Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk meets with Pope Benedict XVI of Rome

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Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, during his official visit to Rome, met on 18 September 2009 with Pope Benedict XVI of Rome at his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

During their an hour-long talk, they discussed a wide range of issues concerning bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

Archbishop Hilarion stressed the importance of the Orthodox and Catholic common witness to traditional Christian values in face of the secular world. He pointed to the identity of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches' views on such themes as family, motherhood, population crisis, euthanasia and many other ethical issues. The DECR chairman pointed to essential differences existing on these issues between the Orthodox and Catholics, on one hand, and various Protestant communities, on the other. In this situation the Orthodox-Catholic cooperation in elaborating a common stand on these issues acquired a special importance, he said.

Archbishop Hilarion also pointed to the need to enhance the positive potential of the bilateral relations including cooperation in the field of culture.

The DECR chairman and the head of the Roman Catholic Church discussed problems and prospects of the theological dialogue between the two Churches. Archbishop Hilarion underlined that there were two different ecclesiological models, one of which (the Catholic one) presupposed the existence of a single administrative center for the whole Universal Church, while the other does not presuppose the existence of such a center. In the family of Local Orthodox Churches, it is the Patriarch of Constantinople who has the primacy of honour but his jurisdiction does not extend beyond the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In his talk with the Pope of Rome, Archbishop Hilarion spoke about the situation in western Ukraine

where the Greek Catholics used force in the period between 1980-1990 to actually destroy three Orthodox dioceses of Lvov, Ternopol and Ivano-Frankovsk. The DECR chairman pointed to the need to make practical steps for a cardinal improvement of the situation in western Ukraine.

In conclusion of the talk, which was held in an atmosphere of constructive mutual understanding, the sides considered prospects for cooperation between the two Churches in the field of culture, especially in conducting the Days of Russian Spiritual Culture to be held in summer 2010 in Rome.

After their talk in private, Archbishop Hilarion introduced to the Pope his fellow-travelers: Archpriest Igor Vyzhanov, DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, Hegumen Philip (Vasiltsev), a cleric of the Church of Protomartyr Catherine in Rome, and G. Guaita and I. Kopeikin, DECR staff members.

The DECR chairman presented the head of the Roman Catholic Church with a pectoral cross produced by the Russian Orthodox church workshops, as a token of the visit.

DECR Communication Service

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