DECR chairman attends conference on World Orthodoxy: Primacy and Conciliarity in Light of Orthodox Teaching



On September 16, 2021, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, took part in the conference held by the Synodal Biblical-Theological Commission on the theme “World Orthodoxy: Primacy and Conciliarity in the Light of the Orthodox Teaching”, which took place at the St. Sergius Hall of the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow.

The conference is attended by members of the Synodal Biblical-Theological Commission, representatives of the theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church, university faculty, hierarchs and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and guests from Local Orthodox Churches.

Presenting his paper, Metropolitan Hilarion stressed in particular that the Orthodox teaching speaks

about the unity and oneness of the Church proceeding from the Gospel and makes this characteristic the first in the rank of her properties.

“Any threat to the unity of the Church is a threat to the Body of Christ, in which believers are united by one faith, the Eucharist and her Head - Jesus Christ”, the DECR chairman noted, “Precisely for this reason, the most tragic events in the history of the Church are schisms in which Christ-commanded unity is violated, the unanimous life in faith is lost, the union around the Eucharistic Cup ends, the apostolic succession in the hierarchy is upset, and a deep wound appears in the Body of Christ”.

According to the hierarch, in the history of the Church there is a great deal of examples of how actions of her particular members led to tragic divisions with their consequences felt to this day.

“These pages of church history could serve as a lesson and a warning against such actions in the present and the future. However, up to this day the unity of Orthodoxy is threatened not only from outside but also from inside, coming from those who seek to act contrary to the Orthodox teaching and canonical tradition. We can see such actions today taken by the Patriarchate of Constantinople”, Metropolitan Hilarion stated.

The DECR head expressed confidence that the distorted understanding of primacy on the level of the Universal Church presents a real threat to the unity of the Church “especially when this understanding entertained by the first Primate in the diptych is imposed on other Primates”.

“It is the attempts of Constantinople to assert its own undivided authority in the Church that lie in the basis of inter-Orthodox crises of the last decades”, His Eminence underlined.

The hierarch also reminded the conference that the lawless and anti-canonical invasion of Constantinople into the boundaries of Ukraine in 2018 was preceded by its no less lawless invasion in Estonia in 1996.

“Already at that time it led to a rupture in the Eucharistic communion between the Russian Church and Constantinople”, the archpastor said, “And though a compromise settlement was found at the price of much effort, the Constantinopolitan side has not fulfilled up to now the commitments it took upon itself as one of the conditions for restoring the communion. The fragile peace proved to be just a truce before, regrettably, a much more serious conflict was to burst out beneath our very eyes”.

The Constantinople’s claim to universal primacy manifested itself with a special clarity at the Council of Crete in June 2016, Metropolitan Hilarion noted. He mentioned that from the very beginning of the pre-Council process, it was the principle of consensus of all the commonly recognized Local Autocephalous

Churches that was put in the basis of all the decisions made at the events held in preparations for a Pan-Orthodox Council. However, a few weeks before the date of the opening of the Council, four Local Churches stated their well-reasoned refusal to participate in it and called to put it off so that the differences preventing their participation in the Council might be overcome. But these appeals were ignored, and in defiance of the voice of these Churches, the Patriarchate of Constantinople resolutely and peremptorily insisted on holding the Council.

“We see the consequences to which the holding of the Council of Crete has led: a part of the Local Churches recognizes it as pan-Orthodox, while others do not regard it as such. There is a direct division”, the DECR head stated.

However, he said, an incomparably greater blow was delivered to the unity of the Church by the invasion of the Patriarch of Constantinople into Ukraine and the ensuing legalization of the Ukrainian schism in 2018.

“As a result, there developed an unprecedented situation, as the Church, which has over 12 thousand parishes and over 250 monasteries and being the most numerous religious community in Ukraine, was announced by Constantinople, as it were, non-existent’, while her lawful right and even her name are sought, by fair means or foul, to be handed over to the schismatics”, His Eminence emphasized.

“It is impossible to call Constantinople’s actions a healing of the schism in Ukraine”, the speaker continued, <…> Now everyone. who recognizes the legalization of the Ukrainian schism and the newly-created ‘Orthodox Church of Ukraine’, automatically recognizes as well that the Patriarch of Constantinople possesses a power in the Universal Orthodox Church not limited by anything or anybody and can, at his own discretion and in defiance of all, cancel historic agreements traced back 300 years, announce as bishops those who have never had episcopal consecration, proclaim by a stroke of pen a millions-strong Church to be ‘non-existent’, etc.”

“The threats to the unity of Orthodoxy that we see now in the actions of Constantinople need to be subjected to a broad and manifold reflection by both hierarchs and theologians. Precisely for this reason, in the anticipation of the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, we are holding now a theological conference devoted to privacy and conciliarity in the Orthodox Church. In the course of the conference, I hope we will be able to fulfil the tasks about which His Holiness Patriarch spoke and to use the results of our efforts in further work to assess the situation in the world Orthodoxy”, the DECR chairman said in conclusion.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/88042/