



Communique of 2nd Talks between Russian Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania

On February 7, 2012, talks were held at the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations between representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania on the theme 'Current problems in teaching religion in the secular school'. From the Russian Orthodox Church key reports were made by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Department for External Church Relations, and G. Demidov, head of the Basic Orthodox Culture section of the Department for Religious Education and Catechism. The Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania was represented by Archbishop Sigitas Tamkjavichus of Kaunas, president of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, and Bishop Jonas Ivanauskas, Vicar General of Kaunas.

The talks were a follow-up of the Symposium on Christians in Face of the Challenge to the Institution of Family organized in January 2011 in Kaunas by the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference with the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In his report, Metropolitan Hilarion underscored the importance of developing dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania as it makes it possible to discuss together pressing problems of today's society and to find ways of inter-church cooperation in this area. The teaching of religion in the secular school is one of the most pressing problems for both Churches as it directly concerns the problem of preserving Christian identity in Europe today. Speaking about the situation in Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion noted that in the process of consultations with governmental bodies and public organizations and considering the experience gained in other countries, a conclusion was made about the need to re-qualify the subject of religion as inter-disciplinary and culturological. In Russian society, debates continue between proponents of the separate and optional teaching of religious culture in the secondary school and opponents of such teaching. By the Russian Federation Government Decree of January 28, 2012, the teaching of this subject as compulsory for all general education schools of the country will be introduced from the 2012/2013 academic year.

Metropolitan Hilarion expressed the conviction that the real fruits and positive results of the teaching of religious culture and ethics in the secular school will become noticeable after a few years when passions will subside and the society will come to appreciate the positive pedagogical effect of religious education in the task of preserving the national identity and improving the moral climate in Russian society.

The representative of the Russian Orthodox Church's Department for Religious Education and Catechism in his report on 'Cooperation between church and state educational structures in teaching

Basic Orthodox Culture in school' introduced the participants to the implementation of this project in various regions of the Russian Federation.

In his remarks, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkjavichus presented the situation with regard to the teaching of religious disciplines in secular schools. The president of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference informed the participants that in Lithuania there is no state religion but the traditional religious organizations are given the right to teach religion in general education schools and this teaching is financed by the state. The religious and moral education of children is an inalienable constitutional right of Lithuanian citizens. The development of curricular and text-books on religious disciplines as well as the training and certification of teachers belong to the competence of the Church's authorities. The archbishop stressed that the principle of separation of the Church from the state does not prevent them from cooperation including in the area of education, for the benefit of all citizens.

In the course of the talks, the sides expressed a shared conviction that students of general education public schools have the right to receive valid knowledge about religion, which does not contradict the principle of the secular nature of education. For the younger generation, it is important to have a valid knowledge of both its own religious tradition and the basics of other religions. It is a necessary element of the moral and spiritual education of the personality.

The experience accumulated in recent years in Russia and Lithuania shows that the teaching of religious disciplines in the secular school does not at all generate inter-religious conflicts but, on the contrary, helps to consolidate the inter-confessional peace and accord in society.

The participants in the 2nd talks between representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania underscored the importance of continued bilateral dialogue and regular meetings on particular issues.

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/54555/>