Metropolitan Hilarion's speech in Churches in Europe working group of St. Petersburg Dialogue forum

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On July 14, 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, participated in the working group on Churches in Europe of the St. Petersburg Dialogue. Below is his address to the group.

The Man of the Modernization Era

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to have this opportunity to open the meeting of the Churches in Europe working group.

In recent times a special place in the public discussion has been given to the theme of modernization, especially in connection with the economic crisis. It disturbs the minds of politicians, representatives of the business community, political scientists, economists and sociologists. The very term 'modernization' has become perhaps the most popular in the media space. What then should be the man of the modernization era? What qualities and merits should he possess to promote progress in a particular sphere of life? Many agree that he must own such distinctive features as creative thinking, scholarship, intellectuality and erudition, efficiency, mobility and communicability. What however can be a source of all these qualities? It should be remembered that man is not only a physical but also a spiritual creature. Therefore, spiritual life becomes actually the foundation of all the positive qualities of man.

In the last two centuries, secularism has sought to persuade us that religiosity is a number one enemy of modernization. Modernization has acquired a vector directed to material wealth and temporal pleasures. As a result, the modern mass culture has turned material wealth and things into a cult, placing them above the spiritual manifestations of being and sometimes even setting them against it. Since modernization and militant secularism became allies, man has been oriented towards the continuous acquisition of material wealth. He is concerned about how to arrange his house in the best way and to buy some expensive things. During his days off, he prefers to go out to a restaurant or a place of entertainment. He has in his case a book on economics and finances, a fresh newspaper, a booklet from

a travel agent rather than a work of fiction or a spiritual book.

This image of man symbolizes the process of continued secularization, which is one of the most serious challenges of today. In Europe, which traditionally has been called a Christian continent, we see the assertion of a way of public life which presupposes the secular nature of the state, ethical relativism and the existence of various spheres of thought and action hostile to the religious ideas and values. Most importantly, this way of life leads to the disappearance of such human qualities as industriousness, initiative, creativity, openness without which modernization is not possible.

A person rejecting his spiritual roots and ignoring the moral dimension of this work is weak and vulnerable. It is only a harmonious person who can realize modernization, and to become such is possible only with reliance on the solid foundation of religious tradition. To achieve it, education in family and school must contain the religious dimension. In the process of religious and ethical learning, a person becomes firm in immutable moral values, forming a clear life attitude, learning to love his homeland, the culture of his people and to respect those around him; he is introduced to the life of people worthy of emulation. All this helps to build a harmonious society in which the pursuit of prosperity is restrained by the care of one's neighbours and charity while consumption is restrained by responsibility.

History knows of cases in which modernization was carried out with disregard of age-old spiritual and cultural values of the people. Suffice it to recall the first Russian Emperor Peter I. He carried out an economic modernization of our countries, inconceivable for his time. But what was the price of it? The social order was destroyed; the traditions of education were violated; the Church, which played a special role in the life of society, was put in humiliating conditions; unknown and alien customs and habits were imposed on people. And perhaps at precisely that time destructive mechanisms were laid to become activated in 1917.

There are also other examples of modernization rejecting the centuries-old experience of the people and their tradition, such as Bolshevism in Russia and Nazism in Germany. The Soviet state sought to achieve progress by expelling religion completely not only from public but also private life. The icons of saints were replaced with portraits of communism movement leaders. To come to church, to wear a cross, to celebrate church holidays was believed inadmissible and almost criminal for a citizen of the Soviet Union. A person was turned into a small cog in the enormous mechanism spread over one sixth of the land. But the spiritually deprived state based on fear and suppression of the person, prohibitions and restriction has proved to be nonviable and ultimately collapsed.

The German Nazism preached the idea of the domination of one nation over others, the unification of people on the basis of a pattern developed by the Third Reich's propaganda. Moral norms and values

were replaced by artificial virtues, such as faithfulness to the Reich and its leader, concern for the acquisition of life space for their own nation by eliminating and enslaving other nations. And it was only through military means that the people of the Earth put an end to this anti-humane ideology.

Clearly, a human civilization without spiritual guidelines is an idol with feet of clay. The lack of spirituality devalues all the material wealth of man. The state cannot rely on functionaries concerned only for the pursuit of profit. Similarly, businessmen cannot build their life only on the rate of dollar and euro and the Dow Jones index. A person needs to feel responsible before other people, before his nation and the world. And for this he needs a certain system of values to be inculcated in him and to serve as a guideline, the guiding beacon in his life and professional activity.

In Russia an experiment is carried on for building a system of teaching spiritual and ethical culture in school. This attempt at modernization has provoked serious discussions in our society. We are ready for a comprehensive discussion on the parameters of this experiment, especially with our German colleagues, since in Germany the problem of religious formation and education is also very relevant. In February 2010, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate held a conference on Teaching Religion in Public School: Topical Discussion in Russia and Germany, which laid foundations for a discussion on this problem. We are called to continue elaborating this theme, exerting efforts for preserving the spiritual and cultural traditions of our two countries.

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