



Press-conference summing up Patriarch Kirill's visitation of Ukrainian Orthodox Church

A press-conference on the results of Patriarch Kirill's visit to Ukraine was held on July 30, 2010, at the Interfax news agency. The visit took place from July 20 to 28 on the invitation of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its dioceses.

The press-conference was given by Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, head of the Synodal department for church-state relations, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, and V. Legoida, head of the Synodal information department.

Opening the press-conference Metropolitan Hilarion said:

First of all I would compare this visit to the first one made by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine because they are very similar in format. Both visits were fairly long but the climate in which the first visit was made was very different from that of the second visit. When His Holiness the Patriarch first came to Ukraine, his visit was seen as an extraordinary event. Earlier His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II had visited Ukraine not long before his death and before his visit there had been a very long interruption lasting 17 years... Perhaps it was prompted by some political circumstances but at any rate one can say that people in Ukraine became estranged from the Patriarch.

When His Holiness Patriarch Kirill first came to Ukraine it provoked a great interest of course but at the same time there was a certain tension on the part of those who are not interested in a stronger presence of the canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine. In the first place, these are schismatic groups and some nationalistic political parties. The political situation in Ukraine itself at that time was instable, and the visit was made in a rather strained atmosphere. Nevertheless, we remember that already at that time the utterly dominating tone of the visit was enthusiasm with which a lot of people welcomed their Patriarch who came to visit Ukraine and to pray together with his flock. Already at that time His Holiness the

Patriarch said that he came to Ukraine not as a guest, a foreign citizen, but as the Primate of the largest religious organization in Ukraine, the Primate of the Church to which most of the Ukrainian population belong.

The recent visit of His Holiness the Patriarch was made in a much more pleasant political atmosphere. First of all it should be stated that after the election of Victor Yanukovich as Ukraine's president, a certain political consolidation has been observed in the country. And the demagogic tone with which some politicians discussed topical issues involved in religious life has been dropped. This positive development in the political sphere could not but had an impact on the general tone of the visit.

When His Holiness the Patriarch came to Ukraine he was asked about the purpose of his visit. He answered that there was no purpose. It was a regular primatial visitation made by the Patriarch to his canonical territory. And His Holiness the Patriarch repeatedly stressed that he was not an 'envoy' of the Russian Federation but he was an envoy of Holy Rus' and Holy Rus' is the spiritual and cultural space that has been created for over ten centuries. Its cradle and heart is Kiev in which the key and primary role belongs to the Patriarch as Primate of the Orthodox Church uniting the peoples of the Russian World.

I believe this good sentiment, which the Patriarch brought to the Ukrainian society with his words and prayer, passed on to all the Ukrainian people and determined the general atmosphere of the visit.

His Holiness the Patriarch plans to visit Ukraine on a regular basis. In this sense I hope his visits will cease to be extraordinary events. They will always attract people's attention and the attention of the mass media but there must be no unhealthy stir around these visits.

I would like to note that one of the leitmotifs of the Patriarch's stay in Ukraine was the theme of overcoming the schism. As is known, the schism has existed in Ukraine for some fifteen years now. It is a persistent wound on the body of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy, and His Holiness, in his addresses to various audiences, repeatedly spoke of the fatality of the schism and the need to overcome it as soon as possible. The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church at its session on July 26 in Kiev adopted an Appeal to the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine who are in the schism calling upon them to return to the canonical Church.

The schism has inflicted severe wounds on people. It has gone through people's lives, dividing human families. The schism tears people away from the Church depriving them of an opportunity to partake of one Cup together with Orthodox Christians and to visit common shrines. In recent times we have received reports that many clergy and laity who are in schism are aware of the fatality of being in it and wish to re-unite with the canonical Church. The Appeal also states that it is terrible to live in schism but it

is even more terrible to die outside the Church, and, unfortunately, many people died in the last years. We say that one should not put off repentance; there is nothing humiliating in it. Repentance is a natural process of returning to the Church for those who fell away from it.

An answer was also given in the Appeal to the question concerning the recognition of the baptism in case of schismatics' return to the canonical Church. In this case the Church herself will decide on the way of accepting them into her fold, and the question concerning the recognition of the Sacraments can be settled only in this perspective. In other words, as long as one stays in the schism the Sacraments administered to one in it cannot and must not be recognized because a schism is not a Church and the 'sacraments' administered in a schism are devoid of grace and salvific power. But if one's return to the Church is considered, history knows of cases when a Church recognized particular 'sacraments' administered in schismatic communities, including baptism. We are not saying that this recognition will be given; we say that the Church herself will decide on the way of acceptance.

I think this Appeal is a quintessence of all that was stated during Patriarch Kirill's visit to Ukraine concerning the schism. His Holiness attaches a great importance to an early healing of the schism. However, his efforts in this respect are met with certain misunderstanding and opposition from the schismatic groups' leaders. Thus, the structure led by the false-patriarch Philaret has responded to the Patriarchal visit and the Synodal Appeal aggressively, but I think this reaction cannot be a way towards dialogue. The way to dialogue can be paved only by a calm pastoral word. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed precisely this kind of word to those who are in the schism.

I believe the visit of His Holiness the Patriarch to Ukraine was a very significant event. It was not accidental that it received such a broad coverage. His Holiness, not only by his wise words but also by his whole appearance and inspiration with which he speaks and celebrates, has made a great impression on the enormous number of people. I hope this visit will contribute to further consolidation of the Ukrainian nation and to rapprochement between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine and to the healing of those wounds which have been inflicted on the Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the last years.

Archpriest Nikolay Balashov was asked whether the Patriarchal and Synodal Appeal could be considered effective if one of the schismatic leaders publicly rejected repentance as the proposed way.

Father Nikolay answered:

The Appeal of the Russian Orthodox Church Holy Synod was not addressed to a religious organization which calls itself 'Patriarchate of Kiev' and which is not recognized by any of the Local Churches. It was actually addressed to people who are outside the unity with the canonical Orthodox Church. Any positive reaction to the Appeal from the leaders of the 'Patriarchate of Kiev' is not to be expected, to my

mind.

It is another matter that very many people who are outside the canonical Church have begun to consider their return to the Church during the year since the first visit of His Holiness the Patriarch to Ukraine. Many petitions of this kind have come. Some parishes in several regions and a group of the 'Patriarchate of Kiev's parishes have already come back to the fold of the Church together with their priests. We know that a number of schismatic leaders also thought and think about their return. Unfortunately, as His Eminence Hilarion already made public during the Patriarch's stay in Ukraine, the former Metropolitan Andrey Gorak of Lvov from the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev' was stopped on the threshold of this step by death. There have also been discussions with several other structures which separated themselves from the Church.

His Holiness the Patriarch said that we have no special strategy, in a temporal, political sense of this word, for overcoming the schism. He stressed that our strategy is that of prayer, and we believe that the schism will be overcome by the will of God, not through political efforts and that the Church in this sense should be an antipode of schismatic organizations as she cannot resort to such means as aggressive polemic, offense, distorted facts. This path is closed for the Church. We will use different means for struggle with the schism, and the truth of God will ultimately triumph.

Journalists asked Father Nikolay if there was in recent year a growing dynamic of the return from the 'Patriarchate of Kiev' to the canonical Church. He answered:

Yes, there is. It should be stated that many of the schismatic leaders have long wanted to return but speak very frankly about the fear they feel, including a fear for their physical life. The recent events have shown that these fears are not at all groundless. I mean the incomprehensible death of Andrey Gorak, who headed the largest diocese of the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev' in Lvov. During the Patriarchal visit, also suddenly and under unclear circumstances, Feodosiy Petsina died. He was one of the leaders of the 'Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church' in the same Lvov region.

To develop Father Nikolay's statement, V. Legoida emphasized:

The real situation that has developed today in the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev' makes it possible to state with all the certainty that the statements made by the officials of this organization do not reflect the real sentiment of believers. We know it and we can confirm it on the basis of petitions we have received and the number of people returning from the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev' to the canonical Church. True, this process has not become a mass one as yet, also for reasons mentioned by Father Nikolay.

With your permission I would like to say another thing, which seems to be of importance for those who

are not well aware of the nature of church life and church canons. Sometimes people draw an analogy with human existence, saying: You see, there was a family but people failed to divide up something and it disintegrated. Years have elapsed and now one half says to another: We got worked up. Let us admit mutual mistakes and come to live together again. This analogy does not in the least reflect the reality of the situation.

I discussed it on several occasions with Ukrainian journalists and I would like to say once again: if we continue to consider the situation along the lines of this analogy, then the family – the canonical Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – continues living as it did before. But if we use biblical analogies then the situation in which people, who fell away from the Church, have found themselves is the situation of the Prodigal Son. Regrettably, today's prodigal son tries to impose conditions and even to accuse the father instead of making repentance as the most important step in everyday Christian life. It seems to me very important that this should be understood by all those who follow closely the church life in Ukraine.

Then the floor was given to Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin. He said:

In spite of attempts by some people, who are already becoming marginalized, to present the Patriarchal visit in the mass media as a political one, it was certainly pastoral, as was already stated, and by no means it should be taken as involving some expansion of Russian interests in Ukraine.

The day before yesterday, Patriarch Kirill, during the farewell dinner before his departure from Kiev, said these words: 'It is my country, it is my people, it is my Church'.

There is no expansionism whatsoever in these words. He is equally the Patriarch for the faithful in Russia, the faithful in Ukraine, the faithful in Belarus, the faithful in Kazakhstan. He equally believes the interests and aspirations of these believers to be his own interests and aspirations. Those who rather persistently try to declare their protest are an absolute minority.

When His Holiness the Patriarch prayed on St. Vladimir's Hill, there were thousands of people praying together with him. There was a rally held nearby in which a few dozens of people with their faces contorted with malice took part. I think their mode of behavior, which does not presuppose any dialogue and represents only an attempt to deprive a pastor of contacts with his flock, becomes more and more marginal. And this is very good; it shows that the political situation really becomes stable as radicals in Ukraine, just as they were in Russia before, are losing the support of society, and this is very gratifying.

When, during the march organized by the 'Patriarchate of Kiev' on July 28, people carried slogans 'Away with the Moscow parson', it showed once again that this organization identifies itself very strongly

with radical forces. It is not ready for any dialogue; it is ready only for accusations and divisions.

I am afraid these forces, however good our attitude to some mistaken people may be, have no and cannot have a future in a civilized society. With these rather miserable and ridiculous protests in the background, it was very interesting to see people of different generations and walks of life coming to meet His Holiness the Patriarch and to ask them very interesting questions, to every one of which an answer was given. People asked about the economic crisis, about the relations of the Orthodox Church with Islam and Catholicism and about how to educate today's young people in the spirit of high morality. People were really interested in what the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia thinks about the life of the modern man. And for him, judging by his answers, these are very personal questions.

I think immediate contacts between the Patriarch and the people pointed to people's love towards the Patriarch. People came to him with joyful faces and enormous interest. They did not come just to stare at a famous person but to pray and hear his word, and they left very joyful and spiritually satisfied. To my mind, it is the main result of the visit if viewed from its public side. His Holiness the Patriarch was open to various people. He also met with the scientific community and with the youth, both church and secular, and with plant workers and with ordinary parishioners, with a small girl who needed aid and to whom he gave a wheelchair...

Our Church is multinational as it unites people with diverse and even opposite political interests. It unites people of various generations and cultures beginning from lovers of Echoes Chant to rap singers. It unites citizens of various states and it will always share people's interests and aspirations even if the political and state interests drift apart, even if the cultures, generations' guidelines and social conditions split...

We are open both for millionaires and the homeless, for people of different nationalities and walks of life. And such the Church will always be because Christ called it to it!

Journalists asked Father Vsevolod about his opinion of how much the weakened position of schismatic groups was associated with the change in the political power. Father Vsevolod answered:

I believe it is associated first of all with the fact that the society has become wiser. The day before yesterday I was at a grand concert organized by the Day of the Baptism of Rus' organization in the Singing Field. It was a rock-concert. A legendary Moscow group 'Voskresenie' performed to be followed by Ukrainian groups 'Boombox' and 'Karamazov Brothers'. There were all kinds of people, but they seemed to represent two generations. Some came to listen to Boombox, while others Voskresenie (Resurrection) – a group known from the 80s. These were people around fifty years of age.

And the older generation people began to ask me: Why do we have church divisions? Why do we have 'Patriarchate of Kiev', the Moscow Patriarchate and other church entities? These people did not clash with me or challenged me but they already had the answer of their own: they said the Church must be beyond nationalities and politics.

Any wise society, having gone through a period of certain political turbulence, will sooner or later come to understand that the Church should be beyond politics and nationalities. I believe in Ukraine today there is a growing number of people, including in the so-called politicum, who realize this and refuse to change the gift of Christ's faith into a small political coin or a rumpled national rouble.

One of the journalists asked Metropolitan Hilarion a question concerning the next visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine. Metropolitan Hilarion answered:

I think His Holiness the Patriarch will make annual visits to Ukraine to stay for a few days in July to be present on the Day of St. Vladimir in Kiev and to visit two or three more dioceses of the Ukrainian Church. This year he visited the dioceses of Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk; next year with will come to some other dioceses.

Besides, His Holiness will come to Ukraine for particular events. I suppose the next important event as an occasion for His Holiness coming to Ukraine will the 75th birthday of His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine, the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which His Beatitude will celebrate on November 23.

In April 2011 there will be commemorative events to mark the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy. His Holiness the Patriarch may wish to come to Ukraine for it.

Another question concerned a possibility for negotiations between Patriarch Kirill and the leader of the 'Patriarchate of Kiev'. His Eminence Hilarion answered:

I do not think we should comment on statements by schismatic leasers, but the readiness for dialogue on our part can be seen first of all in our readiness to hold a calm and unbiased discussion on the situation in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The false patriarch Philaret is one of the main and perhaps even the main perpetrator of this schism. This man can certainly, if he so wishes, put his structure on the path of dialogue, but the statements he and the 'Synod' of his structure made during the Patriarchal visit rather point to their unreadiness for dialogue. These statements are imbued with an aggressive spirit. This man seems to be concerned most of all with seeing to it that the already existing movement back to the canonical Church should not gather momentum.

Otherwise, why should the statement of the so-called 'Synod' say that the transfer to the Moscow Patriarchate is inadmissible and that 'sacraments' celebrated in the schism ought to be recognized as valid? Moreover, it states that there is no schism in Ukraine at all, but there is merely an autocephalous church whose competence is not recognized only temporarily, that is, it tries to pass the desirable for the reality... As a matter of fact, it is certainly a schism, a tragic schism.

As for how schismatics should return to the Church and what the ways of their acceptance should be, we, as I have repeatedly mentioned, intend it to be a procedure by no means humiliating. As the Appeal of the Holy Synod states, we liken the return from the schism to what the Lord Jesus Christ said in his parable about the lost sheep: *If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off* (Mt. 18:12-13).

Metropolitan Hilarion also answered the question about the terrorist action in Zaporozhe:

The Church's assessment of this event has been already voiced in the message of condolence that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has sent to His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine and Bishop Joseph of Zaporozhe and Melitopol. It states in particular, 'Anyone who aims at heavens will ultimately hit oneself'. I believe this is all that can be said about it. One hits of course not only oneself but also other people and all the society, but it is very important that such tragic events should not impede the consolidation of the society and cohesion of all the faithful around the one canonical Church.

DECR Communication Service

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