



## **Talks between Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russian and Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada**

On December 3, 2014, a fraternal talk took place, at the Patriarchal and Synodal Residence in St. Daniel's Monastery, between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada, who have come for an official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Before the talks, the Primate of the two Church proceeded to the residence's Chapel of All Saints Who Shone Forth in the Russian Land for a thanksgiving, which was celebrated by Metropolitan Tikhon. Patriarch Kirill was praying in the sanctuary.

In his welcoming speech after the prayer, Patriarch Kirill noted in particular that His Beatitude Tikhon had visited the capitals of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus last year on the occasion of the celebrations marking the 1025<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' and now, during his official visit to the Russian Church, had an opportunity to see the church life in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

'I am sure that you will feel the love that we have for the Orthodox Church in America. It goes back to the great feat performed by St. Herman of Alaska and his followers and to the work of Ss Metropolitan Innocent and Patriarch Tikhon, many great predecessors on the see of Moscow, whose missionary achievement became a bright page in the history of our Church. The sees of Moscow and Washington are located in different continents and separated from each other by thousands of kilometres, but our Churches are united not only by a common history but also sincere love. For the Russian Church, Orthodoxy in America is a cherished fruit of her missionary work. We are delighted to meet you and your honourable delegation and to discuss with you the matters that will help to strengthen our relations. We are confident that your historic peace visit to the Russian Orthodox Church will become another important step towards the consolidation of our bilateral relations and Orthodox witness on the American continent', His Holiness said.

In his response, His Beatitude Tikhon conveyed to His Holiness Kirill greetings from the members of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America and assurances of prayerful memory from the clergy and faithful in North America.

'The Orthodox Church in America, the youngest among the Orthodox Churches, is always strengthened in spirit by its fraternal relations with the ancient Patriarchates and Churches that faithfully preserve the fullness of the Church and the experience of the Apostles, Martyrs and Saints throughout the ages.

'The Church of Russia herself has played an invaluable role in the life of the Orthodox Church in America, from the sending of the first missionary monks from Valaam in 1794 to the granting of autocephaly in 1970. The brotherly support of the Church of Russia continues in our own day and I am truly grateful for the invitation extended by Your Holiness to the Orthodox Church in America for this present visit and humbled to receive the warm hospitality which is so characteristic of Your Holiness and the Church of Russia', Metropolitan Tikhon said.

After the thanksgiving, a fraternal talk took place between the Primate of the two Churches at the throne hall of the Patriarchal Residence.

In the course of the talk, Patriarch Kirill stressed the importance of the missionary feat performed by St. Herman of Alaska in America, the significance of the work of St. Innocent (Veniaminov) and St. Tikhon the Patriarch of All Russia to reinforce the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America. As was noted, the decision to grant autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America was correspondent with the opinion St. Tikhon had expressed in his time.

His Holiness also recalled with gratitude the work carried out by the predecessors of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon at the primatial throne of the Orthodox Church in America – Metropolitans Theodosius, Herman and Jonas, as each of them, Patriarch Kirill said, made an essential contribution to the development of relations between the two Churches. 'Continuity in the Church is of special importance as we all bound up by virtue of the apostolic succession, but continuity in inter-church relations is also an important fact, and we are confident that under your primatial ministry, good relations between our two Church will continue developing', His Holiness said pointing out the work of the OCA Moscow Representation and the Patriarch Cathedral in New York as an important factor in strengthening relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church in America.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church also recalled that their meeting took place on the eve of the Entry of Our Lady to the Temple – the day when the ascension of St. Tikhon to the Patriarchal throne of Moscow in 19917 is commemorated. 'He is your heavenly patron, therefore it is a special day for you. We will celebrate together the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Moscow Kremlin in which His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon was enthroned', Patriarch Kirill said addressing Metropolitan Tikhon.

He also spoke about the events of the last year when Metropolitan Tikhon visited the Russian Orthodox

Church on the occasion of the 1025<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. 'At that time, we all enjoyed peace and joyful life, including in Ukraine. Now the Kievan Rus' is torn by upheavals. We pray each day that the suffering of the people may come to an end, that a lasting peace may be established in Ukraine', Patriarch Kirill said stressing that today there is a fratricidal civil war is going on in Ukraine'.

'Unlike other religions groups in Ukraine, our Church realises that there can be only one stand in face of this conflict – to be a peacemaking force. We avoid any political engagement or support for a particular side of the conflict. We are praying and working to have a just peace established in Ukraine so that nobody may suffer from discrimination, be it on the grounds of language, ethnic background or religion'. Patriarch Kirill stated.

'We are extremely concerned about the situation of our flock in eastern Ukraine, as there is a humanitarian catastrophe going there', His Holiness continued, adding that for a number of reasons, people in the West are not aware of what is going on in that area where people suffer both from artillery shelling and an economic blockade. Each day, people die and houses and churches are destroyed in artillery shelling.

In central and western Ukraine, churches belonging to the canonical Church are captured on the initiative of the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev'. The attackers often burst into churches, use violence and abuse priests. The Unites, too, have used the situation for their own purposes.

Today our Church is going through the most difficult period in the Ukrainian modern history', Patriarch Kirill stated noting that the church people are courageously standing for the clergy and episcopate. It is a testimony to the fact that the Ukrainian Church has preserved her power and ability to influence the Ukrainian society.

The Church's peacemaking work can be required not only in settling the civil conflict in Ukraine but also in the context of the Russian-American relations, which are going through not the best time at present. 'Recently I have met with the new US ambassador in Moscow and said that even in the difficult Cold War period, not only the Orthodox but generally Christians in the two countries had the courage and ability to do something to improve the situation', Patriarch Kirill related.

'Several decades ago, we and Christians in the USA were divided by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War psychology, but at a difficult time we were united by the awareness that we as Christians belong to the same system of moral values', he said, pointing to the common system of values as a very important philosophical factor that created the system of relations between Christians in the two countries.

'Today we cannot say about many Christians in the USA that we belong to the same system of values

as they do, Patriarch Kirill stressed. He noted that a deviation from the fundamental biblical moral norms makes it impossible to continue dialogue with a considerable part of the Protestant communities in America who are members of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, with which the Russian Church used to maintain cooperation for decades including the grievous Cold War years. 'At the same time, we are fully open to cooperation with the churches in North America who have remained faithful to the biblical morality. These are, in the first place, Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant churches'.

Another problem raised in the talk concerned the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. Patriarch Kirill said that the first to experience oppression and persecution in the modern time were Orthodox Christians in Kosovo. 'There are still enormous wounds in the body of Kosovo and in the body of the Serbian community living there, which have not been healed', he stressed.

His Holiness also expressed special concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East. In his opinion, it has become especially disturbing after terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State, have intensified their efforts. 'I believe our task is to speak out loud about the tragedy of Christianity in the Middle East. Moreover, I see it as our most important task today to help the world community elaborate specific measures for preserving the Christian presence in the Middle East'.

It was also noted that the millennium of the demise of the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles will be marked next year. As the seminary of the Orthodox Church in America is named after him, a theological conference is planned to take place in it as part of the celebrations.

Having thanked Patriarch Kirill for the expression of warm love and fraternal consideration, Metropolitan Tikhon stressed, 'I experienced this same hospitality last year for the joyous events celebrating the 1025<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Baptism of Holy Rus. It was a privilege to be able to serve together with Your Holiness and the most holy Patriarchs and Heads of Delegations of the Orthodox Churches throughout the world, for this glorious celebration and as a testimony to the unity of world Orthodoxy. Although there are occasional obstacles to this unity, it is my conviction that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of our unity, we will continue to collaborate together and strengthen the bond of brotherly love among the Churches in our complex global context.

'The challenges facing world Orthodoxy are no less present in North America. The Holy Synod of Bishops and I remain committed to the work that has been initiated by the Most Holy Patriarchs and Heads of Orthodox Churches to address the question of the canonical normalization of the situation in the so-called diaspora.

'The Orthodox Church in America, from the time of the granting of its Autocephaly by the Church of

Russia, has labored to minister to people of all ethnic and cultural traditions, including native Americans and those who have no connection with any tradition in particular. We are thankful for the brotherly prayers and support of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has always defended our existence.'

He expressed hope that the strong bond of love and fraternity that has been developed over many years will continue to grow as we work together for the strengthening of the Orthodox Faith throughout the world, especially in those areas where Christians face persecution from others or in those areas where the challenges of modernity and a secular culture threaten the faith of our people.

His Beatitude noted that the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America instructed all the priests and lay people to pray for those who are suffering in the Middle East, in Kosovo and in Ukraine, and in all the places where people are suffering for their faith'.

'We pray and hope that Christians and all people of good will will be protected and will have an opportunity for confessing their faith freely. Let us seek to bring out humble witness to those who live in the dark. It is also my hope that we will be able to address, both today at this meeting and in the future, areas of mutual concern for our two Churches and that we will continue to strengthen our fraternal relations as we address these challenges and strive to fulfil the Apostolic mandate, given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, to make disciples of all nations'.

The two Primates also discussed various problems involved in the bilateral relations and the topics of pan-Orthodox significance.

*DECR Communication Service*

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