



Patriarch Kirill: Every manifestation of Orthodox unity is our common glory, common joy, while a want of unity and every tension, every conflict in the global Orthodox family is a common pain and common defeat

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church pointed to the support of fraternal relations within the family of Local Orthodox Churches as one of the most important tasks of his Patriarchal ministry. 'We should remember: the Holy Orthodox Church is one as the Lord is one. All the Orthodox nations comprise it', he said in his address to the Bishops' Conference on 2 February 2010 at the Church of Christ the Saviour, 'The administrative borders of Local Churches are necessary of course for ensuring a proper canonical order but they cannot divide into parts the one body of the Church of Christ'.

Every manifestation of Orthodox unity is our common glory, common joy, while a want of unity and every tension, every conflict in the global Orthodox family is a common pin and defeat, His Holiness Kirill believes.

He expressed joy at the resumption of preparations for a Pan-Orthodox Council, which were blocked in the 90 because of the Estonian church problem. The 4th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference was held last June in Chambesy. It was devoted to the problem of pastoral care of the Orthodox diaspora as one of the most urgent problems of inter-Orthodox relations. In December, also in Chambesy, a Russian Orthodox Church delegation attended a meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission which tackled the problems of autocephaly and autonomy.

'The Russian Orthodox Church has always insisted that Orthodox believers who live in diaspora have the right to maintain relations with the Mother Church', His Holiness underlined, 'It is necessary however to promote consolidation among Orthodox communities in various regions of the world'.

According to His Holiness, the 2009 meeting in Chambesy adopted the wording of documents optimal today for regulating interaction between various jurisdictions in the diaspora. Thus, the conference agreed to establish bishops' assemblies uniting all the canonical bishops in a particular region. Their terms of reference will include the concern for Orthodox unity and coordination of efforts of the Orthodox in a particular region in bearing common witness to our faith and in developing church education together.

'Our Church has showed the necessary flexibility in the approach to this issue', His Holiness informed

the gathering. 'For the sake of church peace we agreed to have the bishops' assemblies chaired in accordance with diptychs. However, the powers of the chairmen and the bishops' assemblies themselves were defined very clearly. As we insisted, all their decisions will be made only by consensus. Canonical relations of bishops with their own Primates and Synods are not challenged, nor are the powers exercised by bishops in the diaspora diminished. Thus, our bishops in the diaspora will be able to make an active influence on the decision-making process in bishops' assemblies', he said.

The December meetings of the Inter-Orthodox Commission adopted an addition to the draft document on Autocephaly and the Way of Declaring It' developed in 1993 and a new draft document on Autonomy of the Way of Declaring It. The supplemented document on autocephaly provides for a procedure of granting autocephaly to a church region, which begins with the consideration of an appropriate request for it by a Local Council of the Mother Church. In case of a favourable decision, the Mother Church notifies the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is to inform all other autocephalous Churches and to find out whether there is a pan-Orthodox consensus on it. Autocephaly shall be declared by an appropriate Tomos, which is to be signed by the Patriarch of Constantinople and Primates of other Orthodox Churches.

The draft document on Autonomy and the Way of Declaring It recognizes that the granting of autonomy lies wholly within the competence of a respective autocephalous Church. Therefore, a request for autonomy shall be considered by the autocephalous Church, which, if her decision is favourable, will issue an appropriate Tomos defining the territorial borders of the autonomous Church and the degree of its independence. Then the Primate of the autocephalous Church notifies other Church about the declaration of a new autonomous Church.

According to His Holiness Kirill, the results of the Inter-Orthodox Commission's work are preliminary. They will be presented to the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference. 'But already now we can note with satisfaction that these meetings have made a significant contribution to the task of strengthening Orthodox unity', the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said.

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