



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, at the opening of the WCC Permanent Conference for Consensus and Cooperation. Moscow, 30 June 2010

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ,

First of all, allow me to wholeheartedly welcome the WCC General Secretary the Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit and all members of the WCC Permanent Conference for Consensus and Cooperation, who arrived to Moscow on invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church. I would like to inform you that we are planning to hold next year here in Moscow a consultation of the Faith and Order Commission under the theme 'A Source of Ecclesiastic Authority'.

For the last two decades a situation in the inter-Christian movement has changed dramatically. Gradually there appeared in the ecumenical movement some tendencies which were not characteristic for it in the past. Initially, the primary goal of the ecumenical movement was to learn more about other Christian denominations, to study thoroughly their experience and legacy. It used to be an attempt to go back to the roots of historical Christendom by learning the Tradition of the Early Church, and it was a distinctive feature of both the WCC and the ecumenical movement as a whole.

Unfortunately, we have often observed that for the last years this mutual interest has tended to decline. As a result, it inevitably diminishes the significance of all our joint efforts in the face of secular, materialistic world-view challenges.

Quite often numerous statements of some high-ranking church officials are heard to the effect that the original interest in inter-Christian dialogue is now subsiding into indifference. I dare suppose that the main question of the current agenda is to reconsider the very core of the ecumenical movement and inter-Christian theological dialogue. I believe we all are called today to rethink the paradigm of interchurch relations.

To do so, we have to turn back to the legacy of the Early Church in order to identify the grounds of its original unity, to figure out why this unity was possible in the first millennium of Christian history. As far back as in the apostolic times, the expression *lex orandi, lex credendi est* defined the church everyday practice, establishing relationships between prayer and faith. Therefore, what we now observe as a stumbling block for different Churches is unfortunately an illustrative evidence of the fact that this ancient fundamental theological statement has sunk into oblivion. The tendency is to shift from this primary position to some secondary matters that have a questionable value for Christian missionary tasks.

Thus, for example, in order to attract the attention of modern society, the WCC widely employs the language of the mass media. On the one hand, this language is fully understandable for modern people, but on the other it has nothing that conveys the specifically Christian world-view and values of the Gospel. As a result, we seem to equalize the Church and social institutions, we seem to become a part of the social and political mainstream. Theologically speaking, we seem to forget that this position contradicts the nature of the Church.

Of course, Christianity must use a language understandable and clear for members of the modern society. But this language has to be unique and radical, and it has to differ from other secular movements and organizations. In other words, the ecumenical movement should not follow social and political language models, but to hold, as St. Paul says, *The traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thes. 2:15).*

Everyone knows that the liberalization of Christian ethical norms is of extreme danger for the traditional faith. But some modern Protestant movements make an attempt to introduce this liberal approach as a certain 'new human era' in the history of Christian exhortation.

For Eastern Orthodox Christendom this point of view is absolutely unacceptable. We cannot agree that the moral ideals of the Gospel have become obsolete and lost their power. Similarly, it is related to the matters of theology and liturgical life, the aim and sense of which is now not supposed to lead people to God, but is reduced to feigned 'humanization' of church life exclusively adapted to some ways of 'this world'; just as Ludwig von Feuerbach foresaw it, anthropology has come to replace theology.

Now we stand at a crossroads, because in the context of an acute financial crisis some people doubt the future of inter-Christian dialogue and cooperation. What we really need is to undertake a structural reform of the WCC. In the first instance, we ought to discover a new approach, a new vision and understanding of our ecumenical movement. We have to realize the fundamental cohesion between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. A good example is to be found in the Church Tradition. Over again, it is necessary to emphasize that this essential principle must be regarded as unique and the only safe

foundation for inter-Christian cooperation.

Many of you participated in hot discussions that after VIII General Assembly in Harare led to the formation of a special WCC committee for the Orthodox membership. After IX Assembly in Porto Alegre a *Permanent Committee for Consensus and Cooperation* was established. This Committee is now an effective mechanism that keeps inter-Christian dialogue safe from various distortions that took place in the past. This allows us to focus on some important questions that require a serious attention and new approaches.

In the last twenty years some representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate were reproached for being isolated and unable to follow the way of cooperation, solidarity and fellowship with other Christian denominations. Our today's meeting clearly shows that it is not so. However, the Russian Orthodox Church has its own understanding of the way towards Christian unity and cooperation that is shared by other Local Orthodox Churches. We are ready to clarify our position in relation to this question and seek for mutual understanding amongst other Christians.

We have also prepared a program for you. The main aim of the program is to let you learn more about today's life of the Russian Orthodox Church and its diaconal service. I want to emphasize that the methodology of our social service was worked out in close cooperation with various charity agencies, such as ATC, Church Aid of Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Diaconal Service of Evangelical Church of Germany. The WCC has also rendered an invaluable service. Therefore, I am convinced that our Church and the WCC has reliable guarantee of success for fruitful cooperation in the future.

As was repeatedly mentioned, the Faith and Order Commission, which is called to play a key role in the work of the WCC, now seems to be sidelined. Nevertheless, a lack of mutual understanding of Christian denominations in the sphere of theological science can only reinforce some unnecessary fears, which will be inherited by the generations of theologians to come. These future theologians in turn will inevitably repeat old trite cliché, which appear as a result of superficial acquaintance with doctrinal theology of their colleagues. I am deeply convinced that one should pay more attention to the Faith and Order Commission and its role in the sphere of inter-Christian cooperation, because it has priority significance for the WCC. If we dissemble that theological disagreements do exist, if we think we can content ourselves with some practical considerations, we shall never follow the way of true cooperation.

I would like also to let you know that due to my obligations as chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, I shall no longer be a member of the Permanent Committee for Consensus and Cooperation. Therefore, I delegate this mission to the Very Reverend Mikhail Gundyayev who is secretary of the Representation of the Moscow Patriarchate at the WCC. I hope that his skills, sociability and responsiveness will contribute a lot to the functioning of the Committee and will help to

manage the agenda.

Dear brothers and sisters! I wish you successful work and I hope that your acquaintance with contemporary life of our Church, with our faithful nation and its shrines will be interesting and fruitful.

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