



Italian version of Patriarch Kirill's *Freedom and Responsibility* presented at Catholic University of Milan

The Italian version of Patriarch Kirill's book entitled *Freedom and Responsibility* was presented on 17 May 2010 at the Catholic University of Milan. The presentation was led by Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations.

Sitting in the presidium were Prof. Lorenzo Ornagi, rector of the university, H.E. Dionigi Cardinal Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Milan, and Prof. Adriano Roccucci of the University of Rome. Present in the audience were Russian Ambassador to the Vatican N. Sadchikov, Russian General Consul in Milan A. Paramonov, professors of the university, as well as representatives of the public and students.

In his address to audience, Prof. Ornagi singled out common concerns shared in their pastoral work by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Pope Benedict XVI. He emphasized in particular the theme of freedom and responsibility as relevant in the context of today's pluralism of opinions. 'When he was chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Patriarch Kirill already raised the themes of ethics and freedom on international arena because of both his personal fate and the tragic history of the all Russian people who survived a 70 year-long era of atheism which did all possible to suppress human freedom and dignity', the rector said. In his opinion, 'Russia today is experiencing a period of the dawn of Orthodoxy when new ways are paved for cooperation between state and church and, more broadly, between society and religion'.

Cardinal Tettamanzi in his turn emphasized that at present the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches were allies in defending Christian values in face of militant secularism. He said that 'the search for unity cannot be ecclesio-political and should be made through the work of the Holy Spirit in an atmosphere of love and peace'.

Then Metropolitan Hilarion presented Patriarch Kirill's book to the public, saying:

What does make this book interesting? - First of all, the personality of its author and its contents. The author has worked his way up in life from a disciple and closest associate of the outstanding hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod, who in the hardest times of Khrushchev's persecution did what was almost impossible to preserve the Church and to

reproduce its episcopate.

It was a time when the Soviet authorities set themselves the goal to destroy the Church. The then leader of the Soviet Union Khrushchev promised to build communism within 20 years and to show all 'the last parson'. In this situation Metropolitan Nikodim, not sparing his life, worked to build the Church. First of all, he managed to lead new young bishops to church service at a moment when the Soviet power did all possible to prevent it. If it were not for Metropolitan Nikodim, our Church may not have survived those terrible years.

And the future Patriarch Kirill was one of the young people who were led to church service by Metropolitan Nikodim. At the age of 28 he was appointed rector of Leningrad Theological Academy and at the age of 29 he became bishop. For 20 years he headed the Leningrad Theological Schools, and at a time when the authorities opposed in all possible ways the propagation of any information about religion, young Bishop Kirill managed to create in the then Leningrad an oasis of theological scholarship. Under Metropolitan Nikodim's protection, the theological thought developed and went in full swing in one of the major theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. After the death of Metropolitan Nikodim, Archbishop Kirill was dismissed as rector of the academy for his too active a work, as it seemed to the Soviet authorities.

However, when the situation in the Soviet Union began to change under Gorbachev and after the celebrations to mark the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia in 1988, Archbishop Kirill was elected to the post of chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, that is, foreign minister of the Russian Church, and headed this main Synodal department of the Moscow Patriarchate for twenty years.

As a very active man and perhaps the second important public figure after the Patriarch in the Russian Orthodox Church, His Eminence Kirill traveled around the world and visited over one hundred countries. He met with religious and political leaders of various countries, delivered lectures and carried out comprehensive educational work within Russia. He was the first and the only church hierarch to act as presenter on his own TV program broadcast by the main Russian national channel.

Already under the late Patriarch Alexy II, Metropolitan Kirill was widely known inside and outside Russia as an outstanding theologian and church figure. Therefore it was quite natural that he was elected to the Patriarchal Throne of Moscow after the death of Patriarch Alexy II.

Today His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia shares his rich life experience with the whole of our Church as not only the leader of the Orthodox clergy but also as a spiritual leader of the whole nation, for his word is listened to not only by Orthodox Christians but also people of other religious

communities as well as state officials. The Patriarch is a spiritual leader of not only Russia but also Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova which are parts of the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, to which most of the population belong and which also plays a very significant role in countries in the post-Soviet space, such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and others.

For many believers who are divided today by political borders, the Church is the main link. It is especially true for the three Slavic nations – Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians who are united by one spiritual and cultural tradition and in fact one language but who are divided by borders. These political borders go through not only concrete lands today but also through human lives. Thus, members of the same family can be today citizens of different states.

In this situation the Church is the only uniting force, and Patriarch Kirill set as one of his priorities in this work the preservation and consolidation of church unity in the post Soviet space.

Thus, the personality of Patriarch Kirill is unique because of his life experience and the status he has in today's world.

Speaking about the book we present today in the University of Milan, I should note first of all that this edition includes articles written by Patriarch Kirill before he was elected to the Patriarchal Throne of Moscow. In a sense, one can say that this book is the program of his patriarchal office. The one who speaks from these pages is not an armchair scholar, not a man who wrote his book surrounded by books of other authors, but the one who achieved what he writes about through suffering. What is written in this book are not theoretical truths but something based on the experience of the Patriarch himself and the experience of the whole Russian Orthodox Church.

As it seems to me, the main article in this book is the first one entitled 'The Norm of Faith as the Norm of Life'. It came out at the turn of the 21st century and represents in a sense the quintessence of Patriarch Kirill's theological thinking. In this article, he speaks about the opposition between traditional and liberal values, especially about a popular view of religion today that presupposes that religion is an exclusively private affair of particular individuals. In this view, a person can confess a particular religion or confess no religion at all but it should by no means affect his public, professional or even family life. The modern secular and liberal ideology seeks to drive religion into a ghetto. We are told: you, religious people, sit in your families or stay within your churches but do not come out of this space allocated to you. This ideology sees as inadmissible the religious motivation of particular actions, especially inadmissible is any mention of religion in public political discourse.

I believe many of you remember the story of Mr. Rocco Butillione who was not allowed to work in the European Commission because he took the liberty to mention his affiliation with the Catholic Church and

to speak out on certain moral issues from the viewpoint of a believer. Patriarch Kirill believes that such practice cannot and should be imposed on all people. He insists that the secular ideology is not universal, that in today's world a believer should have the right to openly confess his faith and to be motivated by the system of moral values in everyday life.

I should note that this thought of the Patriarch has something in common with the work of some lay communities of the Catholic Church, who set as their goal to help Christians remain Christians living in a secular world and engaged in ordinary human activity. Among such movements is the Community of St. Egidio whose members are not priests or cardinals but who remain lay people and university professors seeking to be motivated by Christian values in their everyday life.

Patriarch Kirill insists that in a modern liberal society believers should have an opportunity to live according to divine commandments and to openly confess their faith. He reminds us that Jesus Christ created the Church not only for 'home usage' but for it to be present in the public field so that Christians, not only clergy or professional theologians but also ordinary believers, could be apostles and preachers of the truth of Christ. It is in this, Patriarch Kirill believes, that true freedom is expressed – the freedom which provides for an opportunity to live in accordance with one's moral values. I will not retell the Patriarch's thoughts expressed in this book because I hope that you will surely read it.

In conclusion of my remarks I would like to answer the question why this book has been translated into Italian. What can it give to the Italian reader? I believe the publication of the precisely Italian version of Patriarch Kirill's book is a significant event. Italy is a country with a deep Christian tradition, with deep Christian roots. In every city and village in this country we see signs pointing to the presence of the Christian Church. For many non-Italians, Italy is a place of pilgrimage; we come here just as we come to the Holy Land and other places which have a key importance for Christians throughout the world. The Catholic Church is very strong and influential here. At the same time we can observe precisely in Italy, just as in a number of other Western European countries, an open attack waged by the secular ideology against the Christian Church. In fact, it is a confrontation, if you want, a war between secular and religious worldviews. We are witnesses to a mighty attack mounted against the Catholic Church and personally the Pope of Rome. Without idealizing the situation in the Catholic Church, I have to say that more often than not the voiced accusations are unfair or exaggerated.

I would like to have this book read not only by believers but also those who still live by illusions and mythologems, those who still believe, ignoring the whole tragic experience of humanity in the 20th century, that one can live without absolute moral values, that morality is a relative notion and that every individual can define the scale of moral values for oneself.

The book by Patriarch Kirill is interesting in that it is written by a man who went through the experience

of a persecuted Church, who knows what happens to a Church confined to ghetto, who, on the basis of this experience, has the right to warn Western Christians and Western countries against repeating the mistakes made in the past so that no one could lift up his hand against religion, faith and the Church as fundamental Christian values.

Patriarch Kirill's book has been translated and published through the efforts of the Vatican's publishers and the international society 'Sophia: Russian Idea – the Idea of Europe'.

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