



Patriarch Kirill Meets with Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East

On January 29, 2019, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East and his delegation at the patriarchal residence in the St. Daniel patriarchal monastery.

The delegation includes Metropolitan Philip, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Metropolitan Basilyos of Akkar, Metropolitan Jacques of Buenos Aires and All Argentina; Archimandrite Parthenios (Allati), personal secretary to Patriarch John X; Deacon Meletius Shattahi, a staff member of the Patriarchate of Antioch; and Mr. Raymond Rizk, Mr. Hassan Risheh and Mr. Georges Ghandour, representatives of the youth movement of the Orthodox Church of Antioch.

The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations; Archbishop Feofilakt of Pyatigorsk and Cherkessk, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Hegumen Arseny (Sokolov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East; and Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations.

Addressing the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, Patriarch Kirill said, 'I cordially welcome you to the St. Daniel monastery and thank you for joining us all in celebrating the 10th anniversary of my stay at the Patriarchal See of Moscow. Whenever Primates of Churches meet, they have an opportunity for praying together, celebrating the Divine Liturgy and discussing what worries our Churches and what is important for the whole universal Orthodoxy'.

His Holiness underscored the high level of the bilateral relations between the Orthodox Churches of Antioch and Russia, which has a long history. 'But today our relations have I believe a special importance. We know that the Church of Antioch is going through difficult times, especially in connection with the situation that has developed in Syria. 'And the Russian Orthodox Church is going through sorrowful trials, too, related to the situation in Ukraine. According to Holy Scriptures, he said, *whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it* (I Cor. 12:26), and in the Church of Christ, if one Church is going through trials, then all her members, the whole Orthodoxy, are called to commiserate with her', His Holiness stressed.

His Holiness noted that the situation in Ukraine, where the canonical Church is suffering today, has become especially painful for the Russian Orthodox Church. 'We are grateful to all the Local Orthodox Churches who have expressed solidarity with our Ukrainian Orthodox Church and offered her a spiritual, devotional and moral support', he said pointing with gratitude to the open support that His Beatitude Patriarch John has given to the canonical Ukrainian Church, also in his letters. He also said that last October the Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch clearly spoke out against the creation of parallel church jurisdictions within the canonical boundaries of the existing Patriarchate or autocephalous Churches, including also the complex situation in which the Orthodox Church lives in Ukraine.

Patriarch Kirill also welcomed the joint statement made by Patriarch John X and Patriarch Irenaeus of Serbia on October 19, 2018, in which the situation, which has developed in Ukraine as a result of the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is described as 'a threat that can bring about a protracted division in the Orthodox Church'.

'Addressing to Patriarch Bartholomew, you appeal to him to not make any decisions that could have no consensus of the Orthodox Churches, His Holiness said, 'Indeed, the principle of consensus is adopted as a basis for decision-making in the whole Orthodox Church. The application of the principle of consensus in decision-making has been unequivocally referred to by Synaxes of Local Orthodox Churches and other pan-Orthodox assemblies, which have taken place in the recent time'.

'Your Church', Patriarch Kirill continued, 'is going through a difficult time too, also in the Syrian land'. He noted with satisfaction that the Patriarchates of Antioch and Moscow are developing cooperation in the humanitarian area, including cooperation aimed to support the Orthodox Church of Antioch.

He stressed the importance of humanitarian actions carried out by Russia in Syria. Thus, in November 2018, a group of Russian medical doctors came to Damascus to help select the children who have been maimed by the war, who lost limbs in mine explosions, so that they could be given treatment in Russia including prosthesis. Two of these children have already had a rehabilitation course in Moscow and returned to their homeland.

'The restoration work in the St. Thecla Convent in Maaloula is being completed and we hope that pilgrims will be able to visit these holy places again and enjoy coming in touch with the deep spiritual tradition of your Church', he continued, 'At your request, another important project will soon be implemented – the restoration of the church compound in Arbin and the church in Al-Zabadani near Damascus'.

In addition, after some difficulties had been overcome, an agreement was reached to install the

necessary equipment in the Patriarchal Al-Hosn hospital, the patriarch said.

Speaking about the development of students exchange between the two Patriarchates, His Holiness said, 'Now, five representatives of your Church, young students, are studying in Russia. In its turn, the St. John of Damascus Institute in Balamand admitted two female students from the Moscow Patriarchate. I believe it is a very good program and we have to develop it because students who study in Russia and students who are trained in the territory of your Church gain a unique experience by coming in touch with the spirituality and traditions of our fraternal Churches and in the future will be able to make a considerable contribution to the development of inter-church relations'.

Patriarch Kirill described the development of bilateral relations and cooperation as 'very important both for the consolidation of relations between the two Churches and for maintaining good relations between our nations'.

Speaking in response, the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch said, 'First of all, on behalf of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, I would like to express the warm feeling of love and respect for the Russian Orthodox Church and personally for Your Holiness and your brothers. In this connection, I would like to stress a special importance of the fact that we are present now at the celebrations devoted to the 10th anniversary of your enthronement. It is a very important event'.

His Beatitude thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the moving, warm and sincere words of welcome, which reflect the feeling of fraternal love and good relations existing between the two Churches. 'These relations go deep in our history and now are successfully developing in various areas of activity', he said

'Your Holiness', he continued, 'you were quite right to note that we share the same pain and have common wounds. The first pain is over the situation in which the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has found itself; and the second is the pain of the Church of Antioch and our brothers caused by the situation in Syria'. He also mentioned the problems present in bilateral relations between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem.

Speaking of the destructive war which continues in Syria, His Beatitude stressed: 'We are still enduring pain. We know nothing about the fate of our brothers – Metropolitan Paul and the Jacobite Syrian Metropolitan Gregory Ibrahim, but we continue to hope that everything will end well. I would like to smooth you a little bit, Your Holiness and our brothers in the Russian Orthodox Church by saying that the situation in Syria has somewhat improved as compared to what it was before. Now there is a process of liberation of the territories, which were captured earlier by terrorists, and, in spite of the fact that some hot spots remain under their control, we hope that the full liberation is close at hand. The main

credit in it, as is known, belongs to Russia, which rendered and continues to render political, military and humanitarian aid’.

‘We believe’, he noted, ‘that our Church will continue carrying out her mission, fulfilling her task with honour, as was she did before’.

Speaking about the grave crisis in the Orthodox world, provoked by the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine, Patriarch John stressed: ‘We called and call both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other supreme religious leaders to solve existing problems, including the problems encountered by our fraternal Russian Orthodox Church, through dialogue, negotiations and ordinary talks. Since 1960, the principle of consensus has been laid in the foundation of our work and it should be observed today. We continue to regard this principle, as you have rightly noted, a kind of cornerstone of all our work, which has been aimed at bringing close together the positions of all the Local Churches. We do not agree with the attempts at unilateral solution of several church problems to the detriment of the whole Orthodox world, which ultimately lead to a division in this world. Therefore, the preservation of our Orthodox unity and the fact that we should continue carrying out our mission of peace, love and cooperation – all this should remain the foundation of our work in the future as well’.

His Beatitude stated that this position was shared by all the members of the Bishops’ Council, which recently took place in the Church of Antioch. ‘They spoke of the need to do everything that is possible to achieve and preserve our unity. And we wish that our voice be heard because it is improper to keep silent at our time. We should speak aloud about it. Therefore, we called and call the Patriarchate of Constantinople and other Local Churches to return to the path of dialogue and cooperation. It needs to be done the paramount principle of our work’.

He stressed: ‘We should do everything to make the pain go out of our hearts so that we could rejoice in our unity, the unity of all the Local Churches and the whole Christian world. All the Christian should adhere to precisely this principle and make it the basis of our work both now and in the future’.

I thank God for the successful development of our relations in many areas’, he said addressing Patriarch Kirill, ‘These relations have proved to be effective, and we continue doing everything possible but make our contribution to the common cause’.

Concerning the help given by Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in restoring Syrian churches damaged by military and terrorist actions, Patriarch John said, ‘You have rightly noted that the restoration work in the St. Thecla Convent is close to the end, and the nuns are returning to it to continue their service of the Lord God in it. The situation in Maaloula has become almost normal. It is a very good factor, which gives pilgrims an opportunity to visit holy places’. He also expressed gratitude for the

stated readiness to carry out a project for the restoration of the church compound in Arbin and a church in Al-Zabadani.

‘We are exerting every effort for our brothers in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and throughout the Middle East to feel at home in their homeland and to live a life in love and brotherhood in their native land’, Patriarch John said and continued, ‘Along with the plans to restore several churches, we also want to make our contribution to the restoration of what has been destroyed as a result of the war – schools, universities, the creation of new jobs and thus to continue doing everything for the further development of our homeland. We are full of optimism and believe that our life in the future will be such as we want it to see’.

His Beatitude also expressed gratitude for support in the sphere of students’ exchange. ‘As Your Holiness have mentioned, five of our Syrian students are studying in the Russian Orthodox Church’s theological schools, while two female students from Russia are studying in the university in Balamand. It is a very positive fact. We believe that these traditions will be continued in the future as well’.

‘We thank Your Holiness, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian government and President Putin for the help and support they have rendered to Syria, including the Orthodox Church of Antioch. In light of the actions undertaken together and the humanitarian aid given to us, it is very important to stress that we make no distinction between Christians and Muslims. Therefore, we are called to play a considerable role in making peace return to our land’, he said.

His Beatitude congratulated Patriarch Kirill upon the 10th anniversary of his election to the Patriarchal throne and wished him a long life and service for the good of the Church.

DECR Communication Service

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