



DECR chairman explains to foreign journalists the church situation in Ukraine and Belarus and answers questions about inter-Orthodox relations

During his meeting with a group of foreign journalists, Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, asked about the church situation in Ukraine, said,

‘We never refer to two patriarchates in Ukraine – those of Moscow and Kiev. We maintain that there is one canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine and also a group that has arbitrarily and illegally named itself as ‘patriarchate’. The point is legitimacy and illegitimacy. In no way can we put the legitimate canonical Church, which is in communion with all the other Local Orthodox Churches, on an equal footing with a group of persons who call themselves a ‘patriarchate’ and bear church titles without being a canonical Church’.

He said there was a search for a way to heal this division, and representatives of the canonical Church and non-canonical groups met to find a way out of the crisis. ‘I know that among those who belong to the so-called ‘Kievan Patriarchate’ and among its clergy there are many of those who are willing to reunite with the canonical Church’, Archbishop Hilarion remarked, adding, I believe the positions of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are very strong today. They are not getting weaker but rather stronger and stronger’.

The visit of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia was a vivid testimony to it, His Eminence underlined, saying, ‘He was welcomed not as a guest or a foreigner but as their own spiritual leader. Everywhere he went, in eastern and western Ukraine, the people welcomed him with the words: You are our Patriarch Kirill!’ The archbishop expressed hope that under the wise guidance of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, steps would be taken to heal this division, which arose for purely political reasons at a time when an absolute chaos, political and economic, prevailed throughout the post-Soviet space.

Asked about the situation of the Orthodox Church in Belarus, His Eminence Hilarion said, ‘The religious situation in Belarus is very safe. Thank God, there are no divisions there and the Orthodox Church has preserved unity. The visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Belarus was a national event. He was given a very warm welcome in Minsk, in Polotsk and in Vitebsk. Therefore I believe there are no serious problems in the Orthodox Church in Belarus today’.

The DECR chairman also noted that along with the Orthodox there are people of other confessions and non-Christian religions living in the Republic of Belarus. 'I believe the mechanism of interreligious cooperation working in Belarus meets the interests of the people and the state as well as the interests of the time', he underlined.

Asked about relations between the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Church, the DECR chairman stressed that these relations were very good and did not deteriorate because of the political crisis and complications in the relations between Russia and Georgia.

'In this situation it is important to strengthen the peacemaking potential of the two Orthodox Churches. And the other day His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Patriarch Iliya of Georgia met in Baku and the both sides underlined the importance of cooperation in this situation', he noted.

The archbishop was also asked about the status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church that proclaimed autocephaly in 1967, which has not been recognized by the rest Orthodox Churches.

'The problem of the Macedonian Church is one of those which should be resolved through church means alone', His Eminence answered, 'We do not recognize the Macedonian Church as autocephalous in spite of the fact that it has one-sidedly proclaimed this autocephaly and we believe a solution of the problem of its status should be found first of all in dialogue between the leaders of this Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

'At the same time we are open to giving support, if needed, to our brothers in Serbia and Macedonia so that they may find a common language', he said, adding, 'and we do not rule out that this problem may become an item on the agenda of inter-Orthodox dialogue.

Asked about the situation of the Orthodox Church in China, His Eminence Hilarion informed the journalists that he would make a visit to China in the nearest future to meet the leaders of the Chinese State Directorate for Religious Affairs.

DECR Communication Service