Presentation by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk Chairman of the Department of External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate at the 'Christian Values In An Age of Globalization' Symposium London, 21 February 2014

An international symposium took place at the 'Rossotrudnichestvo' office in London on February 21, 2014. The text of Metropolitan Hilarion's presentation is given below:

Dear participants of the symposium,

Today the topic of Christian values acquires special relevance. The modern-day secular consciousness looks upon religious values as secondary in relation to the dominant liberal democrat standards, the interpretation of which is becoming ever far removed from traditional Christian morality. Therefore the dialogue on Christian values is a most important testimony to faith in the face of contemporary society that has renounced its religious roots.

Not a single world civilization has existed without immutable spiritual and moral maxims, which we call values. The history of humankind has known various values, notions of worthy and unworthy behaviour and of a just structure of society. For many centuries these values flowed from a religious consciousness, they were formed within the framework of the believer's perception of the world. Within the framework of this presentation the problem of Christian values will be viewed mainly in the European context, which has direct relevance to us.

Moral and ethical values in historical retrospective possess a universal character. However, the theory that common human morality is universal by virtue of the fact that a certain moral codex common for all civilizations is inherent in all peoples and nations cannot sustain criticism.

We can indeed discover common moral norms by studying the history of ancient civilizations. And yet, while paganism was dominant in these civilizations there existed in them both human sacrifices and cannibalism, both polygamy and polyandry, and many other things which humankind renounced under the influence of monotheism.

We cannot look upon the ancient pagan cultures as evidence of a universal understanding of morality. Moreover, the continent of Europe before its illumination by faith in Christ cannot be included in the

concept of universal human morality. If, for example, we look at the legal documents of the ancient Slavs, then we notice that whoever had committed a crime could be sold into slavery by his fellow tribesmen in order to obtain greater compensation for those who have suffered. Such practices do not allow us to conclude that there is an unconditional morality rooted in human nature that has not been illumined by faith in Christ.

The Old Testament shows us how the life of the chosen people changed fundamentally after it had received the revelation of the one God and followed the path of observing the divine commandments. The ten commandments which God gave to the people through Moses became the spiritual and moral foundation upon which Israelite society was built. This does not mean that all of the Israelite people without exception observed the ten commandments. The books of the Bible are replete with examples of non-observance of the commandments, the refusal of individuals and a whole nation to follow the divine truth. Yet this truth, this moral basis became the foundation upon which society was built, the spiritual clasp which held together the entire people and made it a single organism. Rejection of this truth was perceived as a sin and was correspondingly punished.

The same occurred in the history of the European nations when they accepted the Christian faith. Together with Christianity the European nations received both the Old Testament commandments and the New Testament morality based on the teaching of Jesus Christ. This at root changed the life of the peoples of Europe and raised them to a new level of spiritual and moral development.

Today we can often hear the argument of religion's critics as to why, if our ancestors were so religious, was our past so scarred by so many wars, sufferings and injustice? The answer to this question is quite simple: the people were given the commandments but they did not observe them. Indeed, in our day the majority of the world's population - Christians, Muslims, Jews and representatives of other traditional religions - agree upon the ten commandments, and yet some of them do not observe them. Many people in their everyday life ignore those values which form the basis of our civilization. It has been said: 'Thou shalt not kill,' and yet people kill and even justify killing; it has been said: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and yet society has created an entire industry of promiscuity.

Today on the continent of Europe there is taking place a conscious and consistent deconstruction of the system of values upon which for centuries the lives of our ancestors was built. If we turn not to public opinion and not to the position of believers but to the official documents of the European Union then we can find clear confirmation of this. The preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that the common values are the dignity of the human person, freedom, equality and solidarity, democracy and the rule of law. Within this list, as in other fundament documents of the European Union, there is no mention of Christian values, the contribution of Christianity to the centuries-old process which turned the barbarian tribes inhabiting the territory of Europe into a great civilization.

I recall the sincere but unsuccessful attempts by the European Christian communities to restore historical and moral justice by insisting on the mention of Christianity in the basic documents of the European Union. The authors of Europe's future were deaf to the voice of common sense, pointing out that a reference to the Christian heritage may offend the feelings of representatives of other religions or atheists. In fact, secularism is in no way a neutral venue for all religions. On the contrary, this is a perception of the world that is rejected by all religious traditions. Militant secularism has declared war on the religious worldview as such as it proceeds from completely different premises and leads to completely different results.

The Church's most important task is to help the human person in his struggle against sin and the passions which destroy the person and lay waste to his soul. The secular worldview proceeds from the fact that the concept of sin has no right to exist: there is nothing sinful in itself, what is wrong is only the impingement by one person on the rights and freedoms of another person. And as regards personal morality, then each person is free to define the scale of moral values around which he can orientate himself. What is sinful and amoral for one person maybe be justified and encouraged by another. The main thing is that everybody lives in peace and harmony.

I was born and grew up in a country where the authorities violently uprooted religion and imposed atheism. Throughout the whole expanse of the Soviet Union there was a monstrous experiment in destroying religion as such. The idea of educating a new universal human person, a citizen of the world devoid of religious prejudice was for the peoples of the Soviet Union a genuine historical experience. We paid dearly for this ideology which cost the lives of millions of people who did not fit into the Marxist-Leninist notion of the bright future.

The experiment in the deconstruction of religious values was an experiment on the very nature of the human person. It was reflected in Russian literature. Thus, the writer Mikhail Bulgakov in his story *The Heart of a Dog* in allegorical form depicted the formation of the new person from a dog by means of a surgical operation by transplanting a dog's heart into a person. This experiment led to the creation of a human-looking animal which knew no moral norms. The writer used this grotesque image to convey the idea of the meaninglessness of human existence if a human does not have a human soul, if his entire life is motivated solely by instincts and passions, if he is deprived of a conscience.

I am fully aware that among non-believers there are people who lead a morally exemplary life, as there are sinners and criminals among believers. Religion is not a panacea for moral degradation, in the same way as atheism does not necessarily lead to a life of vice. However, there is a cardinal difference between the believer and the contemporary bearer of the secular worldview. The former, when committing a sin, is aware of the sinful nature of his act, whereas the latter does not believe sin to be sin

and elevates vice to a norm, justifying this on the basis of specially created ideological paradigms. These paradigms lay at the basis of the new moral codex which radically departs from the religious tradition and is aimed at creating a new type of person devoid of absolute moral orientations.

The humanism which modern-day secular Europe has declared is a superstructure on the Christian foundation. However, liberal thinkers prefer not to notice this. Beginning with the Age of the Enlightenment, political and philosophical thought has taken the direction of breaking with its Christian roots. Having extracted from the Christian tradition the doctrine of freedom, the enlighteners have laid down the vector of development which has led today to the abolition of Christian morality as such. Concern for human dignity, understandable in an age of absolutism and tyranny, has led over the centuries to the creation of the legal and social mechanisms for the encouragement of a sinful way of life.

The thinkers in the Age of the Enlightenment fought against the dominant ideology of the time which they believed to be dogmatic and obsolete. However, modern history has created on the basis of their teaching a dogmatized system of political standards which are intolerant of and indeed aggressive towards religion. And we Christians are already feeling this intolerance and aggression which revives in our memory the persecution of the Christians by the pagans in ancient times and the persecution of religion by the militant atheists more recently. When Christians are forbidden from openly confessing their faith, when Christian symbols are removed from the public arena, when even wearing a cross around the neck may be interpreted as an infringement of public order, images of the recent past are revived in our memory. I remember well how in a Soviet atheist school the teacher tore the cross from around my neck as she had accidentally noticed the chain beneath my shirt collar. And today we can hear of how in democratic Europe an airline employee was forced to remove her cross, supposedly in the name of tolerance, peace and harmony in society

I shall give concrete examples of the difference between Christian and secular morality. Both the Christian and liberal tradition speak of the dignity of the human person, of the value of human life. Yet this value is understood in different ways. The Christian tradition declares that human life is inviolable from the moment of conception, proceeding from the fact that every embryo in nine months time will become somebody's son or daughter. The secular consciousness, however, tends to view the embryo as a mass of chromosomes and stem cells which can be used for rejuvenation and prolonging the lives of other people by means of the destruction of the embryo itself. One may justify the manipulation of embryos by various good motives, but we should not forget that experiments on people in the Nazi death camps also benefited science. The question is whether we need this benefit, are we ready to use the benefits which have cost human life?

It transpires that in modern-day democratic society the declared notion of the dignity of the human

person and the value of human life extends only to certain categories of people. It is not extended to unborn children whom it is considered permissible to put to death without any pangs of conscience. It is not extended to seriously ill people who are offered the possibility of 'exiting with dignity' by means of euthanasia - the legalized murder in a number of countries of the elderly, terminally ill adults and even children.

When speaking of dignity we must also recognize the fact that the human person may mislay or even lose his dignity. From the Christian perspective the dignity of the person is directly dependent on the person's moral choice, his capacity for virtue or sin. 'The use of freedom for the purpose of evil inevitably entails the diminution of the person's own dignity', states *The Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church on Dignity, Freedom and Human Rights*. Secular ideology rejects the connection between dignity and morality, yet beyond this connection the theoretical notion of the dignity of the human person does not become practically realized, remaining merely a declared abstract value.

What is freedom? This concept has key meaning for the Christian tradition. 'Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty,' says St. Paul (Gal 5:13). However, he does not mean freedom as moral anarchy but the liberation of the human person from the power of sin, of passions, of instincts; it is the inner freedom which is founded on the observance of God's commandments. From the perspective of Christianity, the freedom of the human person is inseparable from moral responsibility. Human freedom possesses a great power for it likens the human person to God, yet it contains an explosive potential if it goes against God. Freedom may be compared to a nuclear reaction which is of benefit only where it is active in a nuclear power station and not when it is turned into a destructive weapon. Moral responsibility is the system of spiritual security which preserves the human person from disintegration under the influence of the power of one's own freedom.

Of course, freedom is an immutable value, yet in any religious tradition it exists in moral and ethical, national and cultural, and other contexts. Even in countries with a majority of Christians there may exist differing concepts of the framework of freedom. The universal value of freedom as such cannot be viewed as a carte blanche for committing all sorts of sinful acts.

We are obliged to note the great crisis of freedom as a value caused, among other things, by the discrepancy between the declared relationship towards the freedom of the human person and the real relationship. Thus we ought not to believe that the numerous documents on the freedom of the human person have solved the problem of slavery. According to Human Rights Watch the everyday trafficking of people as slaves may be as many as 900,000. Throughout the world there are an enormous number of people who are involved in criminal networks linked to human trafficking, drug dealing, prostitution and the procuring of sex slaves.

Today there are a number of European countries where prostitution is legal. Its presence is justified ideologically by the person's right to choose their sexual partner as they please and the right of the other person to make money by any means possible. I say this not in order to condemn those women who sell their bodies. If they return to the Church in repentance, as happened with St. Mary of Egypt who was transformed from a prostitute into a great saint, the Church receives their repentance and forgives their sins. Yet the Church can never agree to their way of life being elevated to a norm or recognize as normal the behaviour of those persons who use their services.

When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Christ he said to those who demanded that she be stoned to death: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her'. He not only did not condemn the woman but saved her from death. And yet he said to her: 'Go, and sin no more' (Jn. 8: 2-11). If we are to follow the secular notions of free choice and human dignity, then the Saviour of the world ought not to have said these words but recognize her behaviour to be normal and say: ' Go and continue to do the same'.

In following the example of Christ the Church condemns sin but shows mercy to the sinner. In 2006, thanks to the intercession of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates a Ukrainian woman, who was threatened with criminal prosecution including the death penalty for committing an abortion, was shown mercy. In the Patriarch's letter to it was stated that the Church does not justify abortion, believing it to be a sin, but at the same time she calls for mercy to be shown towards the woman.

Solidarity is yet another category in the list of values in the Human Rights Charter of the EU. Yet within the context of a consumer society it is very difficult to speak of genuine solidarity and brotherhood, the concepts of which were formed by Christian moral teaching. Solidarity is impossible without taking into account the interests of one's neighbour, without the love of neighbour as commanded to us by God, and at times with sacrifice which naturally limits the free choice of the human person, his striving for comfort. Solidarity is impossible where the only limitation of the freedom of the human person is the freedom of others and their legitimate interests.

Social unity naturally presupposes love of neighbour. However, in the conditions of identity crisis many people renounce their firmly-rooted national, cultural and religious ties by being guided in communication with each other by the principle of the supermarket where each person chooses the partner that suits him most at that particular time. As a rule, this approach leads to the atomization of society. As family values disintegrate, relationships of solidarity are in a deep crisis even on the parent-child level.

An obvious example of the deconstruction of the natural ties between generations in the name of

wrongly understood solidarity and freedom is when the state is encouraged to interfere in family life, known as juvenile justice. This phenomenon is based on placing parents in the position of hired workers to whom society has entrusted the guaranteeing of the rights and freedoms of children under the control of the state's forces of law and order. It does not have to be pointed out that this approach, justified as the protection of the rights and freedoms of children, destroys the family. Society's solidarity with children who supposedly suffer from parental abuse in many instances becomes a gross infringement of the basic rights of both children and parents and the family as a whole, when a neighbour's reporting is sufficient for the removal of children from the family into a children's home.

In the conditions of secularism solidarity and brotherhood lose their moral sustenance. Of course, their declaration retains their importance, yet it is impossible to make brotherhood compatible with the relations of a trade exchange which have become a part of interpersonal communion. This is witnessed by the world economic crisis. It has shown the enslavement of society, the members of which in the hope of acquiring personal wealth are ready to endanger the minimal welfare of millions of poor people around the world.

A brief examination of European values which are developing within the framework of a global world leads us to the following conclusion. These values have been violently torn, often against the wishes of many, from their moral context which for centuries was formed in a Christian civilization. Values are meant to help build up a just world, but it is impossible to build this world on the basis of an ideology that views the world without God and without faith. A world without God, without absolute moral values rooted in divine revelation, irrevocably turns into the realm of the rule of slavery and lawlessness.

The Russian Church, which has paid in millions of lives for the godless Soviet experiment, can and must testify before the adherents of militant secularism to the fact that a society torn from its spiritual roots and faith has no future.
