DECR chairman meets with pilgrims from China



On 2 May 2016, at the assembly hall of Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, met with the Orthodox pilgrims from China, descendants of the Albazinians.

The defenders of the Albazin Fort on the Amur River who were taken captive by the army of the Chinese Emperor Kangxi in 1685 and were brought to Peking preserved the Orthodox faith and passed it on to the next generations who also lived in China. It became possible thanks, in many respects, to the work of the Russian ecclesiastical missions that were regularly sent to China with the consent of the Chinese emperors.

In 1900 over two hundred Orthodox Chinese people, mostly Albazinians, were killed during the Boxer Rebellion. In February 2016, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church made a decision to canonize Hieromartyr Mitrophan Ji and those who had suffered with him.

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China was abolished in 1954; two years later the Chinese Church received from the Moscow Patriarchate the status of autonomy. The Orthodox priests in China ordained in the 1950s were chiefly descendants of the Albazinian Cossacks. They managed to preserve their faith during the years of the Cultural Revolution. Today there are several hundred Albazinians living in China – in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Harbin and other cities.

In 2013, during his visit to the People's Republic of China, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the descendants of the Albazinian Cossacks and invited them to visit Russia.

As guests of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, the pilgrims from China will visit Moscow, Tver, Novgorod, St. Petersburg and the Valday region and will pray at the divine services and take part in various celebrations from April 29 to May 9.

The trip was organized by the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations with the assistance of Mr. Ivan Polyakov, Director General of the Interstate Corporation for Development, and the Russian-Chinese Business Council.

On May 1, the Feast of the Radiant Resurrection of Christ, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill received the descendants of the Albazinians at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Addressing the guests, Metropolitan Hilarion said in particular, "It is with great pleasure that I greet our dear pilgrims from China with the words of the Paschal greeting – Christ Is Risen!

"I met with some of you during my visits to China, and I am very glad to see familiar faces today. I am also pleased to see some of you for the first time. We have expected and prepared this visit for a long time.

"I am glad to see here the descendants of the Orthodox clergymen who performed their ministry in the Chinese land. As you know, our Church, in the person of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and the Department for External Church Relations, which I head, pays much attention to the reestablishment of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church. We do not pursue any ambitious goals in China, yet, we would like all Orthodox Christians, regardless of the place of their residence, to have an opportunity to attend churches, participate in the divine services and have their own priests. We do all we can but, of course, much also depends on the PRC State Administration for Religious Affairs, with which we coordinate our activities.

"Undoubtedly, you remember very well the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to China in 2013. It was a historic visit in every respect. I believe that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's meeting with Mr. Xi Jinping,

President of the People's Republic of China, shows that our relations are developing in the right direction. Yet, we have still much to do and I hope for your support.

"The history of Orthodoxy in China is remarkable. The first Orthodox Christians there were Russian people. Every new generation had less and less Russian blood, but the Orthodox faith was preserved. Later, new people would join the community and thus an amazing phenomenon of the national Chinese Orthodox Church emerged. Its members are patriots of their homeland, but at the same time they believe in Christ and observe all Orthodox traditions.

"I wish you to pass on your faith to your children, grandchildren and great- grandchildren."

The pilgrims from China expressed their gratitude to the Russian Orthodox Church and her Primate for an opportunity to visit the land of their ancestors in the days of Ester celebration.

At the conclusion of the meeting Metropolitan Hilarion presented each pilgrim with a memorable gift.

DECR Communication Service

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