Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations to the Annual Nicean Club Dinner (Lambeth Palace, 9 September 2010)

Your Grace, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

At the outset, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to His Grace Archbishop Rowan Williams for inviting me to address the members of the Nicean Club. Your Grace, we highly value your personal contribution to inter-Christian dialogue and your commitment to keep the Anglican Communion unified. We know your love of the Russian Orthodox Church, of its saints and great theologians, of its spiritual tradition. We assure you of our continual support and prayers.

We also highly appreciate the work of the Nicean Club which aims to strengthen relations and to stimulate beneficial co-operation between the churches of the Anglican Communion and other Christian confessions.

The name of the Club – Nicean – takes us back to that blessed era when Christians throughout the world, both in the East and in the West, were united. At the same time, however, that was a period of bitter struggle with heresies and many church schisms. Thanks to the unanimity both of the Western and Eastern Fathers in understanding Church teaching and in standing together with steadfast faith, the Universal Church at its Council in 325 renounced and condemned a heresy that undermined the very foundations of Christian doctrine. At the same time the Church was able to formulate that faith in the Holy Trinity which has survived throughout subsequent centuries. Archbishop Rowan Williams, in his Arius: Heresy and Tradition, has provided us with a profound analysis of Arianism from historical, theological and philosophical perspectives. He describes Arianism as an 'archetypal Christian deviation', which tends to rise again and again under various names.

In 325, the Christian Church, which had latterly emerged from a three-century-long period of persecution, proved itself to be strong and mature enough to discern in Arianism a dangerous digression from Orthodox doctrine. By adopting the Nicean Creed the Church did not introduce anything new to her teaching but rather formulated with clarity what she had believed in from the very beginning of her existence. Subsequent Ecumenical Councils continued to clarify church truth without introducing anything fundamentally new to that confession of faith which sprouted from Christ himself and from his apostles.

Why do the Churches, both East and West, still remember the Fathers of the Nicean and later Ecumenical Councils with such gratitude? Why are the great theologians of the past, the opponents of heresy, revered in the East as 'great universal teachers and saints' and in the West as 'Doctors of the Church'? Because throughout the ages the Church believed it to be her principal task to safeguard the truth. Her foremost heroes were those confessors of the faith who asserted Orthodox doctrine and countered heresies in the face of new trends and theological and political innovations.

Almost 1700 years have elapsed since the Council of Nicaea, but the criteria that were used by the Church to distinguish truth from heresy have not changed. And the notion of church truth remains as relevant today as it did seventeen centuries ago. Today the notion of heresy, while present in church vocabulary, is manifestly absent from the vocabulary of contemporary politically-correct theology – a theology that prefers to refer to "pluralism" and to speak of admissible and legitimate differences.

Indeed, St Paul himself wrote that 'there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval' (1 Cor. 11:19). But what kind of differences was he referring to? Certainly not those which concerned the essence of faith, church order or Christian morals. For, in these matters, there is only one truth and any deviation from it is none other than heresy.

At the time of the Council of Nicaea, the Church was united in East and West. But at the present time, there is a multitude of communities each of which claims to be a church even though approaches to doctrinal, ecclesiological and ethical issues among them often differ radically.

Nowadays it is increasingly difficult to speak of 'Christianity' as a unified scale of spiritual and moral values, universally adopted by all Christians. It is more appropriate, rather, to speak of 'Christianities', that is, different versions of Christianity espoused by diverse communities.

All current versions of Christianity can be very conditionally divided into two major groups – traditional and liberal. The abyss that exists today divides not so much the Orthodox from the Catholics or the Catholics from the Protestants as it does the 'traditionalists' from the 'liberals'. Some Christian leaders, for example, tell us that marriage between a man and a woman is no longer the only way of building a Christian family: there are other models and the Church should become appropriately 'inclusive' to recognize alternative behavioural standards and give them official blessing. Some try to persuade us that human life is no longer an absolute value; that it can be terminated in a mother's womb or that one can terminate one's life at will. Christian 'traditionalists' are being asked to reconsider their views under the slogan of keeping abreast with modernity.

Regrettably, it has to be admitted that the Orthodox Church and many in the Anglican Church have

today found themselves on the opposite sides of the abyss that divides traditional Christians from Christians of liberal trend. Certainly, inside the Anglican Community there remain many “traditionalists”, especially in the South and the East, but the liberal trend is also quite noticeable, especially in the West and in the North. Protests against liberalism continue to be heard among Anglicans, as at the 2nd All African Bishops’ Conference held in late August. The Conference’s final document stated in particular, ‘We affirm the Biblical standard of the family as having marriage between a man and a woman as its foundation. One of the purposes of marriage is procreation of children some of whom grow to become the leaders of tomorrow’.

Among the vivid indications of disagreement within the Anglican Community (I am reluctant to say ‘schism’) is the fact that almost 200 Anglican bishops refused to attend the 2008 Lambeth Conference. I was there as an observer from the Russian Orthodox Church and could see various manifestations of deep and painful differences among the Anglicans.

Today the Orthodox-Anglican Dialogue itself has come under threat. It is especially lamentable because this dialogue has had a long and rich history, beginning with the numerous talks at various levels held between Orthodox and Anglicans from the 17th century. In the 19th century, after the Anglicans founded the bishoprics of Jerusalem in 1841 and Gibraltar in 1842, meetings took place and relations were established between representatives of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in America and the Orthodox Church. The first official message came in a letter of Archbishop Howley of Canterbury (1828-1848) to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1840, assuring Orthodox hierarchs that the Anglicans would never engage themselves in proselytism and calling for co-operation in a spirit of Christian love.

In 1868, the first Lambeth Conference was held. Acting on behalf of Archbishop Tait of Canterbury, this Conference sent a message, written in a spirit of Christian love and friendship, to the patriarchs and bishops of the Orthodox Church. That same year, at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Patriarch Gregory VI of Constantinople permitted the Orthodox clergy to administer the rite of burial to Anglicans if a priest of the Church of England were not available.

The second such agreement was made in 1874 when Patriarch Joachim II of Constantinople gave permission to the Orthodox clergy to baptize and marry Anglicans. These agreements were exceptional developments in the history of relations between the Churches of East and West.

Between 1874 and 1875, representatives of the Orthodox Church, Anglicans and Old Catholics met for the first time at the Bonn Conferences to discuss issues such as the Filioque, the authority of the Ecumenical Councils and the validity of Anglican priesthood. In 1898, Bishop Wordsworth of Salisbury, in pursuance of a resolution of the 4th Lambeth Conference in 1887 on the need to intensify relations

with the Orthodox Church and to set up a special committee for it, visited Patriarch Constantine V of Constantinople and other hierarchs. Patriarch Constantine appointed a special commission for studying the Anglican confession. In the years that followed, Frederick Temple and Constantine V initiated regular correspondence.

At the 1930 Lambeth Conference, after the Anglicans essentially agreed to the Orthodox affirmation that communion in the Sacraments should be preceded by unity in doctrine, it was decided to set up an Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission, which included representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of England. The commission began working in 1931. The 1948 Lambeth Conference gave unanimous support to the further development of relations with the Orthodox.

After World War II, dialogue between our Churches was resumed in 1965. The modern stage in the Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue was opened by a visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Patriarch Athenagoras (Spirou) of Constantinople in 1962. The heads of the two Churches came to an agreement on the need to restore the Joint Theological Commission for studying the doctrinal differences which blocked progress towards unity that had begun in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries.

In November 1964, the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Conference on Rhodes discussed, among other things, relations with Western Churches. The question of establishing relations with Canterbury did not raise any difficulties. It was unanimously agreed that ‘an inter-Orthodox theological commission be established immediately, consisting of theological experts from each Orthodox Church’. After preliminary meetings and talks, a dialogue began in 1976. A regular session of the dialogue completed its work only a few days ago.

We are concerned about the fate of this dialogue. We appreciate the proposal Archbishop Rowan Williams made this year to exclude from the dialogue those Anglican churches which failed to observe the moratorium on the ordination of open homosexuals. But we regard this proposal as not quite sufficient to save the dialogue from an approaching collapse. The dialogue is doomed to closure if the unrestrained liberalization of Christian values continues in many communities of the Anglican world.

We are equally concerned about the fate of bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of England. Contacts between the Russian Church and the Anglican Church began as far back as the 19th century. In 1912, the Sacred Governing Synod adopted the statute of a Society of Zealots of Unity between the Eastern Orthodox and the Anglican Churches. In 1914, a Synodal Commission was established for considering interrelations with the Anglican Church. In May 1922, when Patriarch Tikhon was imprisoned, Archbishop Randall Davidson of Canterbury protested to the Soviet government against the persecution of the Church. The archbishop raised this matter twice in the parliament and urged the British government to apply pressure on the Soviet authorities (Kerson’s

Note).

The relations between the Russian Church and the Church of England were strengthened by the visit of the Archbishop Cyril Garbett of York to Moscow in 1943. After the end of World War II relations between our Churches intensified and contacts became regular.

The first difficulties in relation to the Church of England emerged in 1992 when its General Synod agreed to ordain women to the priesthood. The Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church came out with an official statement expressing regret and concern over this decision as contradicting the tradition of the Early Church.

One might ask why our Church should have concerned itself at all with this matter? By the early 90s the Protestant world had already ordained many women pastors and even women bishops. But the unique point here was that the Anglican Community had long sought rapprochement with the Orthodox Church. Many Orthodox Christians recognized the existence of apostolic continuity in Anglicanism. From the 19th century, Anglican members of the Association of Eastern Churches sought 'mutual recognition' with the Orthodox Church and its members believed that 'both Churches preserved the apostolic continuity and true faith in the Saviour and should accept each other in the full communion of prayers and sacraments'.

Much has changed since. The introduction of the female priesthood in the Church of England was followed by discussions on the female episcopate. In response to the positive decision made by the Church of England's General Synod on this issue, the Department for External Church Relations published a new statement saying that this decision 'has considerably complicated dialogue with the Anglicans for Orthodox Christians' and 'has taken Anglicanism farther away from the Orthodox Church and contributed to further division in Christendom as a whole'.

We have studied the preparatory documents for the decision on female episcopate and were struck by the conviction expressed in them that even if the female episcopate were introduced, ecumenical contacts with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches would not come to an end. What made the authors of these documents so certain? There was a second controversial statement. The same document argued that despite a possible cooling down in relations with Catholics and Orthodox, the Church of England would strengthen and broaden its relations with the Methodist Church and the Lutheran Churches in Norway and Sweden. In other words, the introduction of the female episcopate 'will bring both gains and losses'. The question arises: Is not the cost of these losses too high? I can say with certainty that the introduction of the female episcopate excludes even a theoretical possibility for the Orthodox to recognize the apostolic continuity of the Anglican hierarchy.

We are also extremely concerned and disappointed by other processes that are manifesting themselves

in churches of the Anglican Communion. Some Protestant and Anglican churches have repudiated basic Christian moral values by giving a public blessing to same-sex unions and ordaining homosexuals as priests and bishops. Many Protestant and Anglican communities refuse to preach Christian moral values in secular society and prefer to adjust to worldly standards.

Our Church must sever its relations with those churches and communities that trample on the principles of Christian ethics and traditional morals. Here we uphold a firm stand based on Holy Scripture.

In 2003, the Russian Orthodox Church had to suspend contact with the Episcopal Church in the USA due to the fact that this Church consecrated a self-acclaimed homosexual, Jim Robertson, as bishop. The Department for External Church Relations made a special statement deploring this fact as anti-Christian and blasphemous. Moreover, the Holy Synod of our Church decided to suspend the work of the Joint Coordinating Committee for Cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Episcopal Church in the USA, which had worked very successfully for many years. The situation was aggravated when a woman bishop was installed as head of the Episcopal Church in the USA in 2006 and a lesbian was placed on the bishop's chair of Los Angeles in 2010.

Similar reasons were behind the rupture of our relations with the Church of Sweden in 2005 when this Church made a decision to bless same-sex "marriages". And recently the lesbian Eva Brunne has become the "bishop" of Stockholm.

What can these churches say to their faithful and to secular society? What kind of light do they shine upon the world (cf. Mt. 5:14)? What is their 'salt'? I am afraid the words of Christ can be applied to them: If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men (Mt. 5:13).

We are aware of the arguments used by proponents of the above-mentioned liberal innovations. Tradition is no authority for them. They believe that to make the words of Holy Scripture applicable to modernity they have to be 'actualized', that is, reviewed and interpreted in an appropriate, 'modern' spirit. Holy Tradition is understood as an opportunity for the Church to be continually reformed and renewed and to think critically.

The Orthodox, however, have a different understanding of Holy Tradition. It is aptly expressed in the words of Vladimir Lossky: 'Tradition is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church – the life giving to every member of the Body of Christ the ability to hear, accept and know the Truth in its inherent shining, not in the natural light of human reason'.

It is impossible to pass silently by the liberalism and relativism which have become so characteristic of

today's Anglican theology. From the time of Archbishop Michael Ramsay of Canterbury, the Church of England saw the emergence of so-called modernism which rejected the very foundations of Christianity as a God-revealed religion. Among its most eloquent representatives was the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, Dr. I. A. T. Robinson, the author of the sensational book Honest to God. The Bishop of Woolwich's worldview can be described as 'Christian atheism'. Indeed, he rejected the existence of a personal God, of the Creator of the world and of Providence. He also denied the existence of the spiritual world in general and of the future life in particular. It should be admitted that these views provoked protests on the part of some Anglican bishops, led by Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury.

It is appropriate to recall here the words of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the Bishops' Conference in February 2010. Concerning the liberal novelties introduced by some Protestant communities, he stated: 'What has happened reveals only too clearly a fundamental difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The principal problem lying at the basis of this difference is that Orthodoxy safeguards the norm of apostolic faith and order as fixed in the Holy Tradition of the Church and sees as its task to actualize this norm continually for the fulfilment of pastoral and missionary tasks. On the other hand, in Protestantism the same task allows for a theological development that can remodel this same norm. Clearly, the search for doctrinal consensus, as was the case with regard to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in the multilateral dialogue initiated by the World Council of Churches, has lost its meaning precisely because any consensus may come under threat or may be destroyed by innovation or interpretation that will challenge the very meaning of these agreements'.

Regrettably, what His Holiness the Patriarch says about Protestantism can be applied equally to many Anglican communities. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Orthodox communities discussed seriously the recognition of Anglican priesthood based on its recognized apostolic continuity. Now we are very far from this. And the gap between the liberal Anglicans and the Orthodox keeps growing.

One of the priorities in the work of the Russian Church today is to bear witness to the eternal significance of Christian spiritual and moral values in the life of modern society. In 2000 our Church already made a considerable contribution to the systematization of Orthodox tradition in this area by adopting a Basic Social Concept and, in 2008, a Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights. Today the Church is engaged in major work to compile a Catechesis which will give a clear exposition of Christian doctrine, on the one hand, and will respond to the burning problems of today on the other.

We are not alone in our concern for the preservation of Christian values. Liberal tendencies in Protestant and Anglican communities present a challenge to those Christians and churches that have remained faithful to Gospel principles in doctrine, church order and morality. Certainly, we seek and find allies in

opposing the destruction of the very essence of Christianity. One of the major tasks in our inter-Christian work today is to unite the efforts of Christians for building a system of solidarity on the basis of Gospel morality in Europe and throughout the world. Our positions are shared by the Roman Catholic Church, with which we have held numerous meetings and conferences. Together we are considering the possibility of establishing an Orthodox-Catholic alliance in Europe for defending the traditional values of Christianity. The primary aim of this alliance would be to restore a Christian soul to Europe. We should be engaged in common defence of Christian values against secularism and relativism.

Today, European countries as never before need to reinforce moral education, since its absence leads to dire consequences such as accelerating extremism, a decline in the birth rate, environmental pollution and violence. The principles of moral responsibility and of freedom should be consistently implemented in all spheres of human life – politics, economics, education, science, culture and the mass media.

We should not remain silent and look with indifference at a world that is gradually deteriorating. Rather, we should proclaim Christian morality and teach it openly not only in our churches, but also in public spaces including secular schools, universities and in the arena of the mass media. We do not presume to impose our views on anybody but we wish that our voice be heard by those who want to hear it. Unfortunately, we cannot convert the whole world to God, but we should at least make people think about the meaning of life and the existence of absolute spiritual and moral values. We are obliged to bear witness to the true faith always and everywhere so that at least some may be saved (1 Cor. 9:22).

Summing up, I wish to assert that today we have new divisions in Christendom, not only theological but also ethical. Regrettably, many Christian communities, which once maintained fraternal relations with the Orthodox Church for many years and were in dialogue with it, have shown themselves to be incapable or unwilling to assume obligations stemming from our dialogue. We accompany our reactions to these developments with assurances of respect for the right of all churches and communities to make decisions which they deem to be necessary. Yet, at the same time, we state with sadness that neither the official dialogue nor the most valuable relations and contacts in the past have kept some of our Anglican brothers and sisters from steps which have taken them even farther away from our common Christian Church Tradition.

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church I would like to stress that we continue to be fully committed to the dialogue with the Anglican Church and will do our utmost to keep this dialogue going. We do not betray our commitment to the dialogue. However, we feel that many of our Anglican brothers and sisters betray our common witness by departing from traditional Christian values and replacing them by contemporary secular standards. I very much hope that the official position of the Anglican Church on theological, ecclesiological and moral issues will be in tune with the tradition of the Ancient Undivided Church and that the Anglican leadership will not surrender to the pressure coming from liberals.

Our faithful cherish the memory of the visit made by the Church of England's delegation led by Archbishop Cyril Garbett to Moscow in 1943. Then Patriarch Sergiy, who had been enthroned a few days earlier, remarked, 'The English have come defying the dangers of travelling at a time of war and the entire insidiousness of the enemy'. Addressing himself to Archbishop Garbett, he said, 'The old archbishop teaches us by his example to forget one's own interests and conveniences and one's own life when the truth of Christ and the welfare of our neighbours... call us to serve higher values'.

Today, too, we do not abandon Christian love for our Anglican brothers and sisters. We do not abandon the hope that they, who once defied every danger during the hard years of war, will share with us that trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which rests on the solid foundation of the faith of holy apostles, the Fathers of the Nicean Council and the tradition of the Undivided Church.

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