



## **Patriarch Kirill meets newly appointed US ambassador to Russia**

November 16, 2017 – His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Russian Federation Jon Huntsman, at the patriarchal residence in Chisty Pereulok, Moscow.

Participating in the meeting were also Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), as well as Mr. Christopher Robinson, minister counselor for political affairs of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, and Ms. Sarah Chacha, second secretary of the embassy political department.

Welcoming the guest, Patriarch Kirill said that the Russian Church has a special attitude to the United States of America. ‘For over two hundred years ago the Russian Orthodox Church began its mission in Alaska. Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and Kolomna, in his time, was an outstanding missionary in the American continent. Along with his missionary service he carried out a considerable cultural work and created the Aleutian alphabet. The Russian Church spread from Alaska to California and later to the eastern coast. It is the largest Orthodox community in America’.

His Holiness also mentioned the service performed in the American land by St. Tikhon: ‘This year we commemorate not only the centenary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia but also the centenary of his election as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Patriarch Tikhon, who is now ranked among the saints as a confessor of Christian faith, preserved his love of the Americans to the end of his days. He endured many hard moments in various periods of his life, especially at its end, because severe persecution against Christians began in our country and Patriarch Tikhon became one of the victims of that persecution. But the work he and his predecessors carried out in the American continent is alive today and today the Orthodox Church in America exists there. It is a part of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was granted autocephaly by our Church in 1970, that is, full independence’.

Patriarch Kirill mentioned the acting Moscow church of Protomartyr Catherine-in-the-Field – representation of the Orthodox Church in America. The Moscow Patriarchate representation in the USA is the historic St. Nicholas’s Cathedral in New York, in which St. Tikhon used to celebrate. In total, the Russian Orthodox Church has 33 Patriarchal Parishes in the territory of the USA (in addition to numerous parishes of the Russian Church Outside Russia).

‘You know that residing in the United States of America is a considerable number of people who speak

Russian and recognize it as their first language. They are approximately 700 thousand. Apparently, this is why this language has become an official one in the state of New York during elections. On the whole, in the United States there are over three million people who have Russian roots', His Holiness noted, 'All this is a very important factor that not only concerns people's religious life but is also capable of contributing a positive element to the relations between our two nations'.

Having stressed the importance of inter-Christian and interreligious contacts between the Russian Orthodox Church and communities in the USA during the 'cold war' for maintaining relations between the two countries 'on the level of people, one the level of the people', His Holiness said addressing Ambassador Jon Huntsman, 'Now we live in a different era. It would seem that we all are free but the level of the bilateral relations is not so high, not as intensive as it was in the difficult times of the 'cold war'. At that time we, Christians in both the Soviet Union and the USA, had a special awareness of our role in maintaining peace at a difficult and dangerous time. It seems to me that now too we experience not the best period. I would like to know your point of view concerning a possibility for including interreligious contacts in the contacts between the countries also for the purpose of making a beneficial influence on the possible development of relations between our nations'.

As His Holiness pointed out, relations between believers are relations on the level of people's hearts, whereas relations between diplomats take place on the level of reason, while relations between businessmen are maintained on the level of stomach. 'I do not think that heart should be excluded from international relation', he stressed.

'It is my profound conviction that difficulties are visible today not only in relations between states. In my opinion, there is something very complicated and dangerous on the fundamental level, the level of the understanding of values', His Holiness continued, 'In the Soviet time, we, Christians, being in a difficult situation, saw in Christians, also in the USA, those who share the same values. American people are very religious. During my visits to the United States at that time, I liked to come to ordinary parish churches of various confessions to see how people pray. I was aware that those remote Americans and we have common values. And when I heard some atheistic radio and TV programs in the Soviet Union, I saw that we have no common values with those who address us with such a message. That great sympathy towards the West including the United States which could be seen in Russia in the 90s and complete openness, I would even say naïve openness, was based on the awareness that we had common values. People in our country were told that Americans were enemies, imperialists, but they felt that they were Christians too. And despite the atheistic propaganda in our country, the level of religiosity was also high. And, I think, it was a remarkable basis for developing relations between new Russia and the USA'.

But the processes taking place in the West have caused serious concern: Christian and generally

religious values are being purposefully destroyed and a powerful atheization of people is taking place, His Holiness stated. 'The West is rejecting God. But Russia, just as most people in the world, does not reject God. It means that the distance between our values is growing'. Patriarch Kirill expressed the opinion that the present processes present a great internal challenge to the United States whose people in a majority still remain religious. He invoked the experience of the Soviet Union which failed to build a just, happy and stable society without God.

Patriarch Kirill expressed hope that contacts on various levels of Russia-USA relations would be devoted not only discussions on momentary problems and difficulties but also discussions on global civilizational issues. 'We would very much like that together with the religious American people we could search for and find right answers to challenges of the modern civilization', he said.

On his part, the US ambassador expressed joy over the possibility to meet and talk with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and congratulated him on his forthcoming birthday.

'You speak of issues that concern the very foundation of our life', Mr. Huntsman stated, 'Between our two nations, our societies there are many things in common. They are two great civilizations that, though arts, culture, literature, have made an enormous contribution to the development of all countries'.

The ambassador thanked Patriarch Kirill for telling the story of the Russian Orthodox Church in the territory of America and noted, 'I myself have seen testimonies of this history in our country. I know how representatives of various communities in America appreciate it'.

He observed the existing complexities in relations between the two countries and underscored how important it is for people 'to understand each other beyond what is said on television and in newspaper headlines, to find out what unites us'.

Mr. Huntsman also said that though the level of the people's confidence in politicians is rather low now, the level of confidence in the clergy remains very high. 'It is necessary to conduct a discussion based on the values which unite us' he stressed, 'It is necessary to lead together with representatives of the Churches open discussions on problems facing us. Political figures cannot settle these problems on their own. We will be judged by how we bring up the next generation, whether we will be able to teach them to what respect for each other is, what justice is between people, respect for representatives of various cultures and faiths. It is a very difficult task. It is necessary to seek to do it every day. Politicians and representatives of particular faiths should be involved in order to develop the feeling of tolerance and respect, to understand what unites us'.

The sides discussed the situation of Christians in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East, the situation of

refugees and mechanisms of cooperation in the task of the restoration of destroyed churches and monasteries.

They also dealt with the situation in Ukraine and the peacemaking role of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The ambassador thanked Patriarch Kirill for the efforts to set free those who were taken prisoner as a result of the armed conflict in Ukraine.

*DECR Communication Service*

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