‘It is easy to pray together with the Ukrainian people’ – Patriarch Kirill’s interview to Russia-24 TV channel

On July 2, 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia gave an interview to an observer of the Russian National Television and Radio Company, I. N. Semenov. Below is the full text of the interview, which came out on July 28, the Day of the Baptism of Rus’.

- Your Holiness, your second major primatial trip to Orthodox Ukraine is drawing to the end. How has the country changed in this year and what are the brightest impressions you will take away?

- The country has changed and has changed greatly. One can tell that the people, the Ukrainian society are entering a streak of stability. Actually, something similar happened to us too at the turn of the century, I mean the Russian society. There are many things in common in this post-Soviet development in many countries on the vast Eurasian land, which the Soviet Union used to occupy.

I rejoice in the fact that a period of stabilization is coming, and the people are settling down, and this means that there will be more opportunities for actions in solidarity. It is possible to come out of a difficult situation, whether economic, social or political, only on the basis of solidarity, when people help one another to move forward. I have not so much seen as felt quite a different atmosphere in the country, and this gives confidence that the Ukrainian people will already in the nearest future overcome much of what is to be overcome in order to build a more just, peaceful and prosperous life.

- This year you have visited some regions you have not been to last year. Is there any difference between the Odessa and the Pochayev devotion, for instance?

- I have not seen any difference in the devotion. There is of course an external difference, as these territories may have experienced different cultural influences. But as for the people’s devotion, it is the same on the Black Sea cost and on the Pochayev hill and in all other places. This is such a vivid and strong manifestation of religious feeling that it takes your breath away. It is easy to pray together with the

Ukrainian people, who live historically in the place from which Holy Rus' generated.

- You have met with representatives of almost all the branches of power in Ukraine. What it was about?

- About many things. We exchanged opinions on the developments in Ukraine today. I shared some of my thoughts and experience and listened to a very interesting story told by people including very right and reasonable thoughts about the organization of the Ukrainian society's life. All this is very important for me as a pastor. I assess developments not from a political point of view; I am not an economist and cannot make any economic analyses. But as a pastor I am attentive of course to all that is going on in people's souls and consciousness. And I am satisfied with the level of dialogue with Ukrainian officials and representatives of the Ukrainian public. I have had a chance to meet many people including local politicians, representatives of the business community and intelligentsia – scientists, engineers, metallurgists – all those who create real values.

- Some wondered why Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich, who has assumed his post quite recently, was immediately given a high award of the Russian Orthodox Church. For what achievements?

- He was granted this high order on the occasion of this 60th birthday. It is an important jubilee in the life of Victor Fedorovich. I should tell you that as a statesman he relies on the Orthodox worldview. He is a profound believer, and under the law and constitution, as a President supposed to do, he serves the cause of the spiritual enlightenment of his people, certainly through the means available to his high position. The Church appreciates these efforts of the Ukrainian President, and it was with full responsibility and profound satisfaction that I awarded him this high order of the Russian Orthodox Church.

- Your Holiness, the Russian Orthodox Church has initiated many public projects on the church-wide scale, while being located in various states. Are there any difficulties involved in the fact that legislations in various countries differ? For instance, the Department for Social World and Charity has launched many church-wide projects in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Will there be certain differences in implementing these projects?

- There may be a difference but we are quite accustomed to it. The Church is 2000 year old, while the Russian Church is 1000 year old. And the Church has come through various political systems and used to live on different legislative fields, to put it in the modern terms. What could be done at one place was not always easy to do at another. This is true for the life of the Church assessed on a time scale.

But on a geographical scale? Certainly, there are differences too. But the most important thing, for which we should thank God today, is that in all the countries of the canonical space of the Russian Orthodox Church, people have a full opportunity to freely confess their faith and to live Christianly not only in their private or family life, but also to express their Christian beliefs in public life. This I believe to be the most important thing. For this we thank God.

- Your Holiness, here in Kiev a meeting of the Russian Orthodox Church Holy Synod took place and, among other things, it adopted an appeal to believers in Ukraine who are regrettably still in the schism. This appeal regrettably is lacking any practical recommendations for coming out of the schism. A few days ago Ukrainian believers asked me to ask you what practical actions you advise those who wish to come out of the schism. How to make repentance? Who to address? Do you plan to give certain practical recommendations to those who wish to come back from the schism?

- First, thank God that this process has already started, and thousands of people come to local priests and bishops, and many receive Baptism in the awareness that the ‘baptism’ which was administered to them has no grace of God. Priests are coming over. But certainly all these moves have not yet been on a mass scale for a number of reasons.

First, people are afraid. It seems to some that repentance is a judgment with a jury. We should repent before God every day. Repentance should be made by both those who claim to be righteous, repenting perhaps for their purely spiritual pride, and sinners. Even imprisoned criminals repent. Repentance is our main spiritual power through which every one of us becomes better. Therefore, to make repentance does not mean to subject oneself to a public ‘whipping’ – the thing people are afraid of and disagree with. It is because many found themselves in schism against their own free will. Besides, when a child comes to his parents to admit he did something wrong, does it lead to an aggravation in the family relations? On the contrary, the parents show love and help this child. The Church, as I have repeatedly stated, is a community of healing in which healing is offered to all including those who experienced the tragedy of schism.

Therefore, I would like to say to all those who are listening to me now: you should not hesitate. The most terrible thing for one is to die in a schism. The most terrible thing is to deprive oneself of God's grace. It is necessary to come back from the schism to the Church, to take the Sacraments and to make up for all that was received in the schism only externally with the real gift of the Holy Spirit who is communicated to people only the Church.

And I very much hope that this process of people's re-uniting with the one saving Church will ultimately lead to the full disappearance of the schism. It was the case not only in Ukraine; it was the case in Russia in its time and in many other places, and the Church has always found strength to restore unity and the fullness of grace-giving life through prayer and repentance.

- We are talking on the eve of the Day of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles. From this year on it will be a public holiday in Russia, and some representatives of the civil society do not much like it, saying that the clericalization of public life continues as the Church invades the public sphere which should be secular. What can you say in response to these people?

- Almost nothing. It is an attitude bordering on certain ravings. If we deny the historical significance of the Baptism of Rus', we should reject the supporting pillar of our civilization, because we as a people were formed under the influence of the most powerful spiritual tradition that generated from the Baptism of Rus'. Those who say so do not themselves belong to this tradition, of course. It is their right. But they have no right to deprive an absolute majority of people of their historical memory, as if it were possible though.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/56880/