



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk's interview to Interfax-Religion portal

- Your Eminence, you have just come back from Paris, where you were member of the Russian official delegation led by President Dmitry Medvedev. What are your impressions of this trip?

- The greatest impression was made on me by the President's and his wife's visit to the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris for venerating the main shrine of the cathedral – the Saviour's Crown of Thorns. It was an unforgettable and moving event. Emperor Nicholas II was the last head of the Russian State to visit the Notre Dame. Dmitry Anatolyevich entered the cathedral to the sound of the same music as the organist performed during the visit of the last Russian Emperor in 1896. The President and Ms. Medvedeva attended a brief Orthodox prayer service I celebrated together with a group of students of Paris Orthodox Seminary and then we all kissed the Crown of Thorns, the piece of Our Lord's Cross and a nail with which the Saviour had been nailed to the cross.

Among other events in which I participated during the visit I would like mention the meeting with the Mayor of Paris and the President's speech at the City Council, the dinner with French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the Elisée Palace and the two Presidents' visit to the Louvre where a unique exhibition called 'Holy Rus' was opened. It presents masterpieces of Russian iconography and applied art from the Tretyakov Gallery and other Russian museums. Its opening drew a wide response and launched the Year of Russian Culture in France with its more than four hundred events.

- Was the project for building a Russian church on Qais Branly mentioned during meetings with French officials? When will the construction begin?

- This project was mentioned in particular during the talk Dmitry Anatolyevich had with the Mayor of Paris. Presumably the construction will begin in 2012. By that time the Meteo-France service, which occupies this lot at present, will have to vacate it. By that time the design work will probably have been completed.

- Did you meet with any of Orthodox hierarchs of other jurisdiction in Paris?

- No. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, with whom I maintain a close enough contact, especially in preparations for a visit of Patriarch Bartholomew to Moscow, was absent from Paris in those days. I had been supposed to serve at the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky in rue Daru as I had agreed to

celebrate the Divine Liturgy in it on the invitation of Archbishop Gabriel of Comana, but a week before the appointed date I received a letter from Archbishop Gabriel informing me that my visit to the cathedral had to be put off until better times. He indicated as a reason the French court ruling that the cathedral in Nice be transferred to the Russian Federation for ownership. This decision displeased some members of the Diocesan Council of his Archdiocese, who indicated to him that my visit to the cathedral was impossible at the moment.

- But the lawsuit was brought by the Russian state, not the Russian Church...

- Yes, and the court ruling has nothing to do with interchurch relations, as it is a pure ownership dispute. The cathedral was built by the Russian Imperial Family and it is the Russian Federation as the recognized successor of the Russian Empire that should own the cathedral and the adjoining lot, which was reconfirmed by the French court. This decision by no means infringe on the rights of parish which conducts divine services at this cathedral at present. The Russian Federation has officially proposed to this parish, which is under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, to continue using the cathedral. But the parish council rejected the proposal, insisting that along with the right to use the cathedral the parish should also have the right to own it.

- Your Eminence, how do you assess the prospects for relations with the Evangelical Church in Germany after Margot Kaessmann stepped down as president of its Council? Will the theological dialogue be resumed?

- I intended to come to Germany in May. I suggested to Bishop Martin Schidehuetten, who is responsible for inter-Christian relations in the ECG, that he use my visit to meet and discuss prospects for further cooperation. I received a reply saying that this meeting only was possible on the condition that I gave written guarantees that my meeting with Schidehuetten would serve as a preparation of a meeting between Ms. Kaessmann and the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. It goes without saying that I was not going to give any guarantees because I believed such a meeting was impossible. I already began drafting a reply when news came about the incident that happened to Ms Kaessmann and later about her retirement. I think now the demand of guarantees is no longer relevant.

As for a resumption of the dialogue, I believe we will be able to discuss this matter after a new president of the ECG Council is elected, which is to take place in November. I would like to note that the election of Ms. Kaessmann was only the tip of an iceberg of a sort. As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said in his address to the Bishops' Conference, we disagree in principle with the liberalization in theology, church order and morality which takes place in many Protestant communities including the ECG. We should be frank and ask: Is there any sense in conducting a dialogue if it does not bring us closer together? Certainly, we have many opportunities for cooperation and we should preserve the great positive

potential we have accumulated for the 50 years of dialogue. But can we continue the cooperation in the form of interchurch dialogue, or should we look for some other forms of cooperation? I believe we will be able to answer this question when a new president of the Council is elected and when it is clear how seriously the ECG takes our concern for the situation as it has developed.

- Your Eminence, your work schedule is loaded to the utmost. What trips are you to make in the nearest time?

- I am to go to St. Petersburg to participate in the Holy Synod session on March 5-7. On March 10-11, I plan to visit Vilnius on the invitation of the Lithuanian Seim chairman. On March 12-13, I am to go to the diocese of Lipetsk and Eletsk on the invitation of the ruling bishop Nikon for a talk with university students and faculty. On March 16-18, I will accompany His Holiness Patriarch Kirill on his trip to Armenia. From March 19 to 24, I plan to visit several dioceses in Ukraine and Moldova. On March 26-27, I am to be in Istanbul for a meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew. On March 30, I should be in Dnepropetrovsk. All these before Easter. After Easter I will participate in the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarchate of Alexandria and then I will make trips to Ireland, Germany, Italy and other countries.

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