Patriarch Kirill's interview to Japanese journalists

On 4 September 2012, in anticipation of his primatial visit to Japan, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia gave an interview to correspondents of Japan's major mass media:

- NHK: **This year marks the centenary of the demise of St. Nicholas of Japan. What are the aims of Your Holiness's visit to Japan? How do you, Your Holiness, assess the life of St. Nicholas of Japan? Do you think there are any characteristics of today in his life and what is their meaning, if there are any? Russia and Japan, unfortunately, have not yet signed a peace treaty. On the other hand, President Vladimir Putin has great hopes for the development of Russian-Japanese relations. Your Holiness, in your opinion, what are the prospects for Russian-Japanese relations?**

- I will begin with the end and state that I am confident that there are very good prospects for the bilateral relations. We are neighbours, we live side by side, many things tie us together, and one of them is the Orthodox Church. One hundred fifty years ago St. Nicholas came to Hokkaido to begin his remarkable mission which led to the establishment of the Japanese Orthodox Church.

I would like to note that at that time relations between Japan and Russia were rather difficult. Archbishop Nicholas's service fell upon the hard years of the Russo-Japanese War. It seemed it could not be worse as the two countries were in a state of war. It was not a paper war, for they shot at each other. Archbishop Nicholas, when in Japan, joined the life of the Japanese people. Nobody saw him as representative of a hostile power. He was a real ambassador, not just an ambassador of peace but a real ambassador who showed respect and love for the Japanese people despite the grave and even very dangerous political context.

This shows that religious relations between nations have a great potential. Politicians act in terms of political pragmatism. Economists and businessmen are guided by the considerations of gain and profit, while relations on the religious and cultural level concern human hearts. These relations are realized on the level of the human heart, and that is why a real reconciliation between nations can be ensured only with the active participation of religion.

I attach a great importance to my visit. First, because it will give me an opportunity to pray together with the Japanese Orthodox people, to remember a remarkable man, a saint who dedicated his entire life to Japan, who identified himself with the Japanese people, who brought the Orthodox faith to the Japanese people.

In addition, the visit will give me an opportunity to visit the places which, for us in Russia, are associated with the life of Archbishop Nicholas. My trip will begin with Hakodate – I will come to Hokkaido and traverse Archbishop Nicholas's path.

I plan to come to Sendai, where the Japanese people took the blow of the water element. You know that several Orthodox churches were destroyed. Sendai is the center of the Eastern Japanese Diocese of the Orthodox Church in Japan, and I would like once again to express my support for the Japanese people, to pray together with people, commemorate the victims and to support those who lost their relatives and loved ones.

I suppose I will meet with officials in Hokkaido and Sendai but I also expect to have a meeting with His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. In 2000, my predecessor had a meeting with the Emperor of Japan, and that meeting met with a very positive response around the world, especially in Russia. I would like to meet this remarkable man who makes such a great contribution to the establishment of friendly relations between our two nations.

- In Russia, just as in Japan, the Constitution separates the Church from the state. At the

same time, obviously the Russian Orthodox Church makes a considerable influence of the policy of President Vladimir Putin. Under the Russian Empire, the Church was an official religion. Later, under the USSR, she experienced persecution by the atheistic state. With such a complicated history behind her, how does the Russian Orthodox Church define her relations with the state at present? What, in the Church's opinion, is the political and social responsibility of the Church as the largest religious community in Russia?

- The Russian Orthodox Church has a very dramatic history. Before the 1917 Revolution, under the Empire, she was included, contrary to her will and actually by force, in the state apparatus and became its part. The emperor was the head of the Church, and all the decisions made on behalf of the Church, were actually made by the state power. The status of the Church as official, with the active participation of the state in the church governance, inflicted a great damage on her. In some sense, the very fact of the Revolution can be linked with the fact that at that time the Church had no opportunity for free communication with her people, for speaking the truth about the political and economic situation, for offering people the words of reconciliation and support, for it was forbidden. It was the tsar who spoke on behalf of the Church.

After the 1917 Revolution, the Church was almost eliminated. Scores of thousands of priests, bishops, monks and nuns and hundreds of thousands of the faithful were subjected to repression and most of them were shot to death. Their only guilt was that they did not conform to the ideological standards established by the state. They were ideologically hostile to the regime. No religious community in the world experienced such suffering, as it was actually genocide, the elimination of Orthodox people in Russia, in the former Soviet Union.

When Russia, just as Ukraine, Belarus and other countries, became a free country, we realized that the time came to build a correct pattern for relations between church and state. We were well aware that there must be no interpenetration of the Church and the state or government ownership of the Church because if the Church loses the freedom of decision-making, her influence on the life of society will decrease. We elaborated the basics of church-state relations which presuppose their autonomy and mutual non-interference into each other's affairs. We as a Church are free to speak for ourselves regardless of the stand taken by the state. We have similar opinions on many issues but there are problems on which our opinions do not fully coincide and sometime do not coincide at all. Thus, recently

I have requested to introduce into the legislation a number of provisions concerning the protection of the family and childhood and concerning abortion, and my requests were not fully heard. Therefore, when they say that the Church in Russia has very close relations with the state, they tell a lie; these relations do not exist.

And what does exist? – Cooperation on a number of problems both on the federal and local level. We maintain cooperation in the task of restoration of cultural monuments, moral education of the younger generation, and we cooperate in the field of culture. Our cooperation in the social sphere is especially important today. We also cooperate in the work with youth, that is, in the areas which the Church deems possible for inclusion in the sphere of church-state relations.

We do not set as our task to influence the policy of statesmen. However, we address ourselves to the people including the authorities, with our preaching. We bring certain values to our people, first of all, moral values, of course. And we insist that the moral principle should lie in the basis of any policy. A policy without the moral principle is not beneficial to either those who pursue it or those who are subject to it. Therefore, if we speak of the Church's influence on political life, it is moral, not political influence.

In its time when the Soviet Union collapsed, there were many proposals for us to enter politics. At that time, our society was searching for an alternative to the communist party, but there was no alternative because there were no other parties. The Church was asked to take part in politics, to send her representatives to the parliaments. Moreover, there were even suggestions that she should nominate her own candidate for presidency. We rejected all these proposals, though we were often criticized for it and accused of abandoning our own people at a difficult time in history and failing to assume political responsibility. But we stated that we could not assume any political responsibility because of our beliefs.

The Church is not a political organization. On the other hand however, by making moral influence on social and personal relations, the Church makes an indirect impact on politics. I think she also influences the social life, and in some sense she makes an influence on the way the business should be conducted. There are moral rules for business elaborated by the Church and we actively propagate them because we believe that business should be based on moral principles: in carrying out economic

activity, it is inadmissible to multiply lies or commit crimes. In other words, the Church does relate to all the spheres of public life but this relation is not pragmatic. She does not set it as her aim to obtain some privileges or to broaden her influence, she rather seeks to bring to people the word of Christian truth based on the Gospel. This is our stand.

Our ill-wishers often tell fairy tales – the tales assimilated in the whole world, as clichés tend to be easily assimilated indeed. But one should not think by clichés. Here is a cliché offered to you: the Church in Russia has merged with the state. So people tend to repeat: 'You know, the Church has merged with the state', or 'The Church influences Putin'. Perhaps the Church influences a person from the Christian point of view. I do not know because I have never measured the extent of this influence. God willing, we want to influence everybody – both statesmen and ordinary people, so that the moral principle the Church preaches may be assimilated by the consciousness of our people.

- **Owing to the informatization of the post-industrial society, the unification of the society is developing. Social networks are spreading on the basis of the Internet as citizens seek to become a source of information. On the other hand, in the global information society, America, using her power in computer programs, seeks to broaden her influence to the whole world. Traditional values systems have encountered a new trial called 'the arrival of the information society'. They have encountered a relativity of the value system when the distinction between evil and good is obliterated. How is the Russian Orthodox Church going to oppose the arrival of the post-industrial information society? What will be Russian national values in the information society and will they be able to survive?**

- In speaking about what happens today in the information space, the principal, may be, danger to the human personality should be noted, which lies in the loss of the ability to distinguish between good and evil. What is going on today has not fallen on us in the last years. It has been prepared by the social development during, at least, 200-300 years. But in the 20th century we saw the development of a notion described by philosophers as post-modernism. Post-modernism is rejection of the objective truth. Post-modernism has transferred responsibility onto the individual. In this approach, it is the individual that is the beginning and the end in the effort to elaborate a criterion for distinguishing between good and evil. The individual himself and nobody else is believed to define what is right and what is wrong; each has his own understanding of good and evil. There is neither objective notion of good, nor objective notion of morality.

Why have I cited this approach? Because it has led to the situation where traditional relations, for instance in the family, are destroyed. Today people treat divorce with ease. It is believed to be something quite normal. There is propagation of homosexual relations placed on the same level as traditional family relations. In general, the notion of moral purity, moral decency has been lost. Especially great damage has been done by the so-called sexual revolution of the 60s, and we see now the consequences of this 'revolution' in the consciousness of the younger generation.

We are facing a tragedy of the destruction of moral foundations of society. The society today unites people on the basis of law alone. One type of behaviour is permitted by law while the other is not. It is well known that people are ignorant of laws altogether as they live according to their conscience and convictions. So, if a person's convictions make him live in the way of all-permissiveness when he himself determines what is good and what is bad, then we come to what may be called the atomization of society, that is, a very high level of people's alienation from one another. There is no common platform, a moral platform, for them.

I will cite an example. Your country, just that ours, had to go through wars. When there is a need to defend one's Motherland, what makes people to take arms to go to sacrifice themselves? Is it the law? No, not at all. It is the moral feeling. You defend your home, you defend your people, you defend your loved ones. In extreme situations, it is the moral state of a society that is decisive.

Let me cite a tragedy as an example, linked with the tsunami in Japan. We admire the Japanese people's response to this disaster, the high level of their solidarity and mutual support. But it was not the law that determined people's behaviour at that moment, but their conscience: 'We should do this way!' What we encounter in the information space today destroys the notion of conscience because each has his own conscience and each is supposed to live in the way he sees it. A society however is nonviable if it destroys the moral basis of its own existence.

For this reason we do not want to withdraw and will not withdraw from the information space. We are

aware that we are a minority in it, that we are a weak part of this information space, that we do not have as much money as those who propose a different way of thinking and a different way of life. But it is our deep conviction that the Church has to insist on the need to have an absolute criterion for distinguishing between good and evil, which stems from the ethical tradition.

After all, the theme of morality cannot be dealt with, in my view, without the theme of God, and for the following reason. There are attempts to persuade us that morality is a derivative of the human evolution, the evolution of the human society. Then why murder is considered a crime in Japan, and in Russia and in Africa? Why deception is considered a crime everywhere? Why a lie is considered a crime regardless of the historical and cultural context a liar may live in? All these are crimes because all these crimes are contrary to the moral nature of the human being. It means there is a certain absolute criterion of morality that works everywhere, in each nation and in each era.

So, the task of the Church and not only the Church today, the task of culture, the task of all those who are aware of the danger of what is going on, is to promote the survival of absolute criteria of distinguishing between good and evil, the preservation of the moral principle in people's life.

I do not see any more important task. I cannot compare this task to any other, neither to politics nor to economics, nor to scientific discoveries. The very survival of humanity will depend on our answer to this question, because if evil is seen as good, then evil will destroy the individual and the human community, and the human civilization. Coming in touch with the modern information space, we can see these dangers. It is my profound conviction that the time has come to step up the joint effort of those who are aware of the existence of these dangers and ready to struggle for the life of the human family. I link all my trips abroad, just as trips in Russia, with the hope to find these people. And it is easy to find them because they are a majority. Everywhere, be it in Japan or Russia or Africa or America, they are a majority because if most people had lost conscience and the moral principal, the world would have ceased to exist long ago. For this reason I stand for the solidarity of all those who realize the need to preserve the moral principle in the life of the human community.

- Kyodo Tsyshin News Agency: **Your trip to the city of Sendai affected by the Great Eastern**

Japan Earthquake last year is planned as a very important event. However, we would like to learn what message His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia will bring not only to the people of the Miyagi Prefecture but all the Japanese affected by the earthquake.

- In my view, this tragedy has affected Russian people in an astonishing way. Many took it as their own, although the affected people were thousands kilometres away. At that time, we in the Church decided to raise funds for aid to the victims. In doing so, we did not want approach industrial corporations or banks but decided to appeal to very ordinary people, with many having very low living standards, and ask them to give something of their own, something they can give to our Japanese brother and sisters.

We have raised the amount of a million and a half of American dollars. Perhaps it is not a large amount but it is, as we say, a widow's mite. There is this Gospel's image of a woman who made a very little donation to God but it was all she had. Certainly, our people did not donate all they had but they gave to Japan what they could from their small incomes. And when one does good to another, it is reflected on the state of his soul and unites people. You did good to him, not he to you, but he will stay in your memory, he becomes close to you. Therefore, this action has drawn Russians closer to Japanese and, sharing the suffering of the Japanese people, we have become closer to each other.

Immediately after it happened, I made an appeal to our people, while expressing my condolences to the Japanese people. Watching your struggling with the element, many in Russia saw that the Japanese people knew how to respond to a disaster in solidary, to render mutual aid, to show discipline, and it was a good example for very many in the world.

Therefore, the image of Japan, the moral image of the people, through this suffering, has become vivid to many and many people on our planet including Russians, which I can testify to with full conviction.

- **The recent visit of His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to Poland is described as another step towards reconciliation between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. How important**

will the reconciliation between Orthodoxy and Catholicism be for the entire religious world?

- What happened in Poland concerns the contacts between the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics of course but in the first place this Joint Message of the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches is addressed to the peoples of Poland and Russia. You may know that in Europe there are no other two nations whose relations in the present would be so strongly influenced by the past. What happened in history in relations between Russia and Poland were many grave things which have affected people's state, their consciousness and relations to each other, with each side seeking to strike a certain balance and to turn the remainder to their advantage, saying, 'We suffered more at the hands of the neighbour and we were more fair than the neighbour'. This is done both in Poland and Russia. Since the past has made such a great influence on the consciousness of our contemporaries, an idea arose that someone should make the first step towards true reconciliation, and if this step towards each other were made together, it would be even better.

We agreed with representatives of the Catholic Church that we would try to make this step, we would try to say 'forgive us' to each other. It is very difficult to do. If people are convinced that the historical truth is on their side, then it is very difficult to say 'forgive us' to each other. At least none of the politicians, nobody from the business community, nobody from the cultural community have been able yet to undertake steps to give people an opportunity to forgive each other.

Our two Churches – the Catholic Church in Poland and the Russian Orthodox Church – entered into dialogue three years ago. For three years we were preparing a document. It was a difficult work but at the same time very noble as it created a very good atmosphere. We wrote the text whose essence is this: let historians study history but the wounds of the past should not bleed in the present. We should build new relations on the foundation of forgiveness we ask of each other and give to each other. Such an appeal may have been made by nobody but the Church because the Catholic Church in Poland is the majority Church and the Russian Orthodox Church is the majority Church. This Message in the first place is about the future of our nations. We would very much like to see this Message of reconciliation as a basis for changing political, economic and cultural relations, to usher a new era in the relations between the two neighbouring countries and two nations who have lived side by side for a thousand years.

As for relations with the Catholic Church, today we share our positions on many issues including those which disturb people today, namely, the family, marriage, childbearing, bioethics, and protection of Christian values in Europe. Regrettably, Christians are becoming a persecuted and oppressed minority. There has appeared such a notion as Christianophobia. The religious life of Christians is being ousted from public life. This has happened in Europe and this has happened in other countries, and today we together advocate the need to preserve Christian values in the life of the European, and not only European, community, as well as in the modern culture. We have many things in common, and we develop them through dialogue. I do not exclude an opportunity for a meeting at some moment with the Pope of Rome, but we have to cover some way before this meeting is made possible.

- *Iomuiri Daily:* **Your Holiness, please allow me to ask this question. Actively developing economically and gaining strength politically, Russia has broadened her influence in the world and increased her cultural importance. What role does the Russian Orthodox Church play in this process? How active is her cooperation with Orthodox Churches in other countries, for instance, Greece and Serbia? Does she help to restore churches and holy places in these countries?**

- The Russian Church embraces Orthodox believers who live in the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Kazakhstan and the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. In addition, we have a very large diaspora. Although different figures are given, but they amount to several millions people living around the world. For all these people we carry out our pastoral service.

To take the diaspora, we are building churches, opening schools, participating together with the state in cultural work to help people study the Russian language. In many places we help our people to be integrated in the society in which they live. In doing so, we take this approach: we are against assimilation, and we are against the situation in which Russian people living in America, Germany or elsewhere cease to become Russian people. We are for them to remain Russians, to be native speakers of Russian and to be Orthodox. But we also stand for their ability to work and live in these new societies, for their knowledge of the laws and readiness to observe them, for their ability to find jobs and work in

their own field. A medical doctor often cannot work as a doctor, and many other specialists too are not seen by the local community as qualified enough. In other words, we seek to take care of the life of our people in the diaspora.

We do not link all this work directly with an increase in the role and importance of the Russian Federation in international relations because again our work is not political. We are concerned for human souls, human awareness and culture. We did that even in the difficult time when we lived in the Soviet Union. We do this today too may be more effectively in the situation of freedom and a on a greater scale.

As for our relations with other Orthodox Churches, we have always maintained them. Even during World War II we maintained relations with the Orthodox in the East, and immediately after it was over, Patriarch Alexis I, my predecessor, made a visit to the Middle East Patriarchates. During all this time including the Soviet period, we have maintained cooperation with Local Orthodox Churches and continue this work today. And when there is a disaster somewhere we seek to come to aid.

Nowadays the Serbian Church is experiencing much suffering, especially in Kosovo, because Christian monuments, churches and monasteries have been destroyed. The Serbs live there in a hostile surrounding, often at risk to their lives. Therefore, we seek to support them by raising funds for the restoration of monuments and construction of a seminary in Kosovo and a number of other social projects, such as the one called ‘People’s Soup-Kitchen’, to feed people in need. We will continue doing it because we are in solidarity with the Orthodox people who experience hardships, even if they live far away from Russia.

I would like to say the same about Greece. Greece is a European country, which until recently was prosperous but now is experiencing a severe crisis. In spite of the fact that there are rich people in Greece and middle class people, many have become poor. The Greek Orthodox Church feeds these beggars who have lost everything. We have raised funds to support the Greek Church in giving aid to the destitute.

- Recently the mass media have often referred to the clericalization of the state. What is your attitude to such statements? In your view, how deep is the mutual influence of the Church and the state power in Russia?

- I have already spoken out on this issue, speaking about ‘merger’, but I would like to add that the clericalization of the Russian society is a myth which is not supported by fact. There are no facts. If you read about ‘the clericalization’ or ‘the interpenetration’ in the Russian press, nobody will ever cite any example of this interpenetration or this clericalization. Clericalization, in the direct sense of this word, means political influence of the clergy on the situation in a country, it is the power of the clergy. There are no examples of the political influence made by the Patriarch, bishops or the clergy on the authorities.

There is this thing, however. For the last 20 years, the Orthodox Church has been successful enough in her mission. Indeed, we began with the most of people coming from atheism in the Soviet Union. They did not believe in God. The portion of believers was very low. For these twenty years, the situation has radically changed. Today, up to 80% of the population in Russia are baptized; 65% declare their connection with the Church; over 40% attend church at least one or twice a year. The number of the faithful who come to church every week has increased. Instead of elderly people, who constituted the majority 20 years ago, today we have many young and middle-age people. Among them are state officials and ministers, generals and people of other important professions. And I ask the question: Is it bad? They have become Orthodox. They have returned to the faith of the forefathers. And if a minister or even a president or prime minister comes to church as Orthodox believer, does it point to clericalization? If the clergy have an opportunity to discuss together with these people some vital problems, while sticking to their own positions, is it an example of clericalization?

Sometimes, in an attempt to point to the clericalization, we are told, ‘You come to the army and meet with servicemen in it’. But this happens in many countries of the world. In the United States, priests participate in hostilities, not with arms in their hands, but inspiring their troops. Today chaplains serve in Afghanistan and other countries and in the United States itself. The same exists in European countries, while in the Russian Church, in the Russian Army, there are no chaplains as yet. We cannot get this matter moving, while we are accused of being engaged in clericalization.

The same is true for other issues. There is a substitution of notions: there are successes in the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church which the society should applaud, saying, ‘You have really achieved the impossible for these twenty years’, but instead we are accused of clericalization. The point is not clericalization but the increase of spiritual influence upon the life of our people and society. But it is precisely our task! We are obliged to do it and we will do it. And I ask you: please dispel this myth, at least, in Japan.

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