Patriarch Kirill attends reception in honour of 300th anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy in Great Britain and Ireland



On October 16, 2016, a reception was held in London on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy in Great Britain and Ireland.

The event was attended by Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and Bishop Richard Chartres of London (Church of England), Russian Ambassador to Great Britain A. Yakovenko, representatives of Local Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian confessions, members of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation and guests of the Diocese of Sourozh.

Speeches were delivered by Archbishop Yelisey of Sourozh and Ambassador A. Yakovenko, who noted the role of the embassy church in London and its clergy in the development of bilateral relations between the two countries throughout the 300 years.

The Archbishop of Canterbury greeted His Holiness Kirill on behalf of the Church of England and the whole Anglican Communion.

During the reception, the national anthem of Great Britain was played.

Addressing the participants in the event, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said:

> "Dear Mr. Ambassador,
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> Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen:
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> Today we are marking a remarkable date, the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian presence in Great Britain. Orthodoxy is not an ethnic or multi-ethnic community, and the example of Russian Orthodoxy's history here in Great Britain underscores it very clearly. When 300 years ago the need arose to take pastoral care of the Russian people who came to Great Britain to learn seamanship and to gain experience, including in natural sciences, there also arose the need to establish a parish.
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> The Russian envoy decided to take the initiative and who, do you think, he invited as a priest for the Russian parish? – he invited a Greek priest from the Church of Alexandria. The Greek priest was the spiritual father for the Russians in Great Britain, and nobody felt uneasy about it either in Petersburg or in London, since it was quite natural. We are one Orthodox Church. Greeks, Russians, Arabs, Slavs of other nationalities – we all are one Church. I regret that today it will not occur to any of the ambassadors in the world, either Russian or Greek, to invite a priest of a different nationality to his parish.
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> We have taken a path that is not very helpful for realizing the universal dimension of Orthodoxy. I think the time has come for us to renew this awareness of our common belonging to the one universal Orthodox Church. I should once again, looking back at the past with profound gratitude, to underline the role and significance of the clergy who have taken pastoral care of our Russian flock here for 300 years. The special spiritual role of the Russian parish for the Russian diaspora (and not only for it) here, on the British Islands, is perfectly clear.
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> Allow me to express the conviction that today's anniversary celebrations are important not only for Russian Orthodox people and not only for the Orthodox in Great Britain. I would very much like that this anniversary celebration be significant for the British society, for the Russian-British relation. The distinctive nature, originality, mentality and spirituality of a people are revealed with such profundity in nothing else but their religious culture. And without the awareness of this

culture, a real dialogue between nations and states is impossible. And the fact that the religious factor in often ignored in inter-state and inter-culture relations is, to my mind, a grave mistake because religion is the source of the formation of national identity as well as the spirituality of a people.

If you ask me why I have come to England today, I will say: Certainly to celebrate the anniversary and also to hold out the hand of friendship to the British people, to the Anglican Church, in order to stress once again the significance of the religious factor, including in international relations. I am convinced that cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and Christians communities in England is called to make a weighty contribution, including in the development of relations between our two countries and peoples. Our efforts should be based not on political consideration whatever attitude we may have to the foreign policy of our states, but exclusively on the common things that unite Christians in East and West.

God grant that no upheavals of this age may destroy the unity of Christian moral values and that through these values we may see brothers and sisters in each other. And for it to be so, we all should try to work hard. I hope that we have an opportunity for it and still have time to do it.

May the Lord bless the Queen, England and the Russian Orthodox Church".

At the end of the reception His Holiness Patriarch Kirill had a talk with representatives of Eastern Churches, among them Bishop Angaelos, head of the British diocese of the Coptic Church; Bishop Hovakim Manukyan (Armenian Apostolic Church), and Metropolitan Mor Athanasius Toum Dakkama (Syriac Jacobite Church). His Holiness expressed support for the suffering people of Syria, noting that the Russian Orthodox Church is praying for the cessation of the conflict and will always support its Syrian brothers.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/49105/