Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: Decision demanded by church canons was taken today

A briefing for journalists was held after the session of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church that took place in Minsk on October 15, 2018. Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, told the mass media representatives about decisions taken at the session.

"The decision on the complete cessation of the Eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople was taken today. This is a forced decision, but our Holy Synod could not take another one as the logic of the latest actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople has led to it.

Several days ago it was decided at the session of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople that it restored in holy orders the anathematized leader of the Ukrainian schism Filaret (Denisenko) and the leader of another schismatic group. The decision was taken "to revoke" the act of the Patriarchate of Constantinople of 1686 on including the Metropolis of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate and on establishing a stravropegia of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine.

All these decisions are unlawful and canonically void from the point of view of the Russian Orthodox Church which does not accept them and will not adhere to them. The schism remains a schism. Its leaders remain the leaders of schism, and the Church which recognizes schismatics and enters into communion with them excludes herself from the canonical space of the Orthodox Church. It is the main reason for which we have to break communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople which has completely identified itself with the schism.

I would like to tell you that it is not the first case of this kind in the history of the Orthodox Church. Once the Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople fell into heresy which was condemned at the 3rd Ecumenical Council and the Patriarch was deposed. A thousand years later the Patriarch of Constantinople signed a unia with Rome. This action was condemned by the heads of other Local Orthodox Churches. The Russian Orthodox Church also condemned it. As patriarch-uniat was elected and there was no canonical patriarch in Constantinople at that time, the Russian Orthodox Church independently elected her metropolitan and since then has begun to live as an autocephalous Church.

Even recently, in 1996, the Church of Constantinople intruded into canonical territory of the Russian

Church by establishing its jurisdiction in Estonia, and we were forced to break the Eucharistic communion with this Church.

Decision demanded by church canons was taken today. We adopted the Statement of the Holy Synod with thorough explanation of why and on what grounds the decision was taken. For instance, we mention the canonical rules which do not allow a bishop of a certain Church to intervene into the affairs of another Local Church. We cited the interpretations of a renowned Byzantine canonist John Zonaras and of St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain. They say that the Patriarch of Constantinople has the right to accept appeals within his Church but cannot accept appeals from other Local Churches, on which it insists for no reason The new and anti-canonical teaching on the alleged privileges of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to unilaterally accept appeals from other Local Churches finds no grounds in the holy canons of the Orthodox Church. On the strength of all these reasons the decision on breaking the Eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople was taken today.

We hope that the common sense will prevail and the Patriarchate of Constantinople will change its attitude to the present ecclesiastical reality. But until this change takes place and the unlawful and anti-canonical decisions remain in force from the point of view of Constantinople, we will not be in communion with this Church which happened to be in schism today.

Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions of the journalists.

– You said that in 1996 a decision was taken on breaking the Eucharistic communion with the Church of Constantinople. Could the events of that time be compared with that what is happening now?

– In 1996 the Patriarchate of Constantinople encroached upon the territory of the Russian Orthodox Church and established its jurisdiction on her canonical territory. We had not recognized this decision and do not recognize it. However, the canonical crimes committed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople now are more grievous as it declared its intention to grant an autocephaly to a part of the Russian Orthodox Church, and not the part which once belonged to Constantinople.

The territory of the Metropolis of Kiev, which became a part of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686, is not the same as that of the present Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It was much smaller. Donbas, the south of Ukraine, Odessa and many other areas were not its part The decision “to revoke” the act of 1686 and an attempt to present the case as if the whole territory of Ukraine was a part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for over three hundred years contradicts the historical truth, and we said about it in the Statement of the Holy Synod.

– What kind of response the believers should give to the decision of the Holy Synod? What this decision means for the simple parishioners of the Russian Orthodox Church?

– I believe that that response should be calm. Practically this decision means that we will not be able to concelebrate with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, our bishops and priests will not celebrate Liturgy together with hierarchs and priests of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and laypersons will not be able to take Holy Communion in churches of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. We said about it in the Statement.

– Will there be any appeal to the heads of other Local Churches?

– We will inform all Local Churches about the decision.

– What do you think about the developments that can lead to the escalation of conflict in Ukraine with the seizure of church building and violent actions?

– We hope for common sense. We hope that no clashes will occur. We have heard the assurances of the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko that all the believers in Ukraine will have an opportunity to go to the Church to which they belong and that no obstacles will be created in their way. We do hope that these promises will be fulfilled.

–What does this situation mean for Belorussian Orthodox Church? Is she automatically breaking relations with Constantinople?

– The Belorussian Orthodox Church as a part of the Russian Orthodox Church accedes to this decision. Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus took part in the session of the Synod; yesterday we discussed the situation with the members of the Synod of the Belorussian Orthodox Church. The decisions concern the entire canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, Belarus including.

– Do members of the Synod of the Belorussian Orthodox Church support these decisions unanimously?

– You can raise this question with the Patriarchal Exarch.

– Recently President Poroshenko met with His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry and either tried to persuade him to become the head of this new but yet not established autocephalous church, or threatened him. Could you tell us about this meeting in detail?

I believe it correct to put this question to His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine. It should be noted that His Beatitude took part in the whole session today and supported the decisions as all members of the Synod did.

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