



Message of the Holy Bishops' Council to the Clergy, Monastics, Laity and Children of the Russian Orthodox Church

Beloved in the Lord all-honourable father presbyters, esteemed deacons, God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters and all the faithful children of the Russian Orthodox Church!

The Holy Bishops' Council, which took place in Moscow in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour from 2nd to 5th February 2013, address these words of the apostolic greeting to you: 'Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth' (2 Thess 1:2-3).

The Church's main task is the salvation of people. All that happens in our Church life and in the relationships between the Church and society and the state should always be subordinate to this goal. Our missionary, educational, charity work and other labours are ultimately to be aimed at the salvation of each human soul. The Saviour's commission to 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Mt 28:19-20) remains just as urgent in our times. In recalling this, the members of the Bishops' Council have discussed many problems of church and public life by adopting conciliar resolutions and other documents now addressed to the Pleroma of our Church.

In showing concern for order in church life, the Council's members have defined for the future the procedure of electing the Patriarch at a Local Council, have refined the powers of the Local and Bishops' Councils, and approved the creation by the Holy Synod of metropolitan areas and new dioceses. They have also suggested solutions for the important tasks facing society.

In particular the Holy Council has expressed the Church's position in relation to the development of technology of accounting and the processing of personal data. Finding herself on the side of human freedom, the Church calls upon the state not to oblige people to adopt those technologies which may prevent them from freely confessing their faith in Christ and to follow this faith in their personal and public affairs. The assent of Christians to various legislative, political or ideological acts also depends upon their compatibility with the Christian way of life.

Of constant concern to the Church remains the need to strengthen the family, to protect its life from

undue intervention, to support a strong relationship between children and parents, and the safety of children, especially in the face of violence, cruelty and dissolution. In regard to these questions the Bishops' Council stated its position on the reform of family legislation in many countries and on the problem of juvenile justice.

The Church is seriously concerned by the present state of the natural world. The exhaustion of resources and pollution of the environment put into sharp focus the problem of preserving the diversity of life and the prudent use of nature's gifts. The Council members expressed the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the current problems of ecology by reminding society of its responsibility before the God-created world.

The pastors and flock of the Russian Orthodox Church are invited to study attentively the documents adopted by the Bishops' Council, the majority of which were prepared in the course of discussions over three years held by the Inter-Council Presence attended by hundreds of bishops, clerics, monastics and laity.

Our Lord and God Jesus Christ warned his disciples that 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you' (Jn 15:19). From apostolic times the historical path of the Church has been linked to the way of confessing the faith through unfeigned witness to the truth. The struggle directed against Christians by 'the spirit of this world' (1 Cor 2:12) has throughout the history of the Church had the goal of diverting through various means the human person away from his Maker and Saviour. This struggle has consisted of not only attempts to tempt people into sin but also in the persecution of Christ's followers. Yet the crucible of privations and suffering has only strengthened the faith and made ever more resolute the hearts of the faithful children of the Church. An example of patience in suffering is St. Dalmat of Iset, canonized in 2004 as a locally venerated saint in Siberia. His church-wide veneration has been affirmed by the present Council. St. Dalmat was many times a witness to the destruction of the monastery he had founded, yet every time he rebuilt it, defending rigorously his faith and the church ordinances, thereby retaining deep humility before his neighbours.

Events of the past year have clearly demonstrated that Orthodoxy is being reborn as the foundation of national self-consciousness, uniting all the healthy forces in society – those forces which strive for the transformation of life on the basis of a sure foundation and the spiritual and moral values that have entered the flesh and blood of our peoples. It was for precisely this reason that people of ill will chose the Church as the object of their struggle, resorting to lies, slander, blasphemy, the destruction of churches and the desecration of holy objects.

The Holy Council reminds the faithful that the response to such acts must be prayer, the preaching and

affirmation of God's truth, peaceful civil action by Orthodox Christians, and the increase of the deeds of love and charity. We are to remain a 'light to the world' and 'salt of the earth' so that people, in seeing our 'chaste conversation coupled with fear', even 'may without the word be won' for Christ (1 Pet 3:1-2). In vindicating our faith, we must always recall the Saviour's words that 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' (Jn 13: 35).

In realizing our church ministry and laboring in the field of Christ we called not in words but in deeds to strengthen 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3) in a conciliar way, collectively: archpastors, clergy, monastics and laity alike. The essential thing is to measure one's life according to the Gospel. This is the sole way to the transfiguration of the human person and society.

May our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of eternal life, strengthen and enlighten all of us in our forthcoming labours.

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