Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk reads lectures at Winchester and Cambridge Universities



On February 5, 2015, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman and rector of Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, visited the Winchester University Department of Theology to read a Foundation Lecture on 'Does Christian Ecumenism Still Has a Future?'.

Before the lecture, the high guest was welcomed by Prof. Joy Carter, vice-chancellor of the university. Among the listeners were Prof. Neil Messer, head of the Department of Theology, Religion and Philosophy, Prof. Liz Stuart, deputy vice-chancellor, professors and students, Canon James Atwell, dean of the Winchester Cathedral, Anglican clergy, and local Orthodox parishioners led by the Rev. Andreas Andreopoulos, Patriarchate of Romania.

In his lecture, Metropolitan Hilarion noted in particular,'It would seem that after many decades of dialogue one would expect a substantial coming together of positions. Yet this merging has not

happened; as the restoration of unity among Christians as commanded by God has not happened. On the contrary, at the present moment the differences between, on the one hand, the Orthodox and the Catholics, and on the other differences within the Protestant world itself, have become more serious than they were fifty or seventy years ago'. He stressed that contemporary differences concern not only doctrinal issues. Today the divergences touch upon the sphere of morality – 'the very sphere in which Christian witness may not necessarily depend upon doctrinal difference'.

Under the influence of the secular ideology, he continued, some Christian communities have diverted from fundamental moral norms sealed in the New Testament, in the preaching of Christ and epistles of St. Paul. According to Metropolitan Hilarion, 'It is now becoming more difficult to speak of a single system of spiritual and moral values accepted by all Christians. Today there are various versions of Christianity voiced by different communities. From this perspective all modern-day Christians may be divided into two groups, the traditional and the liberal. And an entire gulf divides not so much Orthodox and Catholics or Catholics and Protestants, as the 'traditionalists' and 'liberals'. Some Christian leaders assert that the Church ought to be 'inclusive' enough to recognize alternative behavioral standards and officially bless them. Traditionalists, in their turn, accuse liberals of rejecting the fundamental common Christian norms and of watering down the very foundation of Christian moral teaching'.

'The Orthodox Church believes' he said, 'that in this instance we are dealing not with an outdated 'traditionalism', but with fidelity to divine revelation contained in Scripture, and therefore with the authenticity of Christianity's good news. And if so called liberal Christians reject the traditional understanding of moral norms, this means that we are confronted with a most serious problem: it turns out that we are divided not only by issues which, from the perspective of the external world, bear a 'technical' character and relate exclusively to the internal Christian dialogue. Currently we are divided in the very essence of that witness which we are called upon to bear to the external world. We no longer speak with a single voice, we no longer preach a single moral teaching, we are no longer capable of a consolidated, joint vindication of the moral principles upon which the life of Christian communities has been built over the centuries'.

In conclusion of his lecture, Metropolitan Hilarion called Christian Churches to act in solidarity to defend Europe's Christian identity and to protect Christians persecuted in the Middle East and North Africa.

On February 6, Metropolitan Hilarion read a lecture on the same theme at the Cambridge University Department of Theology. The lecture was held at the university's Church of St Giles with a great confluence of people. Before the lecture, Metropolitan Hilarion was welcomed by Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokletia, who pointed to the topicality of the theme chosen by Metropolitan Hilarion. After the lecture, Metropolitan Hilarion answered numerous questions from the audience.

In the evening, Metropolitan Hilarion attended the opening of the symposium on the theme ‘Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth’ devoted to Metropolitan Kallistos’s 80th birthday. Among the guests were Archbishop Gregory of Thyateira and Great Britain (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Nikolaos of Messogaia and Lavreotiki (Greek Orthodox Church), Archbishop Yelisey of Sourozh; Lord Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury; and Archpriest John Behr, rector of St. Vladimir Seminary in New York. The event was attended by Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican clergy, Cambridge professors and students, and Metropolitan Kallistos’s disciples who came from various parts of the world to honour his mentor and teacher.

As part of the symposium, Metropolitan Hilarion read a paper on ‘St. Simeon the New Theologian and the Studite Monastic Tradition’.

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