# The Theology of Freedom. Christianity and Secular Power: From the Edict of Milan to the Present

*Presentation by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations, at the Opening of the Academic Year at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy, 17 October 2014.*

Your Eminence! Your Excellencies! Esteemed professors and students of the Theological Faculty,

It is a great honour for me to offer this presentation before you at the beginning of the academic year. First of all, I would like to wish you all success in the new academic year and to wish the people of Italy peace and prosperity.

In my presentation I would like to touch upon events of the remote past and events of recent times. I am speaking of the Edict of Milan and the events which not only recall that era, but which are also occurring in our time before our eyes.

Last year the Christian world solemnly celebrated the 1700th anniversary of the edict signed in Milan in 313 AD by the emperors of the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire Constantine and Licinius. The Edict of Milan is in essence the first official state document in the Roman Empire thanks to which the 'Catholic Church' gained the right not only to exist, but also the right to state and public recognition. If before this Christians were persecuted and destroyed, if they could exist only in the catacombs and deep underground, then thanks to the Edict of Milan Christians for the first time, on an equal footing with pagans, were given the right to confess and preach openly their faith, to build churches and open monasteries and schools. The great achievement of the Constantine era was the recognition of the Church as a full participant in the social process, which allowed her to not only freely organize her internal life. but also to exercise an important influence on the life of the state and society.

Many Christians of that time still remembered how the persecutors of the Church expunged her from the public arena and drove her into a ghetto. Many were confessors whose destinies were shattered by violence and persecutions. The eloquent, yet at the same time pain-filled, appeals of the apologists of the first and second centuries to state leaders of the Roman Empire for many Christians of the beginning of the fourth century remained true for their own lives.

We can have an idea of the worldview of Christians in the era of persecution by reading, for example,

the *Apology* of Tertullian. He exclaims: 'We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you— cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods. For what wars should we not be fit, not eager, even with unequal forces, we who so willingly yield ourselves to the sword, if in our religion it were not counted better to be slain than to slay? Without arms even, and raising no insurrectionary banner, but simply in enmity to you, we could carry on the contest with you by an ill-willed severance alone. For if such multitudes of men were to break away from you, and betake themselves to some remote corner of the world, why, the very loss of so many citizens, whatever sort they were, would cover the empire with shame; nay, in the very forsaking, vengeance would be inflicted.'**[i]**

Christians in the era of persecution had to prove to the imperial authorities their loyalty and their usefulness by participating fully in the life of civil society. Yet the authorities remained deaf to such proof. And suddenly the same generation of persecuted and harassed Christians became a witness to the recognition of the Church as an integral part of society. Moreover, several years after the issue of the Edict of Milan Christianity was transformed into a spiritual force that in many ways defined the course of the subsequent history of the empire and the entire world.

As a result of the Milan accords the emperors Constantine and Licinius affirm something completely new, unheard for their contempories. They are publicly declaring: 'We have, therefore, determined, with sound and upright purpose, that liberty is to be denied to no one, to choose and to follow the religious observances of the Christians, but that to each one freedom is to be given to devote his mind to that religion which he may think adapted to himself in order that the Deity may exhibit to us in all things his accustomed care and favour... now everyone who has the same desire to observe the religion of the Christians may do so without molestation... Christians are granted unrestricted liberty... Liberty is granted to others also who may wish to follow their own religious observances; it being clearly in accordance with the tranquility of our times, that each one should have the liberty of choosing and worshiping whatever deity he pleases.'**[ii]**

It is important to note that this document granted freedom to Christianity not to the detriment of the other religions of the Roman Empire; the followers of the various pagan cults retained their rights and freedoms as before. However, the Edict of Milan in essence recognized the fact that the Church is not some marginal sect that corrupted the traditional pillars of society. On the contrary, the document's authors were convinced that Christians were capable of directing the mercy of God to all the people. That Christians could please God and be useful to society is what the new edict was based upon, expressing the hope that the 'Deity' would send down upon the authorities and the people 'in all things his accustomed care and favour'. These lines did not merely give rights and freedoms to the Christians on an equal footing with the pagans, but also opened up to them the possibility of declaring themselves

to be a new force capable of having a positive influence on society and to fill its life with divine meaning.

Thanks to the Edict of Milan, Christians were faced with the necessity of thinking not only of their own salvation and the welfare of their small community. Their new position in society obliged them to think of the quality of this society, of their role in it - the role of active citizens, of men of prayer for their homeland and people of good will.

In these new conditions Christians - bishops, theologians, monks and many laymen – found their place. Within the empire there unfolded a riotous blooming of Christian thought and culture, there was born a Christian philosophy of history, there was formed a new relationship of the Church towards the world that surrounded her. The era which was initiated by the publication of the Edict has entered history as a golden age of Christianity, while for the empire this era became a time of shifts in worldview paradigms. The Church's theology lay at the foundation of a new understanding of personal, social and governmental responsibility, influenced the renewal of all of society's institutions, gave a new integral foundation to family relationships and the attitude towards women, and ensured the gradual eradication of the institution of slavery in the empire. The new empire united within itself the Roman culture of law, the Greek art of refined thought and the pious belief of Jerusalem. And Christianity became within it a new religion, the foundation of a new worldview, capable of uniting the diversity of races and peoples of the empire. Having been granted a historical chance, the Church seized it to the full.

The Edict of Milan has been justly called within the scholarly world the 'edict of toleration'. In this sense it expresses the same spirit as the decree of emperor Galerius which preceded it in 311 AD. The previous decree permitted Christian worship 'if it did not infringe upon public order', but on the condition that Christians pray for the emperor and the Roman state, promising the latter 'additional help' from their God who, it was supposed, was to protect Rome alongside its traditional deities.**[iii]**

And yet it is with the Edict of Milan that a new era was begun both for the Church and for the Roman state, which ultimately led to the issue in 380 AD of the decree of emperor Theodosius I which proclaimed Christianity to be a state religion and placed the traditional pagan religion in effect outside of the law.

Thus it would be natural to suppose that Galerius' edict, the Edict of Milan and the subsequent decree of Theodosius I heralded a consistent unfolding of the political logic of the Roman state. With regard to this, one may ask whether the Church herself was ready to become in effect part of the structure of the Roman state in not only replacing the already existing pagan institutions, but also in creating principally new ones. We do not find a definitive answer to this question by relying on the written sources of that period. Certainly, Constantine the Great was immediately surrounded by a circle of court bishops, including the already mentioned Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicodeme, who baptized the

emperor before his death. The former of these is even considered by some Church historians to be responsible 'for the adoption by Christians of Hellenist political thought'.**[iv]**

However, this approach can hardly be considered conventional for the Church of that time. Christians, although they prayed 'for the civil authorities and the armed forces' of the Roman Empire, nevertheless thought of themselves as citizens of the heavenly fatherland in recalling St. Paul's testimony: 'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come' (Heb. 13: 14). Moreover, for two centuries they had lived in a state which persecuted their coreligionists, in which their faith was *religio illicita* - a 'banned religion'. One of the accusations constantly leveled at Christians was their indifference to politics and lack of usefulness to society. This often corresponded to reality. 'There is nothing so alien to us as public works', wrote Tertullian.**[v]** Origen asserted that no matter where Christians lived, their 'citizenship was of a different order'.**[vi]** As Fr. Georges Florovsky notes, 'in this sense Christians were "outside of society", they were voluntary exiles and voluntarily rejected - they were people outside of the social order of this world'.**[vii]**

Moreover, between the empire and the Church there existed a special type of antagonism which cannot simply be considered a conflict as a result of their non-recognition of each other. 'Indeed, the Christian Church is more than simple a “church”... Christians are also a special people - the People of God, *tertium genus* (a third people), neither Hellenes nor Jews. The Church is not merely a “gathering of people” or a voluntary association engaged in the same religious works. She has proclaimed herself and in reality she is a special independent society separate from the state. At the same time the Roman Empire too proclaimed itself to be and in reality is more than just a state'.**[viii]** The Roman social order presupposed the full subjugation of its citizens to itself in all dimensions of their lives by ascribing to itself a divine origin. This was most clearly expressed in the cult of the 'genius of the emperor' - a special type of deity who accompanied Caesar. Refusal to worship this deity was punished by death as a crime against the state, for the Roman pagan religion was an integral part of the political structure.

And then this empire - the antagonist and rival of the young Christianity - extends its hand to it, guaranteeing the freedom to confess the faith, property rights and the protection of the law. And the Church very quickly became a part of the life of the empire, assuming responsibility for widows, orphans, virgins, the lame and sick, and took part in those public works that seemed to Tertullian so alien to her nature. The clergy received from the state the right of 'intercession' for the those unjustly condemned. The Church's influence began to be felt on the promulgation of laws, expressed in their gradually being made, albeit partially, humane. Indisputable is the effect the Church had on changing society's attitude towards the institution of marriage and the family, on the gradual socialization of state policy which became more attentive to the needs of the people.

The Constantine era that followed the Edict of Milan not only opened a new page in the life of the Roman

Empire: it determined the paradigm of the development of church-state relations in the countries that came into being after its collapse or under its cultural influence. Contrary to widespread opinion, Christianity did not simply become a substitute for the decayed paganism of the Roman Empire; it entered its life and structure as something principally new. It was not subject to the dictatorship of secular authority, it influenced this very authority, at times embarking upon an unequal conflict with it.

In other words, the Church, upon entering the structure of state power, did not merge with it. On the contrary, the Church, in retaining her independence, as before, as in the pre-Constantine era, in viewing herself, in St. Augustine's, phrase, to be the City of God, gradually came to exert a beneficial influence on the state in the spirit of the Gospel of Christ. And although this positive influence was not immediately felt, throughout the centuries it grew unceasingly.

The historical meaning of the Edict of Milan is that it became a pivotal point in the history of the Roman Empire. Thus, according to Fr. John Meyendorff, 'there appeared a new society which had adopted Christianity as its religious (and therefore moral, cultural and political) norm.'**[ix]** This society existed in Europe right up until the modern times, when the Church was separated from the state in many countries.

From events of 1700 years ago I would like now to turn to events of the recent past and tell you about how the Edict of Milan was marked in the Russian Orthodox Church, which I represent and which last year celebrated another important jubilee - the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. The coincidence of the two jubilees obliged us to think about the historical path of the Church, to reflect upon an event of antiquity which laid the foundation of a new Christian civilization, yet at the same time to evaluate too our own recent history.

That which we have experienced in the last quarter of a century and by which we continue to live today we can with confidence call the 'second Baptism of Rus'. Indeed, as we know, Rus was baptized in 988 by the Holy Prince Vladimir in the waters of the River Dniepr. It was then there was begun the journey of salvation by the Christian faith (in its Byzantine Orthodox variant) throughout the towns and villages of Holy Rus. And Holy Rus is the historical expanse which unites present-day Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia. Three Slavic peoples, now divided by state borders, once comprised a single people and have had a common history for more than a thousand years. Indeed, Holy Rus remains today in the form of the spiritual expanse which unites the Russian Orthodox Church, encapsulating both Ukraine and Russia and Byelorussia and a number of other countries.

For more than the thousand-year history of the Russian state relations between the Church and the secular authorities have developed in different ways. In the period from 988 to the granting of autocephaly to the Russian Church in 1488 the state enabled the spreading of the Orthodox faith and

did not interfere in the internal affairs of the Church. In the following, so called Moscow period (1448 to 1589), the power of the princes often upset the balance of relations and principles of mutual non-interference that had formed by swapping inconvenient first hierarchs of the Church for those who were more loyal.

In 1589 the Council of Moscow, under the presidency of the Patriarch of Constantinople Jeremiah II, appointed the first Russian Patriarch, called Job. The model of relations between the Church and secular authorities was a reproduction of the church-state relations that had formed in the Byzantine Empire, the so called symphony of church and state power. The establishment of Patriarchal rule was a logical continuation of the historical development of Eastern Christianity: the Orthodox patriarchates of the East that were under the power of Muslims in the sixteenth century sought support and protection from the Russian Church and Russian rulers. The election of the Patriarch added a special status not only to the Church, but also to the upper echelons of power which definitively regarded itself as the heir to the power of the Byzantine *basileis*.

Emperor Peter I abolished Patriarchal rule and inaugurated the so called Synodal period in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. With the abolition of the Patriarchate and the setting up in 1721 of the Holy Ruling Synod, in effect a ministry in the structure of state government which was headed by a layman, the Ober-Procurator, there began the period of secularization and the subjugation of the Church to the state.

The year 1917 was a breaking point for the Russian Church, as for the entire Russian Empire, heralding the beginning of the chaos and horror of civil war - war of all against all. The words of Christ were fulfilled completely in Russia at that time : 'And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved' (Matt. 10: 21-22).

The Local Council of 1917-1918, which took place against the background of the destruction of the entire state and social structure, revived the once abolished Patriarchal rule in the Church. The Soviet regime issued in 1918 a decree on the freedom of conscience and Church and religious organizations, asserting the principle of separation of Church from state and school. Religious organizations were deprived of their status as judicial entities and did not have the right to own property or collect donations. The first Soviet Constitution of 1918 defined the clergy and monastics as non-working elements without the right to vote. The children of priests were denied the right to enter establishments of higher education. The authorities, in the person of Lenin and then Stalin who followed him, initiated an unprecedented on its scale repression of its own people, the victims of which were millions of individuals. The Church was subjected to total destruction: bishops and priests were shot without trial

and investigation, churches were blown up, and monasteries and church schools were closed down.

The 1929 decrees on the separation of Church from state and school and on religious associations placed the Russian Orthodox Church beyond the law. Persecution against the clergy and the faithful would subside, then flare up again with renewed force, as in the pre-War period and in the period after the Second World War. By number of martyrs who suffered for their faith the Russian Church many times surpassed the host of Christian martyrs who accepted suffering in the first centuries of persecution at the hands of the pagan Roman Empire.

The political processes at the end of the twentieth century in the USSR led to the collapse of the Soviet state. However, even before the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991, a revival of religious life throughout its expanse had begun. It happened, it would appear, completely unexpectedly in 1988. It was in this year in the context of the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus, planned initially as only a Church holiday, that there awoke in the popular consciousness that which we may call genetic memory, national or religious identity. Thousands and millions of people throughout the Soviet Union openly declared their position by taking part in the festivities by filling the churches and squares during the jubilee services. The authorities could do nothing but see and recognize that the Church was not a museum exhibit or an animal in a cage, but a spiritual force of millions of people capable of reviving and renewing it.

From that moment on there began an unprecedented in its scale revival of the Church throughout the expanse of the former Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 1990s the number of those wanting to be baptized was such that a typical priest in a typical city or village church could baptize in the course of one day hundreds of people. Everywhere churches were restored and opened. Throughout the last twenty six years in the Russian Church there have been restored from ruins or opened anew more than 26 000 churches: this means that we have opened and continue to open a thousand churches a year or three churches every day. There have been opened more than eight hundred monasteries, which have been filled with young monks and nuns. In the large cities church secondary schools and church institutes of further education have appeared. Theological faculties have been opened in secular universities. The Church has assumed the direction of her activities which in the period of persecution were in effect banned: publications, social ministry and charity work.

And all of this has taken place in the very same era which in the West some call post-Christian. I have had to listen many times from my Western colleagues about the decline of the Christian faith, of the decrease in the number of believers, of the fall in the numbers of priestly and monastic vocations, and of the closure of churches and monasteries. In order to be convinced that we in no way are living in a post-Christian era, it is sufficient to visit one of the Orthodox countries in which there continues a full-scale revival of religious life, for example, Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, Rumania or Moldavia. Go

and see how the faithful live in these countries, visit Orthodox monasteries and churches, and you will see the ardent piety of the people, their strong and steadfast faith which has not been broken by persecution.

In my view our era - the era of the Church's revival - has something in common with the era following the publication of the Edict of Milan. The link in time is the concept of freedom. The principle of freedom of conscience proclaimed in the Edict of Milan lies at the foundation of the new attitude of the authorities to its subjects. The Edict of Milan presaged sixteen centuries ago that which was possible in full measure only in the twentieth century after hundreds of years of wars and discrimination. In a whole series of international documents at the basis of the modern legal world (such as, for example, the International Bill of Human Rights and the European Convention on the Defence of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms) the freedom to confess one's faith and live according to it - the main idea of the Edict - is postulated as one of the most important freedoms of the human person.

Something similar to what happened in the Roman Empire in 313 took place twenty six years ago within the then Soviet Union. We were witnesses to how the Church in our country, after many trails and bloody victims, suddenly came out of the ghetto, rose up from her knees and began her triumphant march through the cities and villages. A significant part of society again discovered its Christian identity.

And it all began when in the mid 1980s the question of freedom of conscience was put at the centre of public discussion in the USSR. The Church played an active role in this discussion. Again, as sixteen centuries ago, by the very fact of her existence in spite of the surrounding reality, the Church laid bare the crisis of freedom, at the same time laying bare the inner fragility of the former order of things. Within the system of values that had collapsed there was to be found neither the political, nor the economic, nor the spiritual staples capable of uniting the people.

Certain events in the Church's history cannot be explained other than as a divine miracle. Such a miracle was the era following the Edict of Milan in 313. No less a miracle happened in our country at the end of the 1980s. Could people, who only a few years before this risked their welfare for their faith, and in some instances their lives too, evaluate the freedom that had unexpectedly fallen on their heads as anything other than a divine miracle? Could they have hoped that the godless ideology would collapse and be replaced by another worldview in which the Good News of the Church again will be viewed as one of the foundations of society and the pledge of its success in the future? Numerous believers, who had gathered at the festivities in July 1988, would be able to repeat the words once uttered by Eusebius of Caesarea on the occasion of the general church festivities that heralded a new era: 'All the fear in which our tormentors had held us hostage has evaporated. Now the joyful and triumphant days of popular festivities have come: all has become filled with light'.**[x]**

In both instances it is precisely the gift of religious freedom that preceded the gift of other civil liberties, viewed in our time as one of the main achievements of a democratic society. And it is not fortuitous, for it is in the Christian system of values that the concept of freedom acquires its special content. We Christians believe that the gift of life is a gift from God, and that human life is not under the power of anyone other than the Maker of the human race. This belief renders Christians free from the oppression of any political power and any ideology. It makes then capable of being martyrs and confessors when the Church is persecuted; and witnesses to the truth and heralds of the Kingdom of God when the Church is recognized. No other religion or ideology characterizes such a reverential attitude towards freedom. The great Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev said that 'freedom, above all freedom, is the soul of Christian philosophy and this is what cannot be granted by any other abstract and rationalistic philosophy'.**[xi]**

Christian freedom does not tear us away from our families, from our social ties or from our country. On the contrary, within the Christian understanding of freedom, in the recognition of an absolute and living connection of the human person with God there is embedded a moral potential of great strength. Being the creation of a beneficent God, sons and daughters of the Maker, we are called upon to plow the garden that has been entrusted to us, thereby bringing the Kingdom of God closer to humanity. It is precisely this moral potential, rooted within the free human person, that the emperor Constantine saw in Christianity when he allowed this powerful positive creative energy to be released and act upon all of society.

This very same potential of Christian freedom was released in our people after decades of ideological oppression. I am convinced that this why our nation overcame the colossal social and economic catastrophe of the 1990s and found within itself the strength to raise from its knees, that Christian blood still flows within our people and that in the depths of our national consciousness the notion of Christian freedom has not been eradicated.

In recent times we have more often been able to observe how in the West another type of freedom has been proclaimed: freedom from moral principles, from common human values, from responsibility for one's actions. We see how this freedom is destructive and aggressive. Instead of respect for the feelings of other people, it preaches an all-is-permitted attitude, ignoring the beliefs and values of the majority. Instead of a genuine affirmation of freedom it asserts the principle of unrestrained gratification of human passions and vices remote from moral orientation.

The aggressive mood of such a falsely understood freedom brings it closer to the totalitarianism of the era of persecution and godlessness of the twentieth century. 'Totalitarian freedom', based on human passions, returns us to the times of the pagans, albeit in a more cunning and refined form. Before our eyes there again unfold pictures familiar to us from events of the godless decades of our country.

Militant atheism, often in the most monstrous and grotesque forms, has again reared its head and boldly made itself known on the expanses of Europe. Moral relativism and the all-is-permitted attitude are raised up as the basic principle of life. And now we already see how buses with the signs 'There is no God - enjoy life!' or 'Your are gay - be proud of it!' are traveling around London. We hear of how in Paris proponents of traditional family values, who do not wish to have children to be adopted by same-sex couples, are dispersed with batons and tear gas. We have become witnesses of how on the ambo of Moscow's main church there appeared blasphemers who through their actions received the approval of a certain section of society, and how an analogous action took place in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Secularization under the guise of democracy has in reality released in the European super-state, which is the cultural heir of the Roman Empire, a colossal energy of subjugation to authority. This burning energy today aims to break completely with Christianity which has restrained its totalitarian impulses for seventeen centuries. As a result this energy unconsciously strives towards the establishment of an absolute dictatorship which will demand the establishment of complete control over every member of society. Is this not where we are heading for 'in the interests of security' in agreeing to the obligatory introduction of electronic passports, of universal fingerprinting and the ubiquitous presence of closed-circuit television cameras? After all, this can be used for other purposes which can also be ascribed to 'strengthening security measures'.

That which is happening today in the West is the gradual restoration of the Pax Romana, of global international hegemony. Along with this, if Roman power at certain periods was indifferent towards immorality, then today that immorality is being proclaimed as the norm. The modern-day democratic state is even viewed by some as the role of guarantor of the legal status of immorality, for it protects citizens from the encroachments of 'religious sanctimoniousness'. The role of religion, as in Rome, is seen in an exclusively utilitarian light - it is the servant of the state without any claims to truth, the 'personal affair of each individual'. And yet the state must be recognized unconditionally and we must obey its laws, including those that undermine its foundations.

Nevertheless, Christianity in its very essence cannot renounce its claim to truth - that is her eschatological nature, to seek out the City of the age to come. The Kingdom of God, as preached by the Church, fills the contemporary secular state with fear and is a threat to the kingdom of men that cannot bear competition. As in pre-Constantine times, Christianity remains the only force in the world which is not swallowed up by the gigantic mechanism of the new despotic state.**[xiii]** It is no coincidence, therefore, that in the prophecies of the Apocalypse images of a totalitarian empire are used which wage war against the saints, utilizing for this purpose all its colossal might and means of control.

It would seem that the greatest historical merit of the emperor Constantine was the conscious attempt at the synthesis of a new statehood based on Gospel norms. This experiment could hardly be successful

for 'no man putteth new wine into old bottles' (Mk. 2:22). The pagan statehood of Rome, with its characteristic striving for absolute control, was not outlived even in the Christian states that replaced it. And yet the old bottles of the Roman state allowed the Church fully to reveal herself in her ministry to thousands of generations of people, to realize her gracious gifts in history, to exert an influence on the formation of many cultures and traditions. The heritage of Christianity is perceived by us mainly in the light of its historical evolution in the period following the Edict of Milan. The 'marriage' of Church and state, although not eternal by virtue of the heterogeneity of the 'partners', nonetheless presented European history with a vector of development, the renunciation of which would spell the death of civilization for our continent.

In this context the historical lesson of the Edict of Milan has become extremely valuable. It shows that the new thread of the development of civilization ought to be founded upon the freedom which rests upon firm moral foundations. It is from this freedom that all other forms of freedom are to grow, it is from it that there grows too a state devoid of totalitarianism. If not, then freedom again becomes merely a declared abstract value, while the liberal ideology enslaves and zombifies the human person in the same way as godless ideology did in the recent past.

In the fourth century the Church for the first time in her history began to be integrated into civil society, Christians for the first time felt the possibility of realizing their faith and their beliefs for the good of their earthly homeland. The power of Christian theology - a theology of redemption and resurrection, a theology of the Kingdom of God coming in power - was to be revealed in the lives of the many peoples who inhabited the then *oikumene*.

In our time the Church and her sacred Tradition have become a revelation for our nation. A whole generation of people torn from the Church has again discovered faith. The situation in which we found ourselves - the situation of having to discover a forgotten Tradition, the churching of society, the rebirth of the Church - has confronted us with the task of grasping what the Christian Tradition with a capital letter is and who are we within that Tradition. Moreover, acquaintance with the history of Christian civilization, with the history of the Church, has revealed to us an understanding of the role of the Church in completely different periods of both prosperity and persecution, mistakes and trials. The Church never knew this in the era of Constantine when she was only taking her first steps as an institution recognized by society.

We can say today that the Church over the past seventeen centuries has become more mature, more experienced. The historical experience of the Church does not allow us, in receiving freedom, not to dispose of that freedom with intelligence. Today great wisdom is required of the Church because we have been given a historical chance which we have no right to let slip. By the 1990s the Church in Russia spoke loudly of freedom and responsibility as two absolute values, without the interaction of

which it was impossible to build a just society. Today such thoughts all the more frequently are to be expressed from the mouths of statesmen. Today the Church and state in Russia, as well as in some countries in the post-Soviet expanse, are able to speak with a single voice and express a united position.

The consonance between Church and state as evaluated by the processes in society can in no way be considered a sign of 'convergence' between them. The principle of mutual non-interference of Church and state in the internal affairs of each other must be preserved and is being preserved. Yet this principle must be balanced by the other, no less important, principle of co-operation between Church and state in those areas in which co-operation is possible and essential. And it is essential in various areas connected to the sphere of public morality.

Today both the state and representatives of religious confessions, as well as non-religious people (who have suddenly found themselves in a minority), can take a full participation in the discussion on the moral direction of social development. We ought to create such a society in which everyone finds their own place, in which each person can realize his freedom. Yet at the same time freedom should not be changed into an all-is-permitted attitude. Each member of society is to feel his responsibility not only for himself, but also for his country and the world around him.

Today we cannot view society as a soulless mechanism ruled by judicial norms. Society is also a spiritual organism ruled by spiritual laws. It is not for nothing that we speak of a moral or immoral society, of a sick society or a healthy society. The possibilities for the state of influencing the spiritual sphere of human life are extremely limited, whereas the Church possesses here enormous opportunities. So that the interests of society be realized in full measure, it is essential that civil liberty, which may and should be guaranteed by the state, be harnessed to religious freedom. For it is freedom which is the connecting link of the two spheres of public life: the civil and the spiritual.

This is a complex and multifaceted topic, it provokes discussion and needs discussion. Throughout Christian history, since the historical edict was signed in Milan which granted freedom to the Church, the Church has found herself in an uninterrupted dialectical development: she, on the one hand, must preserve her freedom which has been bought with the price of blood, while on the other she is called to realize it.

All freedom is valuable when it is harnessed with responsibility and sacrifice. To possess freedom for the Church means to be the 'salt of the earth', the yeast of the Gospel, a spiritual force and the conscience of the people. To realize freedom means to act and use those opportunities that the Lord has given us for serving and preaching. The world is so constructed that freedom is the condition of a decisive, yet well thought out action. Freedom is the means, the condition of creative work. And

creativity is engagement in the life of society with all of its inner contradictions.

We have been judged to live in times when in our hands, in the hands of Christians, is the precious gift of freedom - the same gift which Christians received in the era of emperor Constantine the Great. This gift of Divine Providence opens up before us great opportunities. The ability to dispose of the gift of freedom demands from the older generation of people in the Church a special wisdom, and from the young workers in God's field colossal self-sacrifice.

In speaking of the idea of Christian freedom as a thread which ties the era of Constantine with our own era, I think of the deeds of the apostles and martyrs, apologists and holy fathers of the fourth and later centuries right up to the new martyrs and confessors of the Church of Russia. From the very moment of her inception, throughout the generations, thanks to the feats of her heroes of the spirit, the Church has kept her freedom as the apple of her eye. And no matter what researchers say about church-state relations in Byzantium and Rus, at her very heart the Church has remained free, irrespective of the external political circumstance. The freedom to confess Christ as Lord and live according to his commandments will remain constant in the life of the Church and the life of every Christian until the moment when 'the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (2 Pet. 3: 10).

I would like to wish you all, and in your person the future generation of Western Christians, to preserve the spirit of the Christian freedom which considers as vanity all that which does not incline its head before the living God and the Saviour of the world Jesus Christ. In preserving this freedom, do not be afraid of creativity, do not be afraid of the risk of creativity. For God calls us to be his co-workers in this world and co-workmanship cannot but be creativity in the loftiest sense of this word.

And there is another wish which I would like to convey to you all: in bringing into the world the word of Christ, let us not forget that the best testimony always has been and always will be the example of our own lives. Our creative work begins in our souls, in our families, parishes and monastic communities, in church schools and secular universities. Then the power of our testimony will touch all of society and each of its members. Then we will be able to thank God with lives that have been worthily lived for the precious gift of freedom which he has given to us Christians and which no one has the right to take away.

**[i]** Apologeticum 37.

**[ii]** Cited from Eusebius Pamphilus *, The History of the Church*, Book V, Moscow, p.358

**[iii]** Golz, Hans, *Die Konstantinische Wende - Eine betrachtuing zu drei Toleranzedikten*, GRIN

Verlag, 2009, p.12.

**[iv]** Francis Dvornik *, Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, II, Washington, 1966, p.616.

**[v]** Apologeticum 38, 3.

**[vi]** Contra Celsum, VIII, 75.

**[vii]** Fr. Georges Florovsky, *Dogmat i istoriya*, Moscow, 1998, p.261.

**[viii]** Ibid.

**[ix]** Fr. John Meyendorff, *Istoriya Tserkvi i vostochno-khristianskaya mistika*, Moscow, 2000, p.19.

**[x]** Eusebius of Caesarea, *Tserkovnaya istoriya*, 10.

**[xi]** Nikolai Berdyaev, *Filosofiya istorii*, part 1.

**[xii]** Georges Florovsky, *Dogmat i istoriya*, Moscow, 1998, p.261.

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