Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Meeting of the President of Russia Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin with the Participants of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church

On the 1st of December 2017 the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin spoke before the participants of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. This is what His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia said in his reply to the head of state.

Much-esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich, my brothers the archpastors,

Today is an historic event: the head of the Russian State has visited the Jubilee Episcopal Council to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the Office of Patriarch in our Church. A Council which poses and resolves very important relevant issues linked to the spiritual life of the human person, his prosperity and his moral and ethical well-being. A Council which does not shy away from resolving difficult topics, including those connected to our history. I hope very much that the decisions of this Council will help our Church, in dialogue with society, to move forwards, including in the resolution of problems which the people today face.

In the year of the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, it is impossible not to analyze the past, and, using the occasion that together with us here in the Hall of Church Councils is the Head of State, I would like to say a few words on the complex path of development of Church-state relations. In Imperial Russia the Church was a state Church, it was headed by the emperor, while the Church was administered bureaucratically by an institution called the Ober –Procurator of the Holy Ruling Synod. On the eve of the Revolution the best minds of both the Church and the state began to ponder the role of the Church in Russian society and what had to be done in order to make this role more evident. At a very difficult time, about one year before the 1905 Revolution, the then Prime Minister Sergei Witte reported to the emperor that one of the causes of the Church's loss of influence upon the people was that there existed between the Church and the supreme state authorities, between the Church and the people, a bureaucratic layer, meaning the bureaucratic institute of the state. There indeed was no dialogue between the Church and the higher state authorities, and with the interference of the state there was no direct dialogue between the Church and all of society.

After the events of the Revolution, when the principle of separation of Church and state was proclaimed, it appeared that the state would avoid playing such a dangerous role for the integrity of the state and people by removing the Church from a possible direct dialogue with the people. Yet something completely different happened: literally from the first days of the new regime, through institutions making up part of the secret police of the then Soviet state, there were attempts to formulate the same policy that existed before the Revolution, which was to approve all appointments and to control everything that took place at the level of the highest ecclesiastical decisions. In other words, to interfere in Church life in pursing concrete goals at a time when ideological interests had become a part of general state concerns.

And when in the 1990s there were changes and the Church roundly declared that there ought not to be any bureaucratic layers, hot heads were to be found among revolutionaries of that time. There were proposals that a ministry of religious affairs be set up, and certain well know people who took an active part in the political changes not only wanted, but even proposed their candidacy as new Ober-Procurators.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude that in today's Russia there are no bureaucratic layers. There is dialogue between the Patriarch and the President, between the supreme Church authorities and the corresponding ministries and government departments. A direct dialogue is held along the vertical of our life which grants to the Church the opportunity to formulate her understanding of what is happening in the country and among the people, to pay attention to such topics as public morality, social life, ecological problems and the moral dimension of the problems of internal and external politics. All of this forms within society a clear understanding of the Church's independent position. And perhaps the most important thing is that this position is based on the same moral principles upon which our laws are also based. These principles emerge from our spiritual and moral tradition, which today is not disputed by the Russian state.

There is nothing more serious and important than moral consensus within society. If there is consensus on the main moral values, then all other social relationships are formed harmoniously – laws are made that are acceptable to people and political practice corresponds to the interests of the people.

Your great personal role plays a part in all that I am now saying. I express my gratitude to you for the dialogue which we hold together, for the dialogue which is held between heads of ministries and government departments with the corresponding organizations and structures of the Russian Orthodox Church, and for that atmosphere of openness in which our society today lives. I believe that this openness will be the pledge for the certain success of our Fatherland in the near and distant future.

On behalf of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church I would like to wish you, much-

esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich, long years of life, good health and God’s aid in the lofty mission the Lord has entrusted to you through the will of the people. This is how we understand that which is happening in the history of people: the free will of people is combined with Divine Providence. May the Lord preserve you!

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