



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Department for External Church Relations

Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Josef Michalik, President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, sign a Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland

On August 17, 2012, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Metropolitan Jozef Michalik, President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, signed a Joint Message to the Peoples of Russian and Poland in a solemn ceremony at the Royal Palace in Warsaw.

Present at the ceremony were His Beatitude Sava, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland, and the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Prof. Andrzej Rottermund, director of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, welcomed the guests to the Great Assembly Hall of the Royal Palace. A message of greeting was also brought by Dr. Slawomir Debski, director of the Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue.

Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Jozef Michalik put their signatures under the Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland.

The Message, which cannot be ranked among theological or inter-church documents and does not deal with doctrinal matters, calls for reconciliation and mutual forgiveness in the spirit of Christian love. It states in particular, 'After World War II and the painful experience of atheism imposed on our nations, we are embarking today on the road of spiritual and material renewal'. It is underscored that this renewal should become in the first place the renewal of man and through him the renewal of relationships between the nations.

The appeal to believers in Russia and Poland 'to ask forgiveness for grievances inflicted on each other, for injustice and every evil deed' does not mean oblivion, the document states. 'Memory represents an important part of our identity. We also have the duty of memory before the victims of the past who were tortured to death and gave their lives for the faithfulness to God and their homeland on earth. To forgive means to abandon revenge and hatred, to participate in building harmony and fellowship among people, our peoples and countries, which is the basis for a peaceful future.

The Russian and Polish nations are united by the experience of World War II and a period of repression generated by the totalitarian regimes. 'Guided by the atheistic ideology, these regimes struggled with all

forms of religiosity and waged especially bitter struggle with Christianity and our Churches. Victimized were millions of innocent people, the reminder of which is numerous places of executions and graves both in the Russian and Polish soil, the Message states.

The Message addressed to politicians, public figures, scientists, people of arts and culture, believers and non-believers calls for the development of dialogue, restoration of mutual trust and for rapprochement between the Russian and Polish nations in face of common Christian responsibility and the need to solve the same problems today.

After the signing ceremony, Patriarch Kirill addressed the assembly:

'Your Eminence, Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

'First of all, I would like to thank all those present here for the warm welcome to the Polish land.

'In the world today, more than ever before in human history, relations between states and peoples are determined by business considerations and based on mutual interests. Churches cannot deny the importance of these factors, but man shall not live by bread alone (Mt. 4:4). The economic welfare built on the egoistic desire to use those who are far and those who are near not only as sources of resources will ultimately bring disappointment and suffering. In order to avoid this, it is necessary to be guided in the sphere of international relations by 'the golden rule': whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them (Mt. 7:12).

'A great deal of efforts is made on the inter-state level to bring our nations closer together, which is certainly consistent with our common economic interests. However, pragmatic considerations alone are not sufficient to build truly fraternal relations between the Russians and the Poles. It is for this reason that we as Christians are called to make a special contribution to the very difficult process of Russian-Polish reconciliation.

'A lack of the moral component in relations between nations makes people blind to reasons for communication other than mutual profit. It is a sad fact making the foundation of global economy rather fragile. Therefore, peoples who are guided in their life by spiritual values are called to build a different type of relations going beyond economic and military alliances and the material world as a whole.

'Christian faith, which neither Russians nor Poles seek to adjust to the norms of the secular world, is our

treasure possessing of a special uniting potential. Speaking for the peaceful, truly fraternal development of relations between the peoples of Russia and Poland, we called for building dialogue between the Poles and Russians on the basis of traditional Christian values.

'The Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Poland have exerted much effort to elaborate a Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland, having persuaded many sceptics of the need for such a document. The document we have just signed is not another political declaration like those appearing en masse in public sphere, but a pastoral testimony that our faith calls us to overcome historically formed negative stereotypes, to establish mutual respect and confidence capable of opening up a prospect for common growth in solidarity and Christian love.

'In the Joint Message we testify that sin is the cause of every division including divisions between our two nations. This simple idea should not be just understood but experienced by all those who seek to overcome the sinful strife of this world. Regrettably, in our relations with those around us we search for the guilty ones, which only aggravates misunderstanding and distrust. The Christian tradition has accumulated an age-old experience of holiness which lies in the rejection of sin and in seeking the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is not always that one has enough faith to believe it is possible to live without rendering evil for evil and to find strength to see one's own shortcoming and to forgive others. Today we have signed a document which is called to assert the faithful in Russia and Poland in their faith.

'At the same time, Christians, having forgiven mutual grievances, cannot forget those who became victims of hatred and enmity, and there are many of our relatives and loved ones among them. If we stay in the space of Christian tradition, we hold equally dear the memory of all innocent victims. Keeping the memory of their suffering we feel today our calling to mutual good works.

'The document stresses that historical research is up to professionals. The most important thing is that this research work should not be aimed at a 'showdown'. We want to see the results of this research not only objective but also giving a mental food to generations to come, so that young people could see the terrible consequences of people's deviation from the faith, contempt for moral norms and for elementary notion of the truth of Christ, charity and justice.

'Regrettably, the enemy of the human race has often managed to throw in the tares of division and enmity into the family of Christian nations. So, called to confess together Jesus Christ Who came in flesh (1 Jn. 4:2) for the sake of our salvation, they can treat each other with hostility. We know about it from history. And for this reason we together appeal to all with words of reconciliation, reminding that such times are coming that the memory of the past tragedies should be put side-lines in face of the challenges of today. The Message states that in our days the peoples of Russia and Poland have encountered the erosion of moral principles based on God's commandments, the propaganda of abortion, euthanasia, same-sex unions, and rejection of Christian moral values. We are also witnesses to the struggle for driving not only religious symbols but also faith itself and morality away from public space.

'The document stresses that in our days Christians are called as never before to stand side by side defending their right to live by their faith, confessing the Truth before those around them. We have no time for reflections and delays. Indeed, if we allow today to destroy

Europe's spiritual foundation threaten as it is, among other things, by our divisions, then in the nearest future we should await such manifestations of hate and violence that the 20th century may seem to some in comparison an era of peace and prosperity.

'It is impossible to overcome distrust and to forgive mutual grievances without the gracious help of God, without the awareness of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ which grants victory over sin. We believe that our task of developing fraternal relations between the Russians and Poles is blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ and that our sincere participation in it will bring forth much expected fruits.

'Addressing this Joint Message to our nations, we together testify to the good intentions of Christians in Russia and Poland to live in peace, forgiving mutual sins and offences and asserting the immutable values of the Gospel'.

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