Patriarch Kirill answers questions from Ukrainian journalists in anticipation of his visit to Ukraine

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church had a discussion with representatives of the Ukrainian mass media on July 15, 2010, at his working residence in Chisty Pereulok. Before his visit to Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill answered questions from Ukrainian TV channels Inter, Ukraine, First National, *and* Era.

I would like to welcome representatives of the Ukrainian mass media and to have a talk with you before my visit to Ukraine. As an introduction I would like to tell you about my impressions of the first visit because I was so much moved by all that I saw and felt in Ukraine.

The places I went to became my most vivid remembrances of the last year. I was struck by the fact that despite the complicated political context and the contradictions existing in the Ukrainian society, an absolute majority of the people cherish the Orthodox faith and spiritual values defined by this faith. These are the same values that are cherished in Russia, Byelorussia, Moldova and other places. These are the values that outline the parameters of a very important cultural and civilizational notion which I would describe as the Russian World.

For Ukrainians I would like to stress that the Russian World does not mean that of Russia. Even less it is a world of the Russian Federation. It is the world which has come out of our common font – the baptismal font of Kiev. It is the world which exists on the level of faith, intellect, spirituality and culture. This world is not altered by the fact that some deny it; nothing changes because this world exists, and it is an objective reality. I have come to feel this reality and the whole power of this wonderful spiritual and cultural phenomenon, which has been generated by the Orthodox Church. It is a most powerful experience.

I am again going to Ukraine with joy. I hope to visit Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev and to pray again with my faithful people, to touch shrines, to think about much and to understand much. These trips are very important for a Primate of a Church.

I would like to use this opportunity and say that I hold Ukraine very dear for many reasons. But the most important one is the power of faith, the power of religious feeling, the purity and naturalness of the manifestation of this feeling. God grant that people preserve this faith and together with it the remarkable spiritual tradition of Kievan Rus'.

- *Inter TV channel*: Your Holiness, thank you for the opportunity to hear these words from you

for our Ukrainian believers. It is no secret that you have closely followed the developments that have happened in Ukraine when you have been away from our country. Do you think anything has changed?

- In the first place, I would like to see what has changed. As they say, it is better to see once than to hear one hundred times. But it is clear already now that there is a political stabilization, leveling of economic indexes, development of relations with the world and the neighbours, including Russia, Europe, and with the United States of America. I believe there have been considerable qualitative changes in the life of the Ukrainian society, though it may be an outsider's view. Precisely for this reason I would like to see and feel what is happening in Ukraine today. Well, in short, I assess positively the developments in Ukraine in the recent months.

- *Inter TV channel:* You have recently called upon the clergy to make a more active use of new technical means in dealing with the faithful, such as the Internet and social networks. But it cannot replace direct human contacts...

- Quite right. But what are, say, social networks today, or the Internet or e-mail? After all it is about an envelope, be it a conventional envelope in which we put our hand-written letters or an electronic form. All these are technical media which are not the point.

I have to say that I see in the development of these social networks and live journals one very positive things – the revival of the epistolary genre. If we look at the second half of the 20th century, we see that it was an era of the dying epistolary genre. People stopped to write letter – all spoke with each other by telephone. But a letter disciplines the thought. Of course, if you write to a close friend and this letter is read by nobody but this friend, you can afford making mistakes in it. But any thought if committed to paper to become open for a wide range of people to read, especially if there is a feedback, when others can immediately react to this text and critically at that, would discipline one and develop the culture of setting forth one's thoughts in writing. And the ability to set forth one's thoughts in writing is one of the most significant indicators of one's culture. Therefore the development of epistolary genre to reach a new stage is culturally a very important positive step.

And now concerning the participation of the clergy. Indeed, we do not reproach St. Paul for developing doctrine through correspondence. All that St. Paul created are letters. We do not reproach holy fathers and ascetics whose heritage we admire today for the fact that many of their works were also set forth in

letters. Similarly, today clergy and theologians have an opportunity to convey their thoughts in writing, to share their spiritual experience, to answer to the bewilderments of other people and to join polemics. It is certainly a great challenge because when a priest signs his full name for all the rest to know that it is a priest who speaks, then the responsibility is very high. Therefore I call upon the clergy to participate in all this modern life, in this exchange of information, but only with a strong feeling of responsibility. One cannot just chat in the Internet. One cannot present one's thoughts in the way that people take them as those of the Church. Therefore, on the one hand, I call upon the clergy to be more active in the use of these new envelops for correspondence, but on the other, considering thus growing responsibility, I suggest that one should prepare oneself both spiritually and intellectually for this kind of work.

- *Inter TV channel:* Your Holiness, it is no secret that both in Ukraine and Russia there are so-called social diseases. What is the role of the Church today? Can this role be much stronger to combat pride, money-grabbing and greed?

- This is precisely what the social role of the Church lies in. Today we do not limit ourselves to work with individuals, and we do not reduce the Church's preaching only to the preaching of individual morals. Why? – Because history has shown: if we work only with the individual and neglect the social dimension, we overlook pastorally the most important thing, which is how the inner world of the individual is self-fulfilled in a socium. Certainly, evil intentions come from the heart, as Scripture says (see, Mk. 7:19). Greed, pride, anger, impatience, jealousy, envy – a great deal of spiritual problems – arise inside, in the heart, but spill out. We can see them on the scale of the country and society, like, say, in the economy when crime begins to destroy like a cancer the healthy fabric of economic life, to destroy the very society. We also see them in politics when politicians are engaged in dividing people for their narrow political purposes instead of uniting and serving them. And what is the result? The result is a blown-up national life, broken destinies, ruined families. Indeed, when an acute political crisis comes it goes through human destinies.

What is the reason of all this? – The inner state of a person. A person educated for responsibility before God will not project his inner evil into the public, political and economic life and the legislature, so closely bound up with ethics.

That is why the Church says today that she walks around the world holding the cross of the Lord. And what is a cross? It is an intersection of the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension is the inner dimension of man: man and God, while horizontal dimension is the participation of man societal life. Therefore one should by no means start individualistic moralism and say: All that concerns society is of no interest to us since we deal only with man. Just as one should not say otherwise, a thing

which is often present in the world Christianity: We are engaged in social problems, whereas private life is one's private life with the freedom for one to decide everything on one's own. The Orthodox Church is by no means against the freedom of the personality but it calls upon man to develop in such a way as to realize his freedom within the framework of moral responsibility of man before God.

- *The First National TV channel:* Our today's society is called a society of consumers. What does the Church do to make spiritual values prevail over material ones in man?

- You have rightly formulated the question, so that I have almost nothing to answer. Because on the one hand, material consumption is a natural desire of man: if man does not take care of the material consumption he will die. This need is laid in our instincts, as we have to eat, drink, clothe ourselves and see to it that the human race is reproduced. It is linked with human survival, and the Church by no means can adopt a detached and moralistic attitude: You see, you should not think about all that. It is inadmissible especially today when there are so many poor people in our societies, when people are sometimes even starving, when they have no money for the necessities, let alone good education, medical care, healthy rest, cultural life… For this reason the Church cannot say today: You know, all this is bad. And what are the things the Church opposed, oppose and will oppose? It opposes what holy fathers called 'the lust of flesh'. It is when consumption comes to dominate one's life. Then lust (and lust is a disease, a disorder of the inner balance) comes to govern one's life. Such a person concerns himself only with things material while the spiritual dimension is gone. It is very important that man, especially, the modern man, should remember the wonderful words of the Saviour: 'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?' (Mt. 16:26). These words should be written in golden letters and hung in every room, especially in cloakrooms of some rich men. Indeed, what is the use for one in acquiring the world but ruining one's soul?

For this reason the Church should put everything to its proper place in people's conscience, doing it very naturally, with love, without coming down from the height of its position to teach people who sometimes live in poverty, but proclaiming spiritual values in solidarity with poor people. Then nobody will accuse the Church of hypocrisy and sanctimony but people will listen to the preaching of the Church with attention.

The preaching we have just spoken about is of enormous significance for the survival of the whole human civilization because the psychology of consumption, 'the lust of flesh', is unviable. It will destroy the spiritual dimension of human life and turn the human being into an animal.

- *The First National TV Channel:* Is the mass culture, pop-culture, in your view, threatening

our today's society? What is to be done to cultivate in the youth morality and spirituality which is so shaky and so easily lost today?

- We use the words 'mass culture' without thinking about its meaning. It seems to us that mass culture is a culture of the masses. It is not quite so. A culture of masses is called 'people's culture'. The term 'mass culture' appeared at the same time as the term 'the mass media'. Why? – Because the mass culture is a culture which is reproduced through the mass media and lives mostly at their expense. Take any area of the mass culture. If you remove the mass media, it vanishes.

Therefore it is very important to remember that for the mass media not every manifestation of what is called cultural life is worthy of attracting hundreds of millions of people. Culture – and I have repeatedly stated it – is called to cultivate people, to cultivate the human personality. The word 'culture', just as religious culture, originates from what cultivates, what links man to God, hence the word 'cult'. So, what is very important to understand? If a culture destroys the human personality, it is not a culture but an anti-culture; it is devilry. And if the mass media turn this into a mass phenomenon, it is a disaster. Therefore, great attention is needed here from those who have an influence on the mass media and those who support them, but first of all, the responsible mass media workers themselves. They should know how to discern spirits to avoid taking sin on their souls.

Certainly, we live an informationally-united world today. If you do not take sin on your soul in Ukraine, some will in another European country but in an instant it will become known both in Ukraine and Russia. It is impossible to put any obstacles here and not necessary, but I believe we should educate people through the mass media for them to understand what is dangerous and what is beneficial for their spiritual life.

This is the role of the Church in the first place of course. But if the Church relies on the mass media then its word will also become a mass culture.

- *Radio and TV channel 'Ukraine':* Your Holiness, some time ago, speaking of the Ukrainian politics, you said that any well-considered policy was impossible in Ukraine without harmonizing the interests of the Ukrainian society in the system of basic values. Tell me please what basic values you meant and how in your view this harmonization of Ukraine is possible?

- As far as basic values are concerned, these are the values which were born by our faith, because religious values lay in the basis of the Old Russian State from which the present day sovereign states including Ukraine have generated. It is the matrix that formed the mentality of people, their worldview and system of values and this matrix has existed for 1000 years. What a great effort was made to destroy it, especially in the post-Revolution time! Yes, and not only in the post-Revolution but also pre-Revolution…

And when I speak of the need to preserve the basic values I state first of all that this matrix of the people's life ought not to be destroyed. Because if we destroy it we will cease to be Russians or, as they say today, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians… We will become different. It will be an enormous civilizational catastrophe, just as in the case of other nations' losing their identity. The world will become uniform and terrible; the world will become easily manipulated. Why? – Because this spiritual culture traditional for most people is the basic criterion for discerning good and evil.

So, when we speak about today's Ukraine and today's Russia we should understand that there are an enormous number of challenges to these values. They are often associated with the political orientation, the cultural orientation, with the influence of other cultures on the national life. In order to preserve the people in unity (in this case we are speaking about Ukraine), it is important to preserve the basic values and on the basis of these values to harmonize those sections of society which absorbed later cultural influences and which, firstly, sometimes insist on these cultural differences and, secondly, wish these cultural differences to be applied to the other part of the Ukrainian society.

For a country to stay united, the kingdom should not be divided against itself (cf. Mk. 3:24). Given all the diversity of views and preferences, what is it against which it should not be divided? – Against these basic values. Then you can face up pluralism: some like tea with milk, others with sugar – chose whatever you like.

We preserve unity as a people. We join the family of other European nations not as those who are led and hang on the every word of the other, a stronger partner. We join it as equal partners and bearers of our own historical and cultural code.

I believe in some sense it is important today for every nation. Incidentally, the best minds in Europe and other countries understand it very well. I had an opportunity to speak in the UN, at the Council on Human Rights, and we dealt with this theme of preserving national, spiritual, cultural and religious identity. At that meeting, there were ambassadors from almost all the countries of the world who are UN members, and I did not hear any negative comment. Everybody understood that in the situation of globalization it is an enormous challenge since we have to preserve the diversity and beauty of God's world while developing good international cooperation and peaceful relations among nations.

- *Radio and TV channel 'Ukraine':* Your Holiness, now in Italy they forbid hanging crosses in schools, in France Muslim women can no longer wear hijab in public places while in Russia, on the contrary, lessons on basic Orthodox culture are introduced. Tell me please what you think is the ideal model of co-existence between church and state?

- European countries including Russia and Ukraine have declared themselves today to be secular countries in which church is separated from state. We should think within this constitutional space. There are people who object to the separation of church and state and there are people whose attitude to it is very positive. But whatever private opinions may be, the fact is that modern European countries are secular. It seems to me that this term and notion are abused today in a very dangerous way.

What does secularism mean and when did it appear? It emerged as a political phenomenon in Western Europe. It was a response of the society to the clericalization of politics. A number of Western European states were ruled by bishops and representatives of the clergy including the Pope of Rome. These church rulers carried out their policy accordingly, of course, building on their own understanding of how things should be arranged. This was not always met with understanding in society and among the people and it was not without reason that such a term as tyranny appeared. The French Revolution came out against tyranny. We will not start definitions and analysis to find out what was right and what was wrong. But there was struggle including with clericalism.

What was offered in return? Instead of the participation of the clergy in state governance the principle of the Church's non-interference in state governance was declared just as the non-interference of the state in the governance over the Church. That's all. It is the separation of church and state. And what is happening today? Today, under the cover of this term, a false interpretation to it is given, presupposing the ousting of religion from the public space. What we are seeing in Italy today is this attempt to oust religious tradition from the public consciousness. What does it have to do with governance? – Nothing. And we do know that crosses can be not only removed from schools; they can be also sawn off churches. And where is the guarantee that tomorrow some lady or gentlemen will not appeal to the European Court to object to his children passing by a church with a cross on their way to school, or a mosque with a crescent?

We can see now another active attempt to oust Christian culture and Christian faith from the life of Europe. But remarkably such Orthodox countries as Russia, Greece, Cyprus and Catholic Lithuania and Poland and many other countries have come out in support of Italy. Therefore we should state clearly to our opponents that we are not ready to accept secularization as a synonym of a godless and non-

religious world. Then it is not secularization but a triumph of one of the ideologies, the triumph of atheism. We have already lived in an atheistic society and know what it is.

As for the teaching of Basic Orthodox Culture in Russia, certainly it does not go against the principle of church-state separation because there are lessons on not only Orthodox but also Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist culture, and secular ethics and secular cultural and moral tradition are taught as the Orthodox Church has proposed. Now many choose this course and I see nothing bad in it. But it is important that all the courses should be aimed at one goal – the education of the younger generation for high morality. And all this, according to my observations, does not at all run contrary to the separation of church and state.

- Era TV and Radio Company: **Your Holiness, to continue the previous question. When the influence of the Church in society is discussed, references are often made to the number of believers and parishes but seldom to their quality. The quality of a priest is revealed in his ability to govern the parish, to organize the parishioners. How to ensure that the number of parishes grows into the quality of the priest, if I may state it so?**

- I would extend your question and complicate it: How to ensure that the number of parishes is reflected in the quality of people? This is the main task. It is something we all think over and work at today. Only we spoke about religious motivation and moral motivation in general. Today the religious motivation occupies a very small place in people's life, as the choice is more often made according to pragmatic considerations. But if a believer is not guided by faith in making important decisions, then what are the implications of his faith?

A person becomes a real believer when he in his actions is motivated by his religious convictions, the ethical Christian code and the Beatitudes, to speak in purely church language. The number of people who claim to be Orthodox in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus is much greater than that of the Orthodox who go to church. If out of the church-goers we chose those who seek to be motivated by their Orthodox morality in their specific life situations, then their number will be even smaller. I would say there is a lot of work ahead.

In your question there is something especially disturbing for me. It is the moral and spiritual condition of the clergy. The clergy are the people who should set an example. Therefore the education of a modern priest and the creation of conditions for his continuous growth is the most important task of the episcopate. Very often a young man comes to a seminary with his eyes shining and with great enthusiasm. At graduation his enthusiasm remains but the eyes no longer shine. He begins his service

at a parish and his eyes no longer shine and his enthusiasm is gone…

How to ensure that the enthusiasm of a young man, who has decided to devote himself to the Lord and who is ready for certain deprivations and limitations, does not wither away but develop with time? We have the examples of such remarkable priests and ascetics. I am traveling much today to parishes and dioceses to meet with people who carry on their service with great enthusiasm in severe climatic and hard material conditions. I will tell an utterly unexpected thing for some: we stand in the great need of ascetics and we should do all possible so that such ascetics should be as many as possible. They are like small locomotives who will tow the people.

- *Ukraine TV and Radio Company:* Your Holiness, you have just taken a question from my lips, as we say in Ukraine. Figures show that the number of Christians in the world in proportion to the world population is steadily declining. It is understandable why. How you think Christian Churches can be encouraged to replace rivalry, which has sometimes taken terrible forms as you are aware, with joint efforts for enhancing Christian influence in the world, if it is necessary, of course?

- It is very necessary. In order to avoid rivalry among Christians who are kin in the spirit, it is important that the influence made by the political factor on religious life should be excluded. In history it has always happened so that politics would invade church life with terrible consequences. After all, the historic schism between East and West in the 11th century dividing Christianity into the Orthodox East and the Catholic West was a result of political motives brought into church life. It is a classic example of what happens to a Church when it begins to be motivated by political considerations.

There is another important point. It is the desire of power if it is not linked with the spiritual life of a man. Spiritual power can have a very positive aspect. It is first of all the spiritual authority. The growth of spiritual authority is very important. But the growth of bureaucratic powers can be dangerous but more often than not, struggle in the past and perhaps also in the present is waged precisely around these bureaucratic powers.

Concerning Christian kinship in the spirit. There is another problem if we speak of the whole Christendom, namely, a part of this Christendom lives today according to a different law, the law of secular society. Not in the sense that citizens who belong to these religious groups are good and law-abiding citizens. The point is different. Christians let in their inner world the sinful elements of the world and justify these elements if they are offered by a secular society. We see such developments in modern Protestantism. It is very dangerous when under the influence of secular liberal views of life, these

secular philosophical liberal clichés are repeated in Protestant Churches and take root in religious consciousness.

This is precisely how the theme of female priesthood emerged. It was not dictated by missionary considerations. When I asked a Protestant leader, 'Tell me, the number of parishioners has increased with the coming of women priests?' He smiled and answered, 'No'. – 'It was not a missionary project?' – 'No, it was just respect for the rights of the personality'. That is to say, the secular notion of human rights was incorporated in theology and church practice contrary to the entire church Christian tradition. The apostolic tradition excludes this practice, but to please a secular liberal standard, this practice is incorporated in church life.

Another similar problem is the attitude to homosexuality. Here to please the secular liberal standard the very Word of God is distorted. It is written in black and white that it is a sin. And what do you think? Our brothers say, 'No, no, it is wrong to understand it in this way. It is not at all a sin; it is, you know, simply a cultural context of the time when St. Paul wrote it'. It turns out that to please a liberal standard one can even deny the source of one's faith.

Recently I have met with a very important ecumenical leader. I began saying to him about the fact that the developments in Protestantism take Protestants further and further away from the Orthodox and the Catholics, thus increasing the internal gap in the Christian world. And if it increases it will be difficult for us to defend Christian values. And what he told me stuck ne and at the same time helped me to understand how profound this crisis of Christianity is. He said to me quietly, 'Well, what is special about these developments? We have different attitudes to the problems of the Middle East; we have different attitudes to the economic crisis, and to homosexuality we have different attitudes as well'.

If we do not manage to change the situation through the internal dialogue between the Orthodox and Protestant worlds, then I see a very sad prospect – an even greater alienation of the Protestant world from Orthodoxy and hence a weakening of common Christian witness. Therefore the Orthodox Church faces an enormous task to bear witness to the purity of the apostolic tradition, to the purity of faith before, among others, non-Orthodox Christians.

- Ukraine TV and Radio Company: **Your Holiness, just a couple of words about cooperation. As I understand it there is no such a great gap between Catholicism and Orthodoxy as between Protestantism and Orthodoxy?**

- In the Catholic world there are also liberal tendencies. They gathered momentum in the second part of

the 20th century, and we in the Orthodox East watched these tendencies with concern. But I should say that the position of the present Pope Benedict XVI inspires us with optimism. Perhaps, he is criticized so strongly for it by liberal theologians and the liberal mass media in the West, but his attitude to many public and ethical issues coincides fully with that of the Orthodox Church. It offers us an opportunity to defend Christian values together with the Catholic Church on the level of international organizations and in the international space.

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