



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: Our concern is to preserve and consolidate unity of Russian Orthodox Church

On July 17, 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, speaking in Church and World talk show, answered questions from anchorman Ivan Semenov concerning the work of the DECR as a church external policy department.

- Does an Orthodox Christian in his everyday life ever encounter the work of the DECR and fruits of your efforts?

- Of course, they do, especially those who live in the far-abroad countries and some neighbouring countries. Take for instance relations between the Orthodox and the Catholics or between the Orthodox and the Protestants. These are not only relations existing on official level. Many Orthodox believers live in countries with the predominant Catholic Church or in the countries where most people confess Protestantism. It means there are mixed marriages, communication at work places with people of other faiths or other Christian confessions. We do not live in a world where we are isolated from each other. It is the DECR's responsibility to deal with this extensive problematic involved in relationships between the Church and the external world including other Christian confessions.

- What are the main tasks of the Synodal department?

- First of all, our concern is to preserve and consolidate the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Church is not only a Church of the Russian Federation. It is the dominant Church in Belarus, Moldavia, Ukraine, and it is widely represented in other countries of the post-Soviet space, as well as in far-abroad countries. Suffice it to say that now more than a half of the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church are not Russian citizens. In this situation the reinforcement of the external boundaries of our Church and consolidation of its unity is certainly a very important task for the whole Church and its

supreme authorities in general and the Department for External Church Relations in particular.

- In the period of Khrushchev's persecution against the Church, the Department was headed by His Eminence Nikodim Rotov. What can you say about him in the light of today's realities?

- The genuine greatness of this man has become clear only today. In fact, he played a decisive role in defining our Church's attitude to the state which organized under Khrushchev another wave of persecution against the Church. With all the power of his intellect and church consciousness, Metropolitan Nikodim made a stand for the Church. What happened at that time was that every Easter procession with the cross was turned into a demonstration of the ungodly who threw cigarette butts at the clergy and cried out profanities. To put an end to it, Metropolitan Nikodim used, among other things, the external activities of the Church. For instance, he used to invite delegations from Finland or Germany for Easter celebrations, and the presence of foreigners restrained such things. He managed to create a whole system of defense around the Church and, using again the external factor, namely, the involvement of the Church in international life and inter-Christian dialogue, created such conditions as not only prevented the Church from dying but also helped her to continue developing. It was to Metropolitan Nikodim's credit that such young bishops were encouraged as the future Patriarch Kirill.

- What are relations today between the Orthodox Churches? Are there any problems in this respect? Is the Department succeeding in maintaining the unity of Universal Orthodoxy?

- The Orthodox Church as a whole does not have a unified structural or administrative format. Administratively, it is, if one can say so, a confederation of autocephalous, that is, completely independent of one another, Orthodox Churches. According to our diptych, that is, the list of Churches adopted in the Russian Church, they are 15, while according to the diptych adopted in, say, the Church of Constantinople, they are 14. This fact alone shows that one of the Churches – The Orthodox Church in America – does not enjoy pan-Orthodox recognition. Problems arising in relations between Orthodox Churches are not theological or dogmatic in nature, but rather pertaining, for instance, to who should govern particular territories. Historically, some regions in different times were parts of different Local Churches. And today there may be two Churches who claim a particular region. All these and other problems involving interaction between Churches, especially the elaboration a common attitude to various problems of today, are in the jurisdiction of the Department.

- In what way are relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople developing today?

- In the 1990s, we had a very difficult streak in relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, who unilaterally created its own church jurisdiction in our canonical territory, namely, in Estonia. It happened because in the 20s and 30s the Estonian Orthodox Church was temporarily part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Because of this, our relations with Constantinople were suspended for several months. They were restored later but remained tense. The Estonian problem still exists but recently His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has made some steps towards the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the express purpose of relieving the tension and moving from confrontation and rivalry to trust and mutual understanding. The point is for the Churches to restrain from making any unilateral steps and to set up a mechanism of regular consultations on particular issues. And certainly, the Russian Church is ready to render assistance to the Patriarchate of Constantinople since it is located in the territory of today's Turkey in reduced circumstances and needs help and support. Thanks to the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Constantinople and the recent reciprocal visit of Patriarch Bartholomew to the Russian Church, these relations have been pushed in the positive direction and hopefully will continue developing in the same way.

- Your Eminence, please tell us about the Pan-Orthodox Council under preparation.

- Our Department is the church body which will participate in the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council. There are many myths around it. I keep receiving letters from people who say: The coming Ecumenical Council will actually be a false council because it will betray Orthodoxy to bring out the end of the world. I participated in several preparatory meetings for the forthcoming Council. They dealt with purely technical matters from the point of view of an ordinary Orthodox believer. For instance, who and how can grant autocephaly, that is, independence, or autonomy to a particular Church. The problem of diptychs is considered, that is, in what order the Churches should follow when the primates of Local Churches are mentioned during the liturgy, and so forth. It is still unclear whether this Council will consider any doctrinal or ethical issues. Anyway, if the Council is convened, it will include all the Local Orthodox Churches and it means there will be the primates of these Churches and bishops, and one should not expect at all that it will betray Orthodoxy. On the contrary, this Council will help reinforce the position of Orthodoxy in the modern world. There will be no non-Orthodox representatives at all because it will be a Pan-Orthodox Council. The date and venue are not yet fixed, nor even the agenda. His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, when in Russia, said he hoped to convene this Council within the next 2 or 3 years, but it is unclear how much it is feasible.

- What is the purpose of the Russian Orthodox Church's membership in the World Council of Churches?

- The World Council of Churches is an organization with over 300 various Christian member churches, Orthodox, Oriental (the so-called Non-Chalcedonian), and Protestant. The Catholic Church is not among its members but it is a member of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order. The task of the WCC is to provide a platform for representatives of various churches so that they could communicate and voice their positions. No 'super-church' whatsoever or a common Christian religion is planned to be created in this Council; such work is altogether absent. For us, the participation in this forum is prompted first of all by the fact that it offers an opportunity for bearing witness to Orthodoxy before non-Orthodox Christians, that is, actually for us it is a missionary work. But of course, this forum also gives us an opportunity to listen to our non-Orthodox brothers.

DECR Communication Service

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/56954/>