



# DECR chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk's speech at the presentation of Polish version of Patriarch Kirill's book *Freedom and Responsibility: In a Search for Harmony. Human Rights and Dignity* (Christian Theological Academy, Warsaw)

## ***Introduction***

First of all I would like to thank all those who participated in the preparation of the Polish version of the book by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russian entitled *Freedom and Responsibility: In a Search for Harmony. Human Rights and Dignity*. I see in this publication an interest of the Polish intelligentsia in the Russian theological, historiosophic and political thought as an essential part of the Russian culture as a whole. The ideas underlying the works by Patriarch Kirill can be a subject for intellectual communication between Russian and Polish theologians, philosophers, public and political leaders and ordinary believers.

## ***The topicality of the theme of human rights and freedoms***

The triumph of the technological thought and advanced technologies in our days sometimes obscures the importance of the spiritual dimension of human life. However, eternal questions asked by humankind the answers to which have been sought by people in religious traditions are no less relevant today than they were centuries ago.

Among the most important questions of this kind is human freedom. Freedom of the human being, which is different from that of other God's creatures, requires a profound reflection by each human generation. The realization of personal freedom is intimately bound up with virtue and presupposes continued spiritual efforts. Unfortunately, the modern consumerist awareness is often incapable of grasping this simple truth. Indeed, it is easier for one to seek pleasure and entertainment and indulge in one's passions. One's freedom, as they often say, is limited only by the interests of those around one.

However, this approach does not take into account the complexity of human nature. A person, who is

limited only by the rights of people around him, does not have to seek moral perfection and to follow the voice of his conscience. Actually, a person deprived of moral guidelines is inclined to sin and self-destruction. Besides, such a person is incapable of not only social constructive endeavor but even mere co-existence with his dearest ones. For him the freedom of will turns into shameful slavery to sin.

It is for this reason that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has devoted his book to the question of relationships between freedom and responsibility and we are called to answer it in our everyday actions and thoughts. In the articles and statements included in this book this problem is considered from various perspectives.

### ***Moral responsibility as prerequisite for human survival***

The very reality around us leads a person to the realization of the need for him to bear moral responsibility for society and himself. Clearly, a refusal to give moral assessment to the actions of individuals, authorities and the people makes many social problems insoluble. Thus, society has actually refused to combat such social vices as alcoholism, drug-addiction and promiscuity since, according to the liberal logic, if these vices are chosen by free will then society and state should not impede it but rather create conditions for its realization in the best way. Indeed, in Europe today there are houses of prostitution everywhere, in some places drugs are legalized; there are a lot of night bars and dens for drunkards. These recipes for solving moral problems lead to the degradation of whole nations and to the growing depopulation of our continent.

In addition, amoral ways are imposed on society, especially the younger generation, through the mass media and educational system. Here we deal with inadmissible violence against the conscience of people who become victims of a new totalitarian ideology.

Even the global financial crisis has in its basis not technological difficulties or economic patterns but human vices, such as thirst for money, deception and betrayal, greed and egoism. Continuing to ignore their destructive power and rejecting morally-oriented education, humanity finds itself on the brink of collapse.

### ***Absolutizing the right to choose***

We have increasingly encountered the attempts to absolutize the right to choose and to neglect

responsibility with which this right is closely connected. But the Christian culture in which the modern teaching on rights is rooted has always asserted that amoral behavior incompatible with the God-given dignity is an evil parodying freedom and driving human beings away from their Creator.

### ***Lost relation between human rights and morality***

It should be noted that the post-war documents on human rights reflect the relation of freedom and moral responsibility. Thus, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms state that human rights and morality are related.

In the later international acts, such as the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union does not establish this relation between human rights and morality. Freedom is thus completely torn away from morality. Moreover, in the modern liberal socio-political practices, it is considered amoral to pose the question that law may restrict sinful aspirations of the individual. It means that human rights become increasingly a closed system which has nothing to do with the spiritual tradition preserved in Europe by the Church.

### ***Liberalism's monopoly on the truth***

Christianophobia is spiraling in Europe. Among the example of the infringement on the rights of Christians is the decision made by the European Court of Human Rights on 3 November 2009 in the case of Lautsi versus Italy. This decision asserts that the presence of crucifixes in public schools in Italy is a violation of human rights. The decision places believers in an inequitable position by declaring secularism to be the neutral foundation of societal life. Here we deal with an attempt to establish a new godless ideology depriving Christians of an opportunity to bring the religious dimension into public life. The Russian Orthodox Church has supported Italy, Russia and some other states who have come out against this decision which vividly shows how the modern understanding of human right may become a pretext for restricting the freedom of believers. Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Romania and San Marino have come out as a third party. It would be good to see Poland among them.

### ***The need for dialogue of worldviews. Development of 'Basic Teaching...' as a contribution to this dialogue***

The importance of discussion on human rights in the modern world has brought out the need to adopt a document to reflect the Russian Orthodox Church's view of this problem. The Basic Teaching of Human Rights and Dignity, adopted by the Bishops' Council in 2008, had been drafted under the guidance of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for two years. Many of the articles and statements included in this book were a subject of preliminary public discussion on the ideas put in the basis of this church-wide document.

We believe a search for balance between freedom and responsibility to be one of the most complicated tasks of the modern poly-cultural society and the main theme of dialogue between people of various worldviews. This dialogue should be conducted on the basis of mutual respect and openness and exclude diktat and coercion. It should be built on the notion of universal value of human personality, which Christians believe stems from the fact that man is created in the image and after the likeness of God. The high value of human beings is embodied, among other things, in their desire of virtue and perfection, to which society cannot be indifferent.

### ***Conclusion***

Christianity teaches righteous life in conformity with God-given dignity. Only such life can be truly harmonious and free. By returning to their spiritual roots and following in their actions and deed the lofty ideals of morality, European Christians are capable of building a prosperous society on the principles of good and justice, charity and mutual aid.

I hope that this book by Patriarch Kirill will become a contribution to the discussion in Poland on acute problems involved in human rights.

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