



## **Patriarch Kirill meets with President of Germany**

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His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Christian Wulff, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, on October 13, 2010, at his resident in Chisty Pereulok.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church congratulated the President of Germany on his election to the high office and, noting the importance of his visit for the development of Russian-German relations, said, 'It is my deep conviction that the foundation that gives rise to values respected both in Russia and German is that of Christian tradition and Christian culture. I am aware that in today's Europe, there are different attitudes to Christian sources but I am convinced that the Russian and German nations would not have reached the present level of mutual understanding if there had been no fundamental common culture. Precisely this commonality has laid a solid system of relations which goes back into centuries'.

His Holiness also said that civil society institutions constitute a significant factor in developing relations between the two countries today and Christian communities in Russia and Germany are important parts of them.

'I value the fact that now we have a platform on which bilateral relations are successfully developing with the participation of constituent parts of the civil society. It is 'the St. Petersburg Forum'. Since 2007 this dialogue has institutionally included representatives of Christian confessions in Europe, and the work of the European group is commendable. In the last years, precisely this group has raised very important issues concerning the fate of our nations and European peoples. It has initiated discussions on social justice, sustainable economic development, the future of the family, problems of emigration, the influence made by the religious factor on the education of youth. It is in this context that the role of churches was considered. I believe it is a good platform for further discussion which will help us and Christians in Germany to elaborate a common position on important issues', His Holiness said.

The Patriarch also raised the problem of religion being ousted from the public space in Europe today. He reminded that the Russian Church lived for centuries in a state where atheism was an official ideology, where churches were destroyed, crosses sawed off, and religion could manifest itself only in the narrow framework of purely private and family life. Those who pursued this policy proclaimed humanistic ideals and promised to build an economically prosperous society with justice in which everyone would be happy. But these people rejected religion; they were impeded by crosses because crosses were a challenge to the dominant ideology and atheistic patterns in people's consciousness, His Holiness stressed.

'What disturbs me is that something similar happens today in some countries including Western Europe. Nobody says that the Christian presence should be removed from public life for the sake of a bright future, but another philosophical system is used whereby crosses should be removed from schools and religion from public space for the sake of human rights'. According to the Patriarch, the modern civilization 'drops the same brick the Soviet Union did', because it does not matter for the sake of which idea religion is removed from public life, in any case 'it will result in the dismantling of religious awareness'.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church was pleased to point out that in many issues the German authorities have advocated the traditional presence of Christian values in the life of society.

'Philosophical systems come and go but the Christian faith has existed for two thousand years and it is this faith that has built the spiritual foundations of European culture. That is why we believe it necessary to speak out about it today, and we have the right to do it because we lived for long years in a country which drove God away from human relations. We know the consequences. Today's phenomenal revival of the religious feeling in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union is to considerable extent a reaction to our past', the patriarch said.

It was noted in the discussion that the Russian Orthodox Church conducted dialogue first with the Evangelical Church and later with the Catholic Church in Germany since the 50s, and these relations played a great role in reconciling the two nations after the Great Patriotic War. 'One had to have a great inner courage and strong faith to come to the Soviet Union immediately after the war and meet our people face to face. We keep in our memory the visit of the delegation of German Christians led by Pastor Martin Neimoeller who came in the early 50s. This visit initiated the reconciliation on the most profound level – the level of human relations'.

His Holiness expressed the conviction that today too, Christians in Russia, Ukraine and other countries of the former USSR should continue dialogue with Christians in Germany. 'I would be happy if our dialogue centered on our common concern for the preservation of Christian values in the culture of the modern man', he said.

His Holiness dwelt in detail on the life of Russian Orthodox parishes in Germany. There are from 3,5 to 5 million of German residents who have come from countries under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Russian Church, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and others. Some 200 parishes, two monasteries and numerous Sunday schools have been opened and social support groups have been set up in Germany. 'We help our parishioners to adjust to the local conditions; we introduce them to German laws; we help them to study German and give them legal assistance. We enjoy the moral support for our efforts coming from the German state', His Holiness informed the German President. He also told him

that an Orthodox monastery is being created at Getcshendorf near Berlin to become a religious center for dialogue between Russian and German people, between the two cultures. This initiative has found understanding on the part of both the local authorities and ordinary people. It is expected to begin working in 2-3-year's time.

President Christian Wulff thanked the patriarch for the kind wishes in connection of his coming into the office. He said that he always sympathised with the Russian Orthodox Church and stressed, 'I have great respect for the way in which your Church managed to preserve faith in the hard times of atheistic domination'.

The German President recognized the importance of the presence of religious values in the world and underscored the significance of interreligious dialogue.

*DECR Communication Service*

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