



## In conclusion of his visit Primate of Russian Orthodox Church answered questions from Russian and foreign mass media reporters



On October 18, 2016, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia concluded his visit to the Diocese of Sourozh devoted to the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the British Islands.

At the airport, His Holiness was seen off by Archbishop Yelisey of Sourozh and Russian Ambassador A. V. Yakovenko.

Before the departure, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church answered questions from Russian and foreign mass media reporters.

**Question:** Your Holiness, we all have closely followed the progress of your visit to Great Britain and the meeting with Queen Elizabeth II. The royal authority today embodies the ultimate values and a certain

code of honour of the country. Tell us, please, in what things and why does this meeting important for you, what are its principle results and topics, and are you satisfied with it?

**Patriarch Kirill:** I am very satisfied with the meeting and should say that I did not expect that this meeting would be held in such an atmosphere and on such a lively level. I had an opportunity for meeting with Her Majesty in 1994 in Moscow, during her official visit, and our talk at that time was much more formal. This time, I saw the queen safe and sound, and I congratulate the queen on this as well as the royal family and all the British people. Her eyes are bright and radiant; her speech is excellent. It was interesting to listen to her. By and large, I had a very pleasant impression from the talk, intellectually and emotionally. And in my memory I will preserve the bright image of the queen who is 90 with 60 years out of them being on the throne.

I agree with your assessment of the significance of monarchy for Great Britain. Monarchy is as it were above the momentary political problems. It gives the citizens of Great Britain an opportunity to rely on the full power of its national tradition. Undoubtedly, the queen is an authority for her people and God grant that this may keep on. I want to conclude my answer with these words: May God save the queen.

**Question:** You said that the military operation in Syria is a holy war. There is a different view in the West. Do you believe that Russia's recent military operation in Aleppo is a part of the holy war in Syria?

**Patriarch Kirill:** I regret that my words have been read incorrectly. I have never spoken about a holy war in Syria, but I spoke about the holy war with terrorism. I think very many victims of terrorism in Europe can share these words: suffice it to remember all that has happened relatively recently in France, in Belgium. If you ask the relatives and friends of those who have died in the hands of terrorists: 'How do you imagine a rebuff to terrorism? Can this rebuff be called holy?' Defending our loved ones, our relatives, defending countries and peoples against terrorism, we defend the holy gift of life because terrorists encroach upon this holy gift of life. That is why my words should not be taken in a political sense. However, it is my profound conviction that the participation of peoples and states in certain military actions can be called thus.

We describe the struggle against Nazism as 'a holy war'. Even in our songs we praise the heroism of our soldiers of the Great Patriotic War, World War II, using these words. We have a remarkable song: 'There is a people's war, a holy war going on', because the war with Nazism was absolutely holy, for what was defended is the most holy thing people have – their life, their independence, their way of life – all in all their future. It is a task not only for Russia. It is a task for every country. We should close the ranks to defeat this evil. And it is this kind of war that I call holy.

**Question:** Tell us, please about your impressions, your visit as a whole, its political results. Did you

manage, during your meetings with the queen and other officials in Britain, to outline ways of settling, improving relations between the two countries? Do you believe the existing differences between the two countries today are temporary? Or underlying them is a serious conflict between the European civilization and a certain Russia's path of her own?

**Patriarch Kirill:** From the very beginning I have perceived my mission here not as a political, and I would like that others perceive it so as well. I realize that no Patriarchal visit can smooth away the contradictions existing today. But I believed I should visit Great Britain regardless of the political context in the relations between our countries in order to celebrate the anniversary of our parish, to pray together with our Orthodox people and to communicate with the British. You mentioned the meeting with the queen. I have met all kinds of people. There were members of the parliament and representatives of aristocratic clans and ordinary British people. I did not see any animosity. And I can assure you that people who I met with were not some friends of Russia. They were just British people with an interest in the Patriarch's visit. And I felt a very warm and kind atmosphere. And what does it suggest?

I asked a couple of times: We have such a wonderful talk, so tell me please what is the mood in the British society? And the answer was: 'There is a good mood in the British society'. Why so? - Simply because the tradition of our bilateral relations goes deep into the history – it is the dynastic marriages, the joint struggle with a common enemy and cultural exchanges. Indeed, Britain made a considerable contribution to the development of the Russian Empire. Peter I used to send people to be trained here. We simply cannot imagine how strongly we have impregnated each other for these 300 years. Take the English literature, who has not read Dickens? And who has not read Russian literature – Tolstoy and Dostoevsky? All these facts cannot be ignored. And in the face of historical reality our today's political disagreements, however important they may be – and I do not minimize them – in my strong conviction, cannot shake the relations between Great Britain and Russia on the deep level, on the level of people's consciousness. It seems to me that I was able to feel the signal that came from the English society and from the people. And I rejoiced in it.

After all, it is very close, indeed, to what the Church is engaged in. The Church does everything possible to support all things positive there are in relations between nations. The Church seeks to reconcile people. I am often asked about our stand on Ukraine. The only stand is to reconcile people, to relieve the tension, to stop these bloody collisions. And the Church is doing everything to become a peacemaking force. We talked about it today with the Archbishop of Canterbury. By the way, it was a very useful talk as well. A whole program of joint actions is taking shape, and we aim at working together in peacemaking, considering various hotbeds on the globe where there is confrontation. So, the Russian Church and the Church of England have a common approach to understanding what the role of

the Church should be in face of conflicts.

**Question:** You are making many visits abroad. Suffice it to recall your historic meeting with the Pope of Rome in Cuba. Can that event be described as a certain trend towards uniting the Christendom? And what are the reasons for such a rapprochement? How do you assess the fact that, against the background of your visit to Great Britain, the RT Company has been closed, as the British bank has stated?

**Patriarch Kirill:** Indeed, we are living at a difficult time. Everybody including English politicians and Russian and church leaders are aware of it. Many radical changes are taking place in the human civilization and in the world in general today. I will not enumerate them, but it is quite clear that humanity is going through a very risky state in its historical development. How we will go through this stage will determine the existence of humankind, because we can easily destroy it not only by nuclear arms, but also by ecological crises, incredible contradictions between the rich and the poor and many other things. And the question arises here: What about the Church? Should she simply contemplate all this negative dynamic in the development? Or she is called to warn people, to help them rethink many things in order to find a common language and struggle together with these crises?

In fact, it is what I met the Pope of Rome for. When we met at the airport I said this: 'In my view, we are meeting at the right time...', adding '... and in the right place', because we met outside the European context, which is marked with the whole history of division between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. The history of these European contradictions between the two Churches still dominates the consciousness of both the Catholics and Orthodox. The meeting in Havana gave us an opportunity to stand a little aside from this historical European context. But I believe the stress should be made on the first words: 'The right time'.

The Patriarch of Moscow had never met with the Pope of Rome before. And I felt a strong need to meet with the head of the Catholic Church primarily to discuss the issues that cause the greatest concern precisely in the way of global development.

I felt the same today in my talk with the Archbishop of Canterbury and his colleagues. There is a common concern over the developments in the world and there is the willingness to work together to make the world a better place as much as the Church can participate in this endeavor.

As far as the closure of accounts is concerned, I am not familiar at all with the laws in Great Britain. For me it is not clear whether you can move from the bank, which wants to close your accounts, to another one. I will regret very much if such actions prevents your channel from continuing its work in Great Britain.

It seems to me that there must be an alternative point of view, just as we have it in Russia. We have television and very well known radio stations and newspapers, which carry an alternative point of view. It is normal for the modern society. If information becomes monochromatic, painted in only one colour, readers – consumers of information will become suspicious of the reason why it is so. Therefore the very fact of the presence of an alternative point of view is very important for the people's feeling well and for making their own conclusions with regard to this or that point of view. It is a normal process. It is not always liked by a majority. You are aware that a majority in Russia does not have a good attitude to the radio stations and TV networks I have just mentioned. But it is the majority's affair and some may not like it. God grant that the same situation may be in Great Britain.

**Question:** You have found a new friend in London, a Corgi puppy. Have you already chosen the name for it and the residence?

**Patriarch Kirill:** You see, this dog is from Great Britain and its name has already been determined by some others. Its name is Willy. I don't think I should 're-Christen' it and give it a different name. It is a wonderful dog, and since a considerable part of my private life is passed in loneliness, I will be very much pleased to have a reliable friend sharing my loneliness.

*DECR Communication Service*

*Photos by the Patriarchal Press Service*

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