Ideas of solidarity and concern for the common cause must and are intended to play the role of a brace holding society - Patriarch Kirill

On the occasion of National Unity Day, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill I has spoken in an interview with Itar-Tass about Russia's future, bribes, and the most signficant event of the year 2012.

— Your Holiness, on November 4 this country marks the 400th anniversary since the victory accomplished by the whole nation – the elimination of the Times of Turmoil. What is the pathway that Russia should take these days to become a blossoming country? What is the way to keep up and foster the healthy forces of society, to ensure a growth of the sections of society capable of working in the name of lofty ideals rather than for the sake of personal gain? And how could we possibly boost society's culture? These are the questions that many people in this country are asking themselves today.

— The very content of the holiday we mark on November 4 can teach us a lot of things. What do we actually recall on that day? The end of the Turmoil, which we managed to round up thanks to the unity of the nation – or in other words thanks to the solidarity and consolidation of a multitude of individuals in the name of a noble objective that was to ensure the defense and independence of homeland and to safeguard its national dignity.

And do the goals we are facing today differ much? Do we respond properly to the challenges to the traditional moral foundations of our society and our national culture? Or is it untrue that the egotistic personal cravings and selfish material interests, which have turned into priorities of life for so many people today, are putting at risk the country's integrity and culture?

Like it was 400 years ago, the ideas of solidarity and the concern for a common cause as a factor opposed to self-serving pursuits can and must play the role of a brace holding our society together. Whatever an individual's financial status and whatever the official post he or she occupies, a human being cannot feel genuine happiness without caring for the neighbor's needs. The bigger the number of those who are imbued with the sense of social service and who feel the social significance of what they are doing, the stronger a society is and the smaller the distances between the groups making it up.

Human divisions are inalienable companions of our fallen world which, according to the Holy Scriptures, "lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). Our personal sins bring up unrest in the hearts of others and breed arrogance and egotism that implode the social tranquility. The Times of Turmoil was a saddening epoch of societal splits, a time of malice that surged above all the limits, when people were eager to stain their hands with their brothers' blood. And the elimination of that spiritual malady really signaled our common victory over ourselves, a victory that would have been impossible without faith and the Lord's gracious assistance.

As we observe November 4 – a red date that emerged on our calendar in many ways owing to the efforts of the country's religious leaders – we should feel delight for the heroic deeds of our ancestors and, on top of that, remember that our people has so far failed to weed out the features of life, which led up to that Turmoil.

Similarly to what happened 400 years ago, we are facing the lures of arrogance and the extolling of some people over others and are gripped by jealousy that seeks justice through violence. You and I and all of us are making the choices that either bring the times resembling the Turmoil closer or drive them farther away from us. The small steps we make actually either switch us to the track of building a fair and flourishing society or divert us away from it. Our consciousness is the most lucid guiding star in this sense but it does not shine outside the spiritual tradition, however. If someone of our brothers attends a liturgy in the church on a Sunday and begins the morning of the workweek by taking a bribe and if he does not find this to be abnormal, this means the person's moral guidelines are not set properly.

The 'lofty ideals' you are asking about mean something bigger than a high-flown phrase. They step to the fore in the seemingly trivial and routine things – in our everyday conduct, in the way we treat the people around us, in the commitment to our work, and in the observance of the rules of living in society and the state laws.

Well-being of any society depends in many respects on how selflessly and earnestly each and every of its members does his work. Yet these efforts lose any sense if they spring up from the principle that considers man to be a instrument for attaining the goals of every description.

In addition, every Christian has a calling to change his own nature, to rid himself of sin, and if we do change ourselves then the whole of our society will start changing, too. Our attempts to bring changes to society without paying attention to ourselves will be fruitless but this does not mean that the problems existing today should remain unsettled. I am simply trying to point out their root-cause and a closest interconnection between man's inner world and the situation in society. The government assesses a citizen's activity either by stimulating it or by punishing for it. This is how the mechanism of the state and

society works. As for the Church, it deals with the structuring of the human soul and it seeks to reorganize man's inner life.

— In March 2012, you led a ceremony in the Alexander Garden by the Kremlin wall where the first stone was laid into the foundation of a monument to Patriarch Hermogenes, the cleric who inspired the Russian troops in 1612. Why do you think a monument to exactly that supreme hierarch of the Russian Church should be put up in Moscow's downtown?

— The volunteer guard that liberated Moscow was set up at the blessing of the holy martyr Patriarch Hermogenes. And the monument to the holy Partiarch should in theory have been unveiled in parallel with the monument to Minin and Pozharsky [merchant Kuzma Minin and prince Dmitry Pozharsky who led the Russian troops in the 1612 campaign for the liberation of Moscow – Itar-Tass]. But very unfortunately, the name of that Patriarch was buried in oblivion then. And recall that his heroic deed stands in the same line as the exploits of the personalities as outstanding as the saint princes Alexander of the Neva and Dmitry of the Don [famous medieval Russian princes and military commanders – Itar-Tass], General Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, and [Soviet] Marshal Georgy Zhukov.

This monument restores historical justice, which consists in the fact that there would have been no homeland for us today and that Russia would have perished in the abyss of splits and feuds if His Holiness Hermogenes, as well as other hierarchs and clerics had not displayed courage by speaking out against lawlessness or if we had not had the Orthodox Christian faith, which stopped the scourge of fratricide.

Here is how St Hermogenes appealed to the mutineers: "I am calling on you former Orthodox Christians of all social positions and ages. You have fallen off from God, from truth and from the Apostolic Church. I am wailing over you: have mercy for your souls. You have discarded the commandments of the Orthodox faith in which you were born, baptized, educated, and raised. Look at how the alien ones are plundering and devastating your fatherland, how they are outraging on the holy icons and churches. And who do your raise your weaponry against? Against God who created you or against your brothers? Are you not ruining your own fatherland? I am begging you in God's name to renounce your undertakings so long as there is still some time left for your salvation. As for us, we will accept those who repent." St Hermogenes's words have not lost relevance to this day. Even now some people do not perceive outrages on the shrines as moral wrongdoings.

A competition for the design of the monument to the holy martyr Hermogenes is nearing completion now and I do hope the design that wins the contest eventually will reflect the essence and meaning of the exploit of this great saint.

— Your Holiness, you have visited about a hundred of cities, towns and villages in a space from Kamchatka to Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea and you have been meeting with the rank-and-file citizens and with local officials everywhere. As I escort you on your trips to the dioceses, I notice the reassuring changes that are taking place in the way the urban and rural areas look. People have started thinking of something different than mere subsistence. And what is your impression of today's Russia? What tendencies do you see?

— It is important to stay away from extremities when you answer questions of this kind. Encouraging tendencies have taken a clear outline in different parts of Russia but many social, economic and other problems are still in place. A lot depends in reality on the local authorities that bear a huge responsibility for what is happening in the regions entrusted to them. Quite naturally, it is equally important for the federal government to see the picture of each region, too, so that people everywhere could feel we live in a united country.

It is none of my business to assess the economic tendencies but I cannot help telling you what I always think about during my trips. I think about the fantastic riches of our lands. It is amazing how gracious the gifts that the Lord bestowed on us are.

Decent work and willingness to serve the common cause will enable any remotest village to get over the current hardships. Recall the exploration of Siberian lands. People from the European part of Russia would resettle to the places that one has difficulty locating on the map even now. Why did they survive and why are we still able to use the fruits of their work? It is because their stamina and courage in the face of difficulties and lures relied on the strength of faith, whole-hearted prayer and service to their brothers. And that is why I see the revival of Orthodoxy as a crucial condition for the affluence of Russia's provincial areas.

— What events do you think were the most important ones in 2012?

— Any believer who will look back at this year has a duty to recall the good deeds and to try and rectify the errors. And let political scientists and sociologists rate Events of the Year.

Still, here is something I would like to speak about. The organization of aid to the victims of the natural calamity in the town of Krymsk set an example of tender-hearted service for many of our brothers and sisters. The disaster in Krymsk revealed our ability to come to the rescue of people in distress, to help those whom we do not know, and to put aside our own pressing routine concerns. It brought out people's ability to take others' troubles as if they were their own ones. This was real service in accordance with the Gospels, an instance of self-sacrifice and responsiveness that is so important for our entire society.

Something else I would like to say is this. We are called upon to show compassion not only during disasters. If we take a look around us, we will see lots of situations akin to the one in Krymsk – in remote shelters for children, in assisted-living institutions, and at refuges for the homeless near railway stations. The Church always comes to those places as it performs the service of love and mercy and steers the actions of charity and mercy.

Let us remember this and let us show involvement in the needs of our brothers and sisters. Then we will be able to cite many significant events in every outgoing year.

— It is commonly believed that the Church is trying to take on the role of an institute of civic society as it builds up a dialogue with various forces, with the authorities and with international organizations. A number public figures treat this activity acerbically. What motives could you cite for this policy of the Church?

— The Christian congregation has from its very inception been an element that is called 'an institute of civic society' at present. Christian communities have always been built around the principles of self-organization and have had strong internal bonds. They have had a concerted representation of their interests. Secular society has taken over these patterns but it does not always flesh them out with Christian contents.

The essence of everything the Church does, including the case of dialogue with society, is to provide evidence of Christ's truth and to embed the traditional spiritual and moral values in people's life, since we believe that civic peace and development are inconceivable without them. That is why it would not be quite appropriate to speak about 'policy' in this case. This is not policymaking; this is the apostolic mission of the Church. When Jesus Christ dispatched the apostles to illuminate different nations with the light of His Truth, He was not guided by political motivations but by the will to show all the humanity the road to salvation.

And look at the labels that are glued to the public service of the Church. By depriving believers of the right to express their position on the issues of social significance, certain forces are trying to build a society grounded in godlessness. They detest the activity of the Church that is fighting sins. But this is the case where we must call a spade a spade. The Church will never keep silent if it sees sins or vices, all the more so when it sees them on a mass scale or hears their justification.

— Going some twenty years back when the restoration of old church buildings was at the outset -- and now, too -- one could often see the depictions of the open Gospel of Matthew showing the passage that reads: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I

will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." And what passage from the Gospels do you think is especially applicable today?

— Any words from the Holy Gospels are applicable to any moment of the history of humankind. Quite like in the times of Jesus's earthly life, the Good News addresses us humans in all of its entirety and not only within the limits of one or two vivid quotes. And whether or not we accept it depends entirely on ourselves.

— What aspects would you like to see in the Itar-Tass products? What areas of cooperation could this news agency and the Russian Orthodox Church possible develop?

— I do not think I am in a position to discuss any specific products, as I am not a professional in that field. You have a much better vision of the standards and criteria that should be followed.

As for the second part of your question, I would like to say it is important to ensure that the mass media seeking to write about the Church do it in a decent and unbiased manner and show the ability to see its genuine [spiritual] wealth and beauty instead of churning out clichés and stereotypes. This especially concerns the news agencies, the main professional asset of which is an immaculate precision of data, facts and quotes. If you take up the areas of cooperation, an important thing is the media's – Itar-Tass included -- attention to the social activity of the Church and to the real contribution it makes to the improvement of our society's life. This activity embraces care for neglected children and the disabled, assistance to the homeless, protection of maternity, and struggle with social illnesses like drug addiction of alcohol abuse. This is the sphere where the Church has accumulated huge experience. I urge the journalists to tell truth to the world about it.

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Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/53499/