Festive night devoted to Metropolitan Hilarion's 50th birthday



On July 22, 2016, a festive night devoted to the 50th birthday of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECR), rector of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies (CMI) and chairman of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission, took place at the Pashkov House in Moscow.

Opening the celebration, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, addressed himself to the hero of the day with words of greetings:

'Your Eminence,

'With a special feeling I would like to greet you on the day of your 50th birthday. Twenty-eight years ago I saw and heard you for the first time. It was during a meeting of the Bishops' and later Local Council of our Church. At that time you were quite a young monk serving in Lithuania. But already at that time you

managed to formulate thoughts and proposals, which stood out of the conventional outline. Nothing like this was expected from the Council but you modestly but insistently formulated your proposals. They were not accepted for objective reasons. Nevertheless you became visible in the history of our Church already 28 years ago.

‘Then I had an opportunity to accompany you in your life journey, first at some distance and later in immediate proximity. And I should say that your work at the Department for External Church Relations – in rather difficult years caused by a profound restructure in our country with its change in church-state relations – was marked not just with some enhanced efforts (we all worked in the sweat of our brows and perhaps beyond our strength) but participation of the Department staff in solving epoch-making problems, which defined the nature of church-state relations and relations with our brothers and sisters and partners abroad in a new historical situation in which we all found ourselves.

‘It was clear already at that time that you are a man who has considerable abilities, a good education, while having one important virtue: you identify yourself with the policy adopted by the Church. You do not enter into a discussion about the necessity of this course or amendments to be made to it. As a monk and a clergyman you always tried to fulfill the tasks set by the Supreme Authority as honestly as possible. And your work was marked with considerable success.

‘Therefore, when the Lord led me to the Patriarchal service I did not think long over who should be my successor in the hard work in the area of external church relations. And you were elected a permanent member of the Holy Synod and appointed to this difficult post.

‘First it seemed that the center of gravity of our entire work moved for objective reasons to the internal life of the Church, but little by little it became clear that the external conditions, in which our Church lives, do not become easier either. And the recent years have been marked with a considerable growth of problems, I would say, fateful for the whole Orthodoxy and their solution will determine not only the future of the Russian Orthodox Church but also the future of the entire Orthodox world. And the heightened responsibility at present is placed on the Department for External Church Relations. In the fields in which you work you cannot make mistakes because later they can cost too much. The point is the unity of the whole Orthodox world and at the same time the preservation of the lawful demands of the Russian Orthodox Church that the canonical order in relations between Orthodox Churches should be observed and the unity and integrity of our Church should be preserved, and today these two demands are closely tied.

‘Today therefore, without forgetting about your other talents (others will speak about them), I will limit myself only by what I would like to stress as a Patriarch, namely, your service as chairman of the Department for External Church Relations and your participation in the work of the Holy Synod. I thank

you for these efforts and invoke God's blessing on your further life and work so important and necessary for the Church.

'Fifty years is a time of blossom. It is a time when one should work unceasingly, and I very much hope that your efforts will be as successful as they were before.

'By way of gratuity, which I will fully express on Sunday when we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the church in Ordynka, in which you are the rector, at present I would like to present you with this pectoral icon. May the Heavenly Queen protect you in your life journey and help you to work for the glory of God'.

In his response, Metropolitan Hilarion stressed,

'Your Holiness, Holy Master and Father:

'I would like first of all to thank you sincerely and cordially for your coming to honour my personal anniversary with your presence.

'I owe everything in my life to the Church. I have been in the Church since I was 10 and in the monastic rank since I was 20… The Church has given me everything: she has given me Christ, she has given me faith, she continuously gives me interest in life.

Sometimes I am asked by secular people: 'Why have you chosen such a way of service? You could be a musician indeed'. And it seems to them that such a way may be chosen only if some misfortune befell one. I am asked questions: 'May be, you experienced some tragic event, some turning point?'

There was no turning point. I have always been attracted to the Church; it is interesting for me and I feel good in the Church. And while I used to go to school as a necessity, under compulsion, to church I always went at the call of my heart. It was so in my youth, it remains so now. As the Psalmist says, 'I rejoiced with those who said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord' (Ps. 122:1). Never for a minute or a second I was sorry to having chosen this path and I rejoice at the opportunity to offer my efforts and my abilities to our Holy Church.

'I am very grateful to you, Your Holiness, for having invited me 21 years ago to work together with you at the DECR, and since that time I am your assistant. You passed over to me a very important service of the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations. You say that it is a service in which mistakes should not be made, but I am glad that you do not give us an opportunity for making mistakes because we work together with you, under your direct supervision. I will not say that work with you is easy but it is very grace-giving because it is a continued everyday school.

‘I would like to thank you for your confidence and to use this opportunity to thank all who have assembled here. There are very many of my personal friends and colleagues here, those with whom we share the work in the area of external church relations and in the area of education. There are rectors of our universities and ambassadors. I would like to thank you all.

‘I would also like to explain why I have decided to have this festivity in this hall. Once it was a reading hall of the Lenin Library, and here my mother and father met on one of these balconies. My mother was a student of the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow University, and my father a student of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the same university. If this place did not exist, if that meeting did not happen, then I would not exist in this world. I wish that we all should greet my mother who is here today.

‘Your Holiness, allow me to once again cordially thank you and wish prosperity to our whole Church and to you as her Primate – many good years to you!’

Along with the permanent members of the Holy Synod, church dignitaries, high church officials and other archpastors of the Moscow Patriarchate, there were also hierarchs from the Local Churches of Georgia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Serbia, as well as representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Georgia, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Czech Lands and Slovakia to the Moscow Patriarchate and other clergy and church workers.

Among those who came to greet Metropolitan Hilarion were highly ranked representatives of various Christian confessions, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Russian Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), the Russian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Anglican church in Moscow and the Russian Union of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

There were also representatives of the traditional religious communities including the Central Muslim Board in Russia, the Muslim Board of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations in Russia, and the Buddhist Tradition Sangha in Russia.

Among the guests were ministers, officials from the Presidential Administration, the State Duma and the Council of the Federation, as well as other statesmen, representatives of regional authorities, foreign diplomats and others.

There were many academicians, representatives of public organizations, rectors of universities, cultural figures, famous artists, media officials and many others.

Mr. Gromov, first deputy head of the Presidential Administration, in his speech said in particular, ‘Your Eminence, we have just heard the words of His Holiness the Patriarch. I have no right to make any evaluations but I cannot help saying that we all have seen people’s attitude to you. As far as your work is concerned, we understand how complicated it is, what a difficult period has fallen to our lot. On the other hand, I will repeat: you have been lucky to get a very good ‘heritage’ in the form of the experience and results of the work of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

‘You give a lot of time to the training of the personnel for the Russian Orthodox Church. We can see how important it is today, how much the created infrastructure needs responsible people, sometimes even reckless and ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the results of their work’.

Mr. Men, Russia’s minister of construction and housing and communal service, noted, ‘Current among Russian historians is a theory that the state coup, which took place in 1917 in Russia and which we are accustomed to call revolution, happened to a great extent because of a misunderstanding between the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian Orthodox Church. Perhaps, this theory is disputable but certainly there is some ground in it. In the last twenty odd years we have seen the development of a new state of Russia and the renewal of the Russian Orthodox Church, and we see that today this union of the Church and the Russian intelligentsia does exist. Putting it in the secular language, as long as there are such archpastors as you are, Your Eminence, in the team of our Patriarch, the Russian intelligentsia will be with the Church and there will be no demarcation’.

Messages of greeting to Metropolitan Hilarion were brought from the Chair of the Council of the Federation M. V. Matvienko, the Chairman of the State Duma S. Naryshkin, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov, the Minister of Culture V. Medinsky, the Minister of Education and Science D. Livanov, and Moscow Mayor S. Sobyanin.

Among those who extended congratulations to Metropolitan Hilarion was Supreme Mufti of Russia and the Chairman of the Central Muslim Board Talgat Tadjuddin. He presented Metropolitan Hilarion with the Medal ‘Al-Hamd’ (Praise and Glory) in recognition of his contribution to the religious and moral rebirth of Russian society and the consolidation of peace, harmony and good cooperation between the peoples and followers of traditional religions in Russia.

Among the speakers was also Bishop Tikhon of Yegorievsk, chairman of the Patriarchal Council for Culture. He mentioned Metropolitan Hilarion’s new book *The Beginning of the Gospel,* which was presented on that day. He said in particular, ‘For all the enormous duties placed on the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, His Eminence still finds time to devote his hours and thoughts to a very important thing – the preaching of Christ. We all preach Christ, but neither music nor even a service will bring to people the word of God as a good, wise and necessary book will. His

Eminence has written an astonishing work – a biography of our Lord Jesus Christ in six volumes. The six volumes of a story in the finest detail, which includes both a study and a reflection, and examples from the patristic literature about Christ. Today the first volume of this enormous and excellent work has been presented. His Eminence expressed some confusion during the presentation, wondering whether modern people will read six volumes when they often find it hard to get through a small book. But I as the publisher of this book comforted him saying that his previous work "Orthodoxy" is voluminous too. However, the Sretensky Monastery has had to reprint it six times'.

Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov) spoke on behalf of the DECR staff, reading out their congratulatory address:

'Your Eminence, Dear Vladyko!

Today we, your staff, together with the Plenitude of the Russian Church mark your 50th birthday.

Fifty years is a time borderline sanctified by the Lord Himself: 'Sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year' (Lev. 25:9-10), proclaims the prophet. And we see an all-good providence of God in the ways He has led you, dear Vladyka, to this glorious date.

'Thy servant fear the Lord from my youth' (I Kings 18:12). These words said by pious Obadiah in the time of the Prophet Elijah can be applied to your life as nothing else can. In the time of early adolescence, the Lord revealed His mercy to you, showing to you the beauty of Orthodox liturgy. Crossing the threshold of the sanctuary of the church of the Finding of the Lord's Sepulcher, you became aware of your vocation: the service at God's altar. Following the God-praising David, you can say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

The Lord has endowed you with many talents. Developing and multiplying them, you could walk in life along a broad and long path gaining temporal laurels and human honours. But you have preferred to all this the narrow monastic path.

The Lord has endowed you with the gift of words. Your monographs, interviews, sermons, appearances on TV and radio contain profound theological and philosophical judgments, reflections on the past and the future, on culture, formation and education, and spiritual advice rooted in the Orthodox tradition and applicable today. For these reason they provoke invariable interest.

Your heart is open to every person. Like the Apostle Paul, you seek to be "all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). You illuminate by the light of the truth those who are blind

in faith and for this reason it is you who are authorized by His Holiness the Patriarch to bring to the Orthodox Church those who have fallen away from her into sectarian misconception and schismatic false belief.

The abilities given by God multiplied by diligence have enabled you not only to assimilate the wisdom of theology but also to successfully share your knowledge and experience with future pastors and theologians of our Church in the theological schools of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies, of which you are head.

We, your assistants and co-workers, see in you, dear Vladyka, an exacting and at the same time kind and merciful archpastor, who fatherly “warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak” (Thes. 5:14).

Your church service began under the omophorus of Metropolitan Pitirim of eternal memory, whose successor you are in your title. Later you embarked on the path of church work in the Department for External Church Relations led by the present Patriarch Kirill, whose successor you have been at the post of the DECR chairman for over seven years. We wish you, Vladyka, God’s help and blessed successes in fulfilling all the tasks entrusted to you.

According to the apostle, “But covet earnestly the best gifts” and the Lord will show you “a more

excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31)’.

In the course of the festive night, compositions by Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Metropolitan Hilarion and other composers were performed by the Tchaikovsky Grand Symphonic Orchestra conducted by V. Fedoseyev, the Moscow Synodal Choir led by A. Puzakov, and other musicians.

DECR Communication Service

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