomy (self-governing) to a church province within a Local Church and considered in part a method of promulgating a new autocephalous (completely independent) Church.

This time the Commission had to complete consideration of the issue of church autocephaly and discuss the topic of the holy diptychs – the lists, according to which the Primates of the Local Churches are commemorated during divine services.

The Commission' meetings, chaired by Metropolitan John of Pergamon from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, took place on 21-27 February 2011. With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church was represented by myself, by Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain (the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia), and by my deputy, archpriest Nikolai Balashov.

Was an agreed decision on the mentioned questions taken?

The Commission's work has shown that both mentioned questions need serious complementary exploration. The discussion in Chambesy was not an easy one and disclosed different positions, while the decision must be taken only by consensus in accordance with regulations.

The major debate developed on the method of signing a document on the promulgation of autocephaly called “Tomos.” Some participants, including those of the Russian Church, made the following proposal: In keeping with the practice of the former Ecumenical and Pan-Orthodox Councils, common decision of all the heads of the Churches sign their common decision without any distinction, beginning, certainly, with the first among them – the Patriarch of Constantinople.

In the end it was recognized that this topic needs further exploration.

As to the topic of diptychs, the Commission has thoroughly studied all its aspects and analyzed the criteria used for the inclusion of the name of a Primate of a Church into diptychs. Having compared the differences in the present diptychs, the Commission considered it useful to reach a uniform opinion on this matter.

Also considered were opinions on the place of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches of Georgia, Cyprus, Poland and Albania and the variant reading in the diptychs that exist because of the lack of common opinion on the number of Churches recognized as autocephalous. This refers to the Orthodox Church in America, which is recognized as autocephalous by five Local Churches, including the Russian Orthodox Church, while other Churches do not have the name of its Primate in their diptychs. Unfortunately, mutual consent has not been obtained on all these questions.

Is it really true that convocation of the Holy and Great Council is postponed for an indefinite period? What should be done to reach the unity of sentiment on disputed questions?

The situation should not be excessively dramatized. It is true that we have encountered certain difficulties in the process of obtaining consensus on certain questions. However, it only means that we all should seriously ponder over the overcoming of these difficulties. After all, it was difficult to obtain consensus in the past.

Participants in the discussion in Chambesy are aware of their responsibility for the destiny of inter-Orthodox dialogue. They understand the necessity to continue in a constructive way the preparation for the Holy and Great Council. They understand the importance of thorough elaboration of all questions included in the agenda. We should seek to hear those points of view that do not concur with ours and try to comprehend them. In the process of seeking other solutions the voice of each participant in the dialogue should be heard and the opinion of each Local Church should be taken into account. This principle is reflected in the regulations of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission and the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference.

Our common aim is not to convene the Council as soon as possible, but to do all we can to make its decisions show the majesty of the Orthodox faith to the world, to bring witness of the intransient meaning of the Holy Tradition of the Church, and to confirm the unity of the Church.

I am confident that preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council will continue in the near future.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/55836/