



Metropolitan Hilarion: Patriarch's visit to London will strengthen mutual confidence

On the threshold of the visit by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to Great Britain to take place from October 15 to 18, the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, in his interview to RIA Novosti news agency, speaks on the program for the visit of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to London, the anniversary of the Orthodox presence in the British Islands, the Royal family's attitude to Orthodoxy and development of dialogue and cooperation on the grass-root level.

- What are the key points in the program of the forthcoming visit, what are the most complicated ones and what are the Russian Orthodox Church's expectations of this visit?

- First of all, I would like to say that the forthcoming visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to Great Britain is timed to the celebrations devoted to the 300th anniversary of the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the British Islands. Our first community in London, the Parish of the Dormition, emerged at the Russian imperial mission in 1716. The whole program of the Primate of the Russian Church's visit is devoted to this historic event. Its key points will include the consecration of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God and All Saints in London and the Divine Liturgy at this cathedral, as well as a prayer of the church of the Dormition of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. His Holiness will also bless the new headstone at the burial place of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh and attend the solemn meeting at the Royal Geographic Society.

During his visit, the Primate of the Russian Church will meet with the Queen of Great Britain Elizabeth II at the Buckingham Palace and will visit the Lambeth Palace for a talk with Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury.

- The Great Britain's ambassador to Russia Laurie Bristow, during a meeting with Patriarch Kirill, described the relations between our two Churches as 'very good'. Are these relations hampered by rather liberal stand of the Anglican Church on many issues concerning both

church and public life?

- The Russian Orthodox Church has close relations with the Church of England, which began in the 16th century and developed in subsequent centuries. Especially active our relations were in the second half of the 20th century. They began with the memorable visit of the Archbishop of York Cyril Garbett to Moscow at the gravest moment in our history in 1943. It attested to the common struggle waged by our nations against fascism and to the role played in this struggle by the Churches. That visit became a very important support of our Church.

We are following with concern the processes going on in the Anglican Community, such as liberalization introduced by some members of this community to the moral teaching and introduction of first 'women's priesthood' and now already 'women's episcopate'. Today, the Anglican world in fact is divided, and we support those of its representatives who defend the Gospel's moral norms.

- As to the number of its parishes and faithful, the Russian Orthodox Church's Diocese of Sourozh is the second largest after the dioceses of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, among the dioceses of various Orthodox jurisdictions. It is known that once there was even a conflict between them, which was settled through the efforts of Patriarch Kirill, who was head of the DECR at that time. How the relations are built now and will the Patriarch's visit have an influence on them?

- For a long time there have been parishes in England belonging to different Orthodox jurisdictions, and relations among them have always been friendly and constructive. There have been no conflict whatsoever between church jurisdictions in Great Britain. The withdrawal of already former Bishop Basil (Osborn) from the Moscow Patriarchate was not linked with the relation between the Orthodox jurisdictions acting in the territory of Great Britain. He did not move to any of them but to the Exarchate of the Russian parishes of the Patriarchate of Constantinople based in Paris. He did it apparently for purely personal reasons. Three years later he announced his divestment from the holy order and entered into a marriage.

We hope that the constructive nature of our relations with brothers will be preserved in future as well, and the forthcoming visit of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to Great Britain will make a contribution to their good development.

- It is known that the heir to the British crown, Prince Charles of Wales has been to Mount Athos on several occasions; he is a long-standing member of the American-British Society 'Friends of Mount Athos', which is financing the restoration of the Vatopedi monastery. According to the British mass media, in his Highgrove residence there are several Orthodox icons, and Archbishop Gregory of Thyateira and Great Britain even makes believe that Charles is Orthodox in his soul. Are there any plans for meetings with the prince during the visit?

- I am aware of Prince Charles's sympathy for Orthodoxy. Along with visits to Holy Mount Athos, His Highness tries to visit other holy places as well. Quite recently, on September the 30th, Prince Charles, while on a visit to Israel for the funeral of ex-president Shimon Peres, visited the Russian convent in Gethsemane. He proceeded to the shrine with the relics of the Holy Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth Fyodorovna and laid flowers from the homeland of his grandmother, a niece of the saint. Then the high guest came up to other shrines in the church and put candles.

Such sincere feelings for Orthodoxy are associated with the fact that Prince Charles's father, Duke Philip of Edinburgh, belongs to the Greek line of the Oldenburg Dynasty and confessed Orthodoxy from his birth. It is only after his marriage to Queen Elizabeth II that Duke Philip, having become the British prince consort, embraced Anglicanism. He often says about himself: 'I became an Anglican but remained Orthodox'.

- Can we hope that the visit of Patriarch Kirill will help improve the relations between our two countries, which are going through a rather hard period, and how?

- The relations between Russia and Great Britain have not been going through the best time recently. However, history knows also of periods of cooperation between the two countries, for instance, during World War II.

The past and the present compel us to promote closer relations between the peoples of Russia and Great Britain, which, in its turn, cannot but will affect official contacts.

Among things that help greatly to promote the development of dialogue and cooperation on the grass root level is the presence of a large community of our compatriots on the British Islands, a considerable part of which are the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church. I trust that the pastoral visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to Great Britain, the divine services he will celebrate, the meetings with the faithful, with representatives of the Anglican Church and public at large will help our peoples strengthen mutual confidence.

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