



Metropolitan Hilarion: the procedure for returning from schism should not be humiliating

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, took part in a meeting of the Inter-Council Presence's commission for opposing and overcoming church schisms, on 25 March 2010.

The commission is led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine. Metropolitan Hilarion is his vice-chairman.

Addressing the meeting, the DECR chairman said in particular:

A schism in the Church is always a tragedy. It is not accidental that our meeting takes place in Ukraine where this problem is especially relevant.

A favourable situation seems to be developing in Ukraine at present for overcoming the schism as political reasons which conditioned its spreading are becoming a thing of the past. They are no longer relevant. Ever more popular become the ideas of integration, rather than disintegration.

The absence of any prospects for the schism has become increasingly realized by the schismatics themselves. Many of them would like to return to the fold of the Church. This process is already underway. Yesterday I visited the diocese of Vinnitsa, where I learnt from Archbishop Simeon that seven parishes of the so-called 'Kievan Patriarchate' have returned to the Church's fold. Such processes are also taking place in other regions in Ukraine.

The Church like a child-loving mother always awaits with love the return of those who have fallen away from her. Their coming back home should be made as easy as possible. This is exactly the aim of our commission.

To achieve this aim we are to fulfill the tasks the Inter-council Presence presidium has set us, doing it on

the basis of an historical and canonical analysis of the schisms which already existed and were healed. This analysis should be made by experts who are also to elaborate possible models of overcoming them.

We should realize that in the schism there are those who chose this path consciously when they left the canonical Church. But there are also a great number of those who have already grown in schism and have been formed in it as Christians. Some of them do not realize the fatality of their dwell outside the Church, and we should help them return to communion with universal Orthodoxy.

The procedure of returning from a schism should not be humiliating. We should proceed from the fact that it is categorically inadmissible to recognize sacraments administered in schism. However, there is an opinion that in a return to the fold of the Church the sacraments administered outside it are filled with grace-giving power. This does not apply however to episcopal consecrations since they are bound up with the apostolic succession which is absent from a schism. We have to discuss what is to be done when thousands or even millions of people will be returning to the Church. Should we administer baptism or anointing to them? Or can we accept them through repentance?

We will also have to discuss possible forms of integration for large communities returning from schism.

Our work to heal schisms should be carried out in the spirit of Christian love. We must be motivated by compassion. I wish success to our commission.

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