



Communique of the meetings of the Inter-Council Presence's Commission for Opposing and Overcoming Church Schisms

The Russian Orthodox Church Inter-Council Presence's Commission for Opposing and Overcoming Schisms held its first meeting on 25 March 2010 in the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. It was chaired by His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine.

Opening the meeting, Metropolitan Vladimir noted the fact that 'the first meeting of our commission being held in Kiev is not just a tribute of respect for the ancient capital city of Rus'. It is also a response to an urgent need of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Indeed, the problem of church divisions is especially pressing precisely in Ukraine today'.

Speaking about church divisions, His Beatitude emphasized that 'schisms are bleeding wounds on the body of the Church, which need a skilful and considerate treatment. And how painful it is to hear from the faithful of our Church that we should not be concerned over the fate of brothers and sisters who are outside the Eucharistic communion with us... A refusal to heal the wounds of schism runs contrary to the very spirit of the Gospel and comes into conflict with the teaching of Church Fathers'.

His Beatitude also recalled the words of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill who, during his visit to Ukraine in summer 2009, called for taking all possible actions 'so that one Church of Christ, the martyr and confessor Church who remained faithful to Christ even unto death and shared the fate of her people, may again have the power and resources to hold her faithful children in a maternal embrace'.

'In these words by the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church we see a clear pastoral imperative urging us to action', the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said. He also reminded those present of numerous initiatives taken by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to heal the schisms in the spirit of love commanded by Christ. It was noted that the establishment of the Inter-Council Presence's commission for opposing and overcoming schisms was an organic continuation of these initiatives.

The Most Rev. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the commission's vice-chairman, noted in his remarks that a favourable situation was developing in Ukraine today for overcoming the schism as the political reasons which conditioned its spreading were becoming a thing of the past. Increasingly popular now are the ideas of integration, rather than disintegration. The absence of any prospects for the schism is realized by the schismatics themselves. Many of them would like to return to the fold of the

Church. His Eminence reminded the meeting that along with those who went away into schism consciously, 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; therefore the task of the Church is to help them return to communion with universal Orthodoxy. The comeback procedure should not be humiliating. It is categorically inadmissible to recognize sacraments administered in schism. However, there is an opinion based on historical practice that the forms of sacraments administered in schism are filled with grace-giving power and do not have to be repeated in case of schismatics' return to the fold of the Church. This does not apply however to episcopal consecrations since they are bound up with the apostolic succession which is absent from a schism.

Metropolitan Hilarion called upon the commission to work in the spirit of Christian love and compassion.

The commission members, having supported the ideas expressed in the remarks of His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir and His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, defined the priority themes for the commission's further work as follows:

- systematizing the existing schisms;
- studying the existing precedents of church divisions healed;
- healing the schism in Ukraine;
- conducting dialogue with the Old Belief;
- preventing schisms.

Guided by the ROC Inter-Council Presence procedure, the commission resolved that the results of its work be commented upon only by the chairman of the commission, the vice-chairman of the commission and the persons authorized by them.

Kiev Monastery of the Caves

25 March 2010