



## **Theological symposium held in Athens to highlight publication of Greek version of Patriarch Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility'**

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On December 12, 2011, a theological symposium was held at the Megaro Mousikis palace in Athens to highlight the publication of the Greek version of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's book 'Freedom and Responsibility'.

Present at the event were Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece of Athens and All Greece and hierarchs of the Greece Orthodox Church, Russian Ambassador V. Chkhikvishvili, members of the Russian Orthodox Church's delegation, as well as theologians, journalists and public figures.

The symposium was opened by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, who said:

'It is a great honour and joy for me to present to you the Greek version of His Holiness Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility' which has just come out. It is a fruit of the Primate of the Russian Church's reflections on essential problems of human life. The articles in this book were written when Patriarch Kirill was head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations and in that capacity had to travel to various countries, meet various people, conduct dialogue with people of various cultures and worldviews. This book is one of the fruits of that dialogue.

'I remember how the Patriarch was working on this book. In the late 1990s when I was a staff member of the DECR and accompanied him during one of his trips abroad, after a long day of work we came out for a walk and during that stroll Metropolitan Kirill said to me: 'I am working now on an article'. He related the principal thoughts in that article, which is the first one in this collection and it is entitled 'The Circumstances of the New Time'. This article and the next one entitled 'Norm of Faith as Norm of Life' drew a wide response in the Russian society and outside Russia because in them Metropolitan Kirill posed questions having an enormous importance for human life.

'The main one of these questions is that of relationship between freedom and responsibility. Today we hear a lot about human freedoms and rights, about the need to protect them by all possible means, about every individual being the master of his own life. All these talks are good in themselves so long as

they do not come into conflict with the idea of one's responsibility before oneself and society. Indeed, freedom is very often understood as all-permissiveness. Already Dostoyevsky, a great Russian writer, said, 'If there is no God, then everything is permitted'. This affirmation reflects the ideology of modern secularism whereby everyone can define for oneself a scale of moral values to be upheld. There are no absolute values at all, those who adhere to secular outlook tell us. It doesn't matter if God exists or not. You can believe or not believe – this is your private affair, just as you can ski or not ski or listen to classical or popular music.

'A believer gives this response to this way of thinking: Everyone has freedom, but there are also absolute moral values; hence there are rules to be followed by everyone. Religion is not a private affair. An adherent to the secular outlook would say: The most important thing in one's life is to be happy and happiness lies in the realization of one's needs and desires. Some men like to live with women, while others with men. Some married couples wish to have children, while others do not. Some believe that elderly people should be allowed to leave this life voluntarily when their resources are exhausted, while others believe it is impossible.

'For a religious person there is no option here. There are values which are immutable, for instance, the value of a human life. If a man and a woman enter into marriage, it follows from this that they wish to have children. Moreover, from the Christian point of view, it follows that they wish to have as many children as the Lord will send them. For a Christian it goes without saying that a marital union is a union between a man and a woman. Christianity defends the values, integrity and indissolubility of marriage. Christianity believes it is impossible to interrupt a human life, be it the life of a baby in the mother's womb or the life of an elderly or a seriously ill person.

'The outcome of this dispute is decisive for the life of humanity. If the upper hand is won by the ideology of secularism, basically hedonistic and egoistic, then the humankind has no future. Humanity has a future only if such traditional values as faith in God, the Church, integrity of marriage and values of human life are preserved.

'The book we are presenting today is not a theological treatise. It speaks of the most urgent issues of today, about a crisis which is much deeper and much more serious than a financial and economic crisis we are experiencing today. It is a crisis of human personality, of human identity. The Patriarch gives an answer to these questions from the point of view of profound Christian faith. Some will not be satisfied with these answers. Some will hear in them a voice from the past. Some will say the modern man cannot live up to the standards offered by Patriarch Kirill. But Patriarch Kirill does not offer other answers than those which have been offered by the Orthodox Church for centuries.

'Those who will criticize this book can with the same right criticize the Orthodox Church herself. Indeed,

there are those who believe that the Orthodox Church is obsolete, that she lags behind life, that she has to be reformed.

'Russia, Belarus, Moldova and Greece are countries of Orthodox tradition. In each of them, just as in a number of other countries, we can see an intensive and profound religious life. In the Russian Orthodox Church 25 years ago, there were 18 monasteries but today they are over 800. Who can say that the Orthodox faith or monastic life does not interest the youth, as they often say today? Come to our monasteries and look how many young people there are.

'A few days ago the Sash of the Most Holy Mother of God was brought to Moscow. About a million people in Moscow alone came to venerate this shrine. The line stretched for several kilometres. People stood in line for over 20 hours to kiss the shrine. According to the Moscow police, it was the largest event in Russia's modern history.

'Therefore, nobody can convince us, believers, that our values are out of date, that our worldview is not consonant with the modern time. In this sense it can be said that the voice of the Patriarch is not a voice from the past but a voice from the future. Many of those who would not agree with him today will do so tomorrow when they see what fruits are brought forth by the secular ideology'.

The next speaker was Nikolaos of Messogaia and Lavreotiki. He said that for the success of the Orthodox witness before the modern world, Local Churches should give more attention to what unites them. While the Russian Church is a bearer of rich historical tradition, experience of sanctity and confession, the glory of miraculous rebirth and deep devotion of her heroic people, the Greek Church is the guardian of the scriptural language, the heritage of great Greek fathers and authentic liturgical texts. And both Churches are called to share these gifts with each other. 'The glory of our witness is built on our own humbleness, on the recognition of the other's superiority in certain things and on mutual trust', he said.

Metropolitan Chryssostomos of Messenia in his remarks spoke of the timeliness of the publication of the Greek version of Patriarch Kirill's book. This book is a church answer to the challenge of post-modernism, presented in the spirit of Orthodox tradition. He singled out three factors which he believed were conducive to the appearance of Patriarch Kirill's book. These are historical transformations in Russia in recent decades, Patriarch Kirill's personal rootedness in church tradition and his rich experience of the Church's dialogue with the external world.

The last speaker was honorary Prof. V. Fidas of the University of Athens. He noted in particular that Patriarch Kirill, in his reflections on the human rights problem, sets forth a thesis of 'freedom's responsibility' versus the thesis of 'freedom from responsibility' characteristic of the Western Christian

tradition, especially Protestant philosophical and theological anthropology.

In Prof. Fidas's opinion, the book by Patriarch Kirill is a call to constructive dialogue between political and religious leaders of various countries. The book is a 'bouquet of proposals giving the fragrance of Orthodox tradition', which is offered to the Western Christian world to 'enrich the scentless and colourless inter-civilization dialogue on human rights'.

*DECR Communication Service*

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