



Greek version of Patriarch Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility' presented in Thessaloniki

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On December 13, 2011, the Greek version of Patriarch Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility' was presented at the Megaro Mousikis palace in Thessaloniki. The book was published with the support of the Archdiocese of Athens, En Plo Publishers and the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity.

Present at the event were Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki, the diocesan clergy, Russian General Consul A. Popov, the Russian Orthodox Church's delegation as well as journalists and public figures.

In his address to the audience, Metropolitan Anthimos stressed that the presentation was an important event 'pointing to a special attitude of brothers from Russia to the Greek people'. He warmly welcomed Metropolitan Hilarion who came to Thessaloniki specifically for the occasion. He said that cooperation between the Orthodox Churches in Russia and Greece was a faithful witness to God's will 'because God expects this unity'. He welcomed the publication of Patriarch Kirill's book in Greek, noting that its very title spoke of its topicality.

Metropolitan Hilarion spoke of the life and work of Patriarch Kirill:

'Patriarch Kirill, his secular name Vladimir Gundyayev, was born in 1946 in postwar and post-blockade Leningrad. His father and grandfather were priests and both were repressed in the Soviet years. Patriarch Kirill's grandfather went through 46 prisons. Patriarch Kirill himself was born in the years when religion was persecuted in the Soviet Union. The postwar years from the 1940s to the 1950s was a period when the persecution continued though weakened compared to the scale in which it was carried out in the 1920s and 1930s.

The time of the Patriarch's youth and formation as active member of the Church coincided with a new wave of persecution, now under Khrushchev, when he set the task to destroy the Church not physically but ideologically. While in the 30s the clergy were repressed and executed, in the 60s the Soviet power found other, more sophisticated ways of influencing people to ward them off from the Church.

A policy was adopted aiming at the gradual extinction of the Church. Soviet leaders, who sincerely believed that the communist society could be built within twenty years, believed equally sincerely that the Church could die in herself within that period as a vestige of the past. It was not accidental that the leader of the Soviet Union Khrushchev declared at that time that in a matter of twenty years he will show

'the last parson' on television.

However, since the Church refused to die the Soviet power invented ever new ways of helping her disappear. For instance, the taxes imposed on the clergy exceeded their incomes many times over. This tax had to be paid by the father of the future Patriarch Kirill. To pay it, he had to borrow much money from his relatives and friends and the future Patriarch had to pay his father's debts up to the time when he became a bishop.

There were also other ways of struggle against the Church. For instance, people were selected for entering seminaries. Some of them even became priests. And later they were to reject their faith in God in a spectacular way in public. Archpriest Alexander Osipov, a professor at the Leningrad Theological Academy, rejected his faith in public and became a militant atheist... Such was the situation in which the future Patriarch grew as a young man.

His meeting with Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod was fateful for him. In the most difficult situation when the state staked on the gradual destruction of the Church, Metropolitan Nikodim exerted every effort to prevent the death of the Church, to help her rebirth. He kept persuading the Soviet leaders of the need for the Church to be represented at the international arena. And for the Church to be represented adequately on the international arena, she needed to be represented by young, gifted and capable people.

Metropolitan Nikodim himself selected these people from among seminarians and students of theological academies. He sent them to other countries for service and later they came back to the Soviet Union to become bishops and occupy episcopal chairs which became vacant after the death of old bishops. The Soviet state did not plan to install new bishops on these chairs because it adopted a policy of gradual elimination of the Church.

The future Patriarch Kirill was one of Metropolitan Nikodim's chosen ones. When he was still very young and still had to decide on his walk of life, he came to Metropolitan Nikodim and asked him which of the two he had better enter – the university's department of physics or a seminary. Metropolitan Nikodim told him to enter the seminary. Four years later, Fr. Kirill graduated from the 8-year course of seminary and theological academy and was sent to Geneva for service where he was to spend four more years. Then he came back to Russia and at the age of 28 was appointed rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy to occupy this post for 10 years. At that time, the theological schools in Leningrad lived an intensive life as young people came to them and biblical studies were held there. Moreover, it became possible for the first time in history of seminaries to enroll young girls and women for training.

The authorities did not like the active work of the young rector and in 1984 Archbishop Kirill was ousted

as rector of the theological academy and appointed to one of the poorest bishop's chairs in Smolensk.

The new stage in his life coincided with a new stage in the life of the Church which began coming out of the underground after seven decades of persecution. At that time, the state weakened its grip on the Church and later collapsed itself to give rise to 15 independent states in its territory. Precisely at that time Metropolitan Kirill was fated to become head of the Department for External Church Relations, which represented at that time the main think-tank of the Russian Orthodox Church. The task of the Department was not only to carry out manifold international, inter-Christian and interreligious work, but its most difficult and important task was to build relations between Church and State. As a matter of fact, for the first time for centuries the Church found herself in freedom. For the first time she was free from decisions imposed on her from above, and she could make all the decisions on her own. She could no longer try to fit in the Procrustean bed of church-state relations which were dictated by the state. Now she could develop a model of her relations with the state which would ensure her internal freedom.

In order to develop such a model and to define the Church's place in a rapidly changing society, the Church needed to make colossal intellectual and spiritual efforts. This work was done by Metropolitan Kirill and the team he guided in the DECR.

Among the fruits of this work is a document entitled 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Social Concept', a document unprecedented in scale as it defines the Church's relations with the external world and gives the Church's official answer to many social and moral questions of today, including the questions of bio-ethics.

Another fruit of this intellectual work was the book we present today to the Greek reader. The book carries the name of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia though it was written in the years when the present Primate of the Russian Church was a metropolitan. It embraces the period from 1999 to 2008, that is, the most difficult period preceding the election of Metropolitan Kirill as Patriarch of Moscow. This book, like a drop of water, reflects the history of our Church and our homelands in the period from the late 20th to the early 21st centuries'.

The book is about the challenges the Church has encountered after the 70-year period of atheistic power. From Patriarch Kirill's point of view, the primary challenge is the liberal secular ideology imposed as compulsory for all spheres of life.

The author is convinced that religion should be reflected in the everyday life of a person. 'Faith cannot be just an intellectual belief; it cannot be perceived as a private affair of a particular individual', Metropolitan Hilarion said during the presentation, adding, 'One cannot be a believer at his parish and home but a non-believer as this work. Christianity is a way of life, not only a way of thinking'. Therefore,

if a Christian is a public figure, his statements and actions should be motivated by Christian faith. If a Christian is engaged in politics, then his faith should be manifested in his political work. 'Without imposing anything on anybody, the Church still believes it necessary to be present in the public domain. The author of the book, now His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, insists that the liberal secular ideology is essentially godless; it cannot be accepted as general and compulsory for all', Metropolitan Hilarion said.

What is dangerous is not the co-existence of different worldview paradigms but the fact that the secular paradigm is imposed on all the society and claims to be normative. 'For a religious person, freedom does not mean all-permissiveness. There is an absolute scale of moral values the source of which is God Himself and His commandments. Christians should have the right to live up their beliefs. Therefore, the liberal secular standard cannot be imposed or laid in the basis of legislation or become the only basis for political discourse or to influence theology and church practice', the DECR chairman said.

Metropolitan Hilarion said in conclusion that in his book 'Freedom and Responsibility' Patriarch Kirill calls to a freedom which is not the freedom from moral commandments and laws, nor to the freedom that implies all-permissiveness, egoism or hedonism. He calls to freedom from sin, which promotes the spiritual growth of a person. Metropolitan Hilarion expressed the conviction that so long as the debate between religious and secular worldviews continues, the book by the Primate of the Russian Church will remain topical. 'We hope that this debate, which most probably will continue to the end of time, will end in the triumph of truth over falsehood and Christ over antichrist'.

DECR Communication Service

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