Speech by the President of Russia Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin before the Participants of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church

On the 1st December 2017 the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin visited the session of the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church which is being held in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. The head of state spoke before His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and all of the Council's participants.

Your Holiness, esteemed participants of the Council,

First of all, I would like to thank you sincerely for the invitation to take part in the Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church which is being held to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the Office of Patriarch – an event that has become defining for the life of the Russian Orthodox Church, for all of our nation and the entire country.

More than four hundred years ago in 1589 the Office of Patriarch was instituted in Old Russia, becoming the embodiment of a more significant role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Orthodox world, the recognition of her authority and the ministry of great spiritual deeds of her First Hierarchs.

The wise words of the Patriarchs of Moscow strengthened the faith of the people, inspired people to creative deeds and heroic endeavours in the defense of our Fatherland; they taught righteousness, kindness, mercy and justice, united representatives of various social classes and helped people to withstand times of tribulation.

The names of the Patriarchs of Moscow and All Russia Hermogenes and Philaret, their courage and steadfastness in faith, have become for our fatherland a symbol of the vanquishing of the inner turmoil and the foreign invasions of the seventeenth century and a symbol of the spiritual and national renaissance of Russian statehood.

It was at such a complex, dramatic time of our history – 1917-1918 – that the Local Council of the Orthodox Church of Russia was held. The hierarchs, clergy and laity together took the conciliar decision to revive the Office of Patriarch and the historical forms of the ordering of Church life.

The holy bishop Tikhon at that time, in taking upon himself the mission of Patriarchal ministry, undoubtedly committed a great heroic act in the name of God, faith and his nation. He knew that he has placing upon himself a colossal personal responsibility during those hardest of times for our country, he understand that he would encounter not respect from the new authorities but their open enmity. He understood truly what all of this would mean.

Yet linked to the newly-elected Patriarch were the thoughts and hopes of people who awaited from him protection, support and exhortation, and the bringing to their senses of those who had plunged the country further and further into civil war.

Patriarch Tikhon and the ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church fully shared the fate of Russia and her people, stood by the people in their adversities and tribulations. In spite of the repressions and persecutions, the destruction and plundering of churches, the attempts to weaken and discredit the Church, they preserved that which was most important of all – a faith which helped our nation, both here and in foreign lands, to preserve its culture, history, customs, traditions and national character.

Life puts things in its places and precisely separates the imposed and artificial from the truth. It was genuine values and patriotism which revealed their power and became a mighty pillar of support for all of our warrior soldiers of the Great Patriotic War, the defenders and heirs of the thousand year-old Russia. Prayer services were conducted in all churches where the words ‘for the granting of Victory to the warriors of our Fatherland’ resounded.

The Russian Orthodox Church and representatives of other religious organizations collected means for the needs of the front, with words of encouragement and their participation supported those who labored at the rear, who had lost their kin and loved ones, who were under siege in Leningrad or found themselves in occupied territories. The defeat of Nazism was indeed a victory not only of arms, but also a moral and spiritual victory.

And, of course, I would like to speak of the ministry of the Russian Orthodox Church in the period of social and economic transformations which our country underwent at the end of the twentieth century.

This time is called a time of spiritual rebirth and a huge growth of the Church’s authority in society. When many state and public institutions were weakened, when life was literally tuned upside time, it was the Church which supported people, gave hope and helped us to acquire a moral and spiritual direction in life, which called people to accord and unity.

The fact that Russia survived, that conflicts were not allowed to grow into a new civil schism is the great

merit of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as of other Russian religious organizations.

We are obliged to recall the lessons of the past. And so that society may develop confidently and harmoniously, it is important to restore the unity of our history, heal wounds and remove the divisions and intolerance which we have inherited from times past.

This path of attaining peace through mutual brotherly forgiveness has been shown to us by the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia when they signed the Act of Canonical Communion in 2007.

Your Holiness! Esteemed participants of the Episcopal Council!

Today, as in all times, the Russian Orthodox Church carries out with dignity her lofty and responsible mission, and every year broadens her public and social ministry. She labours prolifically in the field of moral enlightenment and charity, spiritually cares for the soldiers of Russia and renders help to the elderly, to those in need and to those who have lost their way in life.

The Russian Orthodox Church deserves great respect for her contribution in strengthening international and interreligious peace, for developing constructive dialogue and cooperation with the other traditional religious of Russia.

The state, in respecting the Church’s independence, hopes for a continuation of our collaboration in such important spheres as education and health care, the preservation of our cultural and historical heritage, support for the family and the upbringing of the young, and the combatting of social ills.

The mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in her great spiritual exploits knows no state borders. Her canonical territory extends beyond the confines of Russia. You do much for the support of our compatriots and Orthodox communities abroad, for the strengthening of mutual trust and the development of the cultural, spiritual and human ties which unite and have united us for centuries.

We highly value the fact that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and other religious figures are sincerely striving to resolve the key issues of the development of our country and society. From the position of the centuries-old experience of Orthodoxy and Christian civilization they honestly and directly impart their vision of the processes happening today both within our country and in the world as a whole.

Indeed, new technologies, the global media expanse, integration and mutual interdependence have a great influence on society and the everyday lives of people throughout the world and open up colossal, truly unlimited opportunities.

And all of us are faced – including, of course, the Church and religious figures – with the most complex task of doing everything possible so that it may serve only the cause of good and be of benefit to every person and all humanity.

What will happen if civilization squanders its spiritual and humanistic principles? What risks will this bring to the future of humanity?

Already today we see traditional values being blurred in many countries and that this leads to the degradation of the institution of the family, to mutual alienation in society and the depersonalization of people.

Neglect and indifference and the loss of direction in values bring about a growth in radicalism, xenophobia and conflict on religious grounds. Egoism, which destroys the human person, turns into aggressive nationalism.

It is extremists and the ideologues of terrorism, the enemies of progress and all civilization who fill a spiritual vacuum. You all know what terrorists have done in Syria, how they have persecuted their coreligionists and Christians, destroyed churches and murdered people.

It is my hope that the Russian Orthodox Church, in relying upon her authority in the world, will render all possible help in uniting the world community for the rebirth of Syria and in sending humanitarian aid to its citizens, in restoring the ruined cultural and religious centres.

The Patriarch and I have talked about this on numerous occasions, I know his position, and we are prepared to support all religious confessions and all Christian denominations – *all*, without exception. Today we have this opportunity, and we are ready to work together.

I repeat: the world is indeed changing rapidly and going through a very difficult stage. Russia does not stand apart from the global processes and tendencies. We are to endeavor to become leaders in the field of technology, economics and knowledge in the broad sense of this word so that we can guarantee the prosperity and security of our citizens. At the same time, more and more people are looking towards Russia as an example of steadfast traditional values and a normal human life.

I believe that in order to respond to the challenges of the future worthily, we must defend justice, truth and righteousness, preserve are way of life and identity and take strength from our culture and history, and our spiritual and moral foundation. We must advance forward, taking in all that is new and progressive, yet remain to be Russia forever.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate you once more on the hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the Office of Patriarch – and give to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill an icon which is a copy of the icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker which once adorned the St. Nicholas Tower of the Kremlin.

The icon survived in 1812 when the tower was destroyed when the gunpowder stored by the invaders in the walls of the St. Nicholas Tower caught fire. The icon displays bullet holes from the autumn of 1917 during the bloodshed of fratricidal battles in Moscow. I believe that together we will preserve peace and accord, understand and listen to each other, and together labour for the common aims and the good of society.

Your Holiness, I wish you strength and many long and good years of Patriarchal ministry. I wish you all success – all of the participants of the Episcopal Council – in your work as archpastors. I would like to end my short speech with words which we have always used and now use: “Let us go with God!”

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