Primate of Russian Orthodox Church meets with Cardinal Kurt Koch



On 22 November 2016, at the Patriarchal residence in St Daniel's Monastery, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Kurt Cardinal Koch.

The Russian Orthodox Church was also represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Archbishop Amvrosy of Peterhof, rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy; Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; and Rev. Alexy Dikarev, a staff member of the DECR Secretariat for Inter-Christian Relations.

Cardinal Koch was accompanied by Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to the Russian Federation, and Rev. Hyacinthe Destivelle, a staff member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill greeted the high guests and thanked them for attending the celebrations marking his 70th birthday. “I regard it as a good gesture of the Roman Catholic Church and as yet another opportunity to exchange opinions on our current agenda,” the Primate of the Russian Church said.

Patriarch Kirill mentioned his meeting with Pope Francis in Havana, saying in particular, “I think, that meeting, held in the atmosphere of sincerity and fraternity, was very meaningful. It is highly important that our common concern over the sufferings of Christians in today’s world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, was at the core of our meeting.”

As His Holiness noted, the common concern and support to the suffering Christians expressed during that meeting had found a positive response in the world community. “It was after our meeting that the problem of the genocide of Christians in the Middle East was raised at high levels in various countries, and this issue became a major item on the political agenda,” Patriarch Kirill said, “Soon after our meeting, an agreement was reached in Munich, stipulating a ceasefire between the government forces and the opposition in Syria. It also evoked a positive response among those who have a sincere compassion for the suffering and dying people in the Middle East.”

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted with regret the aggravation of the situation in Syria and Iraq, caused “not only by the hostilities in Aleppo and Mosul, but also by the ongoing sufferings of people.” As His Holiness said, “The actions of the existing coalitions still lack proper coordination, necessary for combating terrorism successfully. I am convinced that only joint coordinated actions aimed at achieving specific goals can really help defeat terrorism.”

“After that meeting in Havana, our joint Orthodox-Catholic groups made the right steps both in Syria and Lebanon,” His Holiness continued, “It was an important visit that helped representatives of our two Churches form a clear view of the situation in Syria and Lebanon and lay the foundation for our future collaborative work aimed, among other things, at providing aid to people.” Patriarch Kirill noted that, as a result of the joint visit of the Orthodox-Catholic delegation from Russia on 7 April 2016, its members had begun to draw up a list of churches and other religious buildings destroyed during the hostilities. “We hope that the war will end and that people will live in peace again,” His Holiness added, “An issue will be raised of restoring Syria. For us, Christians, it will also be important that churches should be restored and people could return to their normal religious life. We are willing to continue our joint work with the Roman Catholic Church, with its representatives, and to do all within our power to cease sufferings and help people live in peace again.”

The Declaration singed in Havana also revealed the common approach to the Ukrainian issue, the

Primate of the Russian Church emphasized. “Not long ago, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of independence of the Ukrainian state, the Pope of Rome and I sent our respective messages,” His Holiness said and noted the closeness of the two Churches’ positions on this issue. “Both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are committed to the peacebuilding mission. The Churches must be peacemakers, not the players in a most serious civil conflict,” Patriarch Kirill emphasized.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill also noted the progress in cultural cooperation between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, saying in particular, “The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity that you head held the 2nd meeting of the joint working group for cultural cooperation between our Churches, and the both sides have continued to carry out various cultural projects. We hope that on December 11, a joint concert of the Sretensky Monastery Choir, the Synodal Choir of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Choir of the Sistine Chapel will take place at the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and the Martyrs. On November 25, a remarkable exhibition of the Vatican’s masterpieces will open at the Tretyakov Gallery with the participation of Mr. Giuseppe Bertello, Governor of Vatican City. It is a significant cultural event and, at the same time, an important factor for the development of our bilateral relations.”

Speaking on the inter-Christian contacts in the sphere of theological education, the Primate of the Russian Church rated highly the work of the Summer Institute for Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, organized by Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies. “It is my conviction that the development of our good relations in various spheres will also help promote the relationships between our peoples and overcome conflicts, as well as coordinate our activities aimed at defending people, their right to life and dignity,” His Holiness said in conclusion.

Cardinal Kurt Koch thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the warm welcome and read out a message of greetings from Pope Francis on Patriarch Kirill’s 70th birthday. The letter reads, in particular, “I wish to convey to Your Holiness, my beloved brother in Christ, the assurance of my personal best wishes and fervent prayers on the occasion of your seventieth birthday. I thank the Lord for the abundant blessings that he has bestowed upon you in your life and in your ministry as Pastor of the Russian Orthodox Church. I am especially grateful for your personal contribution to the rapprochement between our Churches and I recall with great emotion our historic meeting in Havana.”

DECR Communication Service

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