



Patriarch Kirill receives Italian ambassador to Moscow Antonio Landi

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On March 30, 2011, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia received Ambassador of the Republic of Italy in the Russian Federation Antonio Landi, at the patriarchal residence in Chisty Pereulok.

In response to the Patriarch' warm welcome, Mr. Landi thanked him for the opportunity to meet and talk, saying in particular, 'I make this visit as a representative of the Italian Government, but also as a person who has a profound interest in the Russian Orthodox Church'. He said that he had served for eight year as diplomatic representative of the Republic of Italy to the Vatican. He also represented Italy in Belgrade, where he had an opportunity to meet the late Patriarch Pavle and many other representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Mr. Landi thanked the Patriarch for solidarity in defending Christian tradition in the case of Lautsi versus Italy at the European Court of Human Rights. 'As a representative of the Republic of Italy, I would like to thank you for the support you gave to the Italian Government in the case of Lautsi. Eventually this battle we fought together had a positive result. It has helped us to become aware of the things which we have in common and which will continue in the future because clearly the problem of Europe's future is linked inseparably with her past', the Italian ambassador said.

He also told His Holiness about the recently published book by Prof. Carlo Cardia entitled *European Religious and Cultural Identity. The Problem of the Crucifix*, devoted precisely to that case. The preface to the book is written by Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini.

Mr. Landi informed the Patriarch that during his meeting with the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, they discussed a possibility for Prof. Cardia's book to be translated into Russian and published in Russia as it deals with problems relevant in Russia as well. The translation work is already underway. The ambassador expressed hope that Patriarch Kirill, or another patriarch-authorized representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, would write a preface to the Russian version of the book.

Mr. Landi conveyed to His Holiness the Patriarch greetings from the Italian President and Prime Minister.

The Italian Ambassador also pledged his support for the dialogue of cultures on various issues including morality.

He handed over to the Patriarch a part of the relics of St. Panteleimon he received as a gift of the Russian Orthodox Church from Archbishop Giuseppe Betori of Florence and parts of the relics of the Holy Martyrs of Aquileia.

Accepting the small shrines with the relics Patriarch said,

‘I am deeply moved by this gift which attests to our common Christian spiritual sources and our common history. When two peoples venerate the same saints it cannot but be important. The martyrs of Aquileia, the Holy Martyr Panteleimon and St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker, whose relics rest in Bari – these are saints whose intercession is sought by both Italian believers and the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church.

‘History belongs to the past which comes to us in monuments and manuscripts. But in the Church, history lives a special life, for history is actualized in it when we turn to holy martyrs not as those who lived in the past and venerate them not as heroes and authorities of the past but as those who for us are alive. And through their veneration, history becomes part of our life. Perhaps this is characteristic only of the Church and we believed it happens through the power of the Holy Spirit’.

Recalling the words of Pope John XXIII that the Church is not a museum which preserves things important for science but not very necessary for ordinary life, His Holiness Kirill stressed that ‘in the Church, tradition is animated. Indeed, it is not only about the memory of martyrs, not only Christian history but values, primarily moral ones, which live in the Church. The church preaching brings these values to the conscience of the modern man’.

His Holiness noted that in various times in history, moral values in human life were challenged by both the society and the individual. ‘But today we are going through a time special in some sense, when people’s way of life often becomes a negative challenge to moral values’, he said.

He pointed to an opinion spread in various social circles, which maintains that moral values belong to the past. It was this opinion that prompted Ms. Lautsi to bring in action against Italy, demanding that crucifixes be removed from public schools. ‘The Italian people together with people in other European countries who supported Italy, together with the Russian people showed to the whole Europe and the whole world that today’s Europeans need Christian tradition and that, if necessary, we are ready to defend by peaceful means the presence of this tradition in public domain’, His Holiness stressed.

Patriarch Kirill thanked Mr. Landi for a copy of the book by Prof. Cardio, saying, 'It is very important that this work should be translated into Russian. I will await the translation and very much hope that the Russian version will come out with the Church's preface, the more so that the Russian Orthodox Church took a certain part in the consideration of that case by the European Court of Human Rights'.

The Patriarch also mentioned a special sympathy the two peoples feel for each other. Relations between them are developing also within the framework of the Russian-Italian Dialogue Forum of the civil societies. According to this Holiness, this forum has a great future.

His Holiness also spoke about the pastoral care of compatriots in Italy, among them Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians and people of other ethnic origins. He informed his guest about the pastoral work of parishes located in various cities in Italy and pointed out the growing number of pilgrims coming to venerate common Christian shrines from the countries under the pastoral care of the Moscow Patriarchate.

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