



## **“Moral Dimension of Democracy” Speech by Metropolitan Hilarion at the International Conference on Democracy, Society and Modernization in Modern Russia: Unity of Purpose and Action**

Dear Yefim Iosifovich!

Dear participants in the Conference!

Thank you for inviting me to take part in this public scholarly conference that gets together Russian and foreign scholars, experts, human rights activists, journalists and all those concerned about the future of Russia.

I consider it very important for the Russian Orthodox Church to have an opportunity to discuss social development of our country. For us this discussion has begun centuries ago. Historically, the Orthodox tradition has inspired people to construct a building of national life and has given them strength to selflessly serve their Motherland. The Russian Orthodox Church cherishes the memory of many righteous people who exerted all their powers for the sake of their neighbours and even sacrificed their lives.

The Church tradition cherishes the memory of the passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, the first canonized Russian saints. It is symbolic that people venerate the princes, who fell victims to political struggle in Russia. On rational thinking, they did nothing for their people, but simply preferred to die lamblike rather than fight against their power loving brother. Their life differs strikingly from the realities of political life in which its leaders sacrificed not only their honour and conscience, but - what is most awful - human lives for the sake of expediency.

One can hear answers to the question about democracy in Russia from people speaking from high rostrums and common people alike. But do we have a consensus on the notion of ‘democracy’ in our society? Apparently, democracy is a form of government of society, but its content and implementation may differ considerably even within countries that regard themselves as perfect democracies. These differences do not prevent attempts to dogmatize the notion of democracy and to make it an instrument in ideological wars or a ground for recrimination. The dogmatization of the notion of democracy comes along with a wish to make it the universal criterion for assessing the life of society. Peremptory and rigorous adherence to such an approach cannot do real good to society.

I will give you an example. Being involved in the external church relations, I happened to see attempts to bring the so called democratic standards into the church tradition. For instance, an institute of the European Union has adopted a regulation against discrimination in hiring. It was intended for the European church structures, too, as they are employers. Can you imagine what would have happened had the regulation not been rescinded at the last moment through the efforts of the European Churches? They would have been obliged to employ as women, representatives of other religions, or non-believers as priests. This regulation is irreproachable in terms of democracy, but is absolutely inadmissible in terms of preserving European civilization, within which democracy has been developing.

The Church is often accused of the lack of flexibility. But at present we often see that democratic standards are taken as the ultimate truth. The Western media reported of a U.S. state, in which couples of non-traditional sexual orientation were given equal rights with traditional families. Thus these couples got the right to adopt children. Of course, Catholic agencies refused to deal with homosexual couples, but the local authorities closed these agencies, as their work with only traditional families would have been considered a discrimination. The same happened in Great Britain, where Catholic adopting agencies were closed for the same reason. I believe it to be an obvious case of intolerance to dissent disguised in the form of democracy.

In defining its attitude to democracy or to any other form of government, the Church accentuates moral content of the form rather than a procedure. Not long ago by historical standards, Adolf Hitler came to power democratically with the support of the majority. The accusations of undemocracy are becoming a pretext for interfering into internal affairs of the states and may bring about even more human sufferings. Democratic procedures being applied, laws can be adopted with the provisions discarding the notions of morality, which has bound human society for centuries.

During the centuries of her being, the Church has formulated its own universal criterion for assessing the social life. As it is stated in "The Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church", 'the Church should give more attention not to the system of the outer organization of state, but to the inner condition of her members' hearts.' It is the condition of the heart that makes all social initiatives a success or a failure.

I am confident that if we bring moral ideals into public sphere and educate society on them, we shall manage to change society and it will respect human dignity that ascends to the image of God. However, if our concern about social wellbeing will be limited by implicit copying of democratic standards, we will face new disorders.

The more people in our country will be inspired in their social and political life by Boris and Gleb, rather

than by their murderer Svyatopolk the Accursed, the more chances Russia will have of a truly just human society. I appeal to all not to give in to evil, not to make people a tool for achieving one's own goals or an instrument in political struggle, and not to sacrifice neighbours for the sake of expediency. That is what the holy passion-bearers have taught us.

We all agree that something should be done to change the life in our country for the better. The Church earnestly supports those who are not satisfied with *status quo* but are willing to work honestly and bring more good into our life. In his address to the businessmen, Holiness Patriarch Kirill called modernization 'a moral imperative' and emphasized that the Church understood modernization not only as an economic reform and technological re-equipment of Russian economy, not as modern infrastructure, but first and foremost as the building up of a new system of relations among people based on our national moral foundation, be it in business, industry, education, or science.

What is the moral foundation of our society today? I invite the participants in the Conference to think about it. But one thing is clear. If we show understanding of our spiritual tradition and, above all, rely on it in attempts to make social changes, these changes will differ from the utopian projects of those who wanted to extinguish our historical memory in their endeavour to build a new world without God.

---

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/55047/>