



Metropolitan Hilarion speaks at the "Teaching of religion in state schools: topical discussion in Russia and in Germany" conference (Moscow, 24-25 February 2010)

"Dear Mr. Ambassador! Dear reverend fathers, brothers and sisters! Ladies and gentlemen! I am happy to greet you at the conference sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations.

The participation of clergymen, representatives of state structures, scholars, and teachers in discussion of the problems of teaching of religion in secondary schools and of religious and ethical subjects in general is a fact of great value. The theme concerns a most topical problem, namely a place of spiritual and secular in the life of people and society. It is in this field that polemics is unfolding about the models of social system, and a question of the presence of religious dimension in public domain proceeds, including secular school. In order to come to an agreement in these debates it is necessary to understand that material existence of human person cannot be of full value without a spiritual component.

A forceful suppression of religious feeling inherent in human person brings about catastrophic results. The tragic events of the 20th century and modern crises give vivid evidence to it. The present paradigm of structuring public life in the countries with predominant secular world outlook is not conducive to active manifestation of spiritual principle in the life of society, in particular to the participation of religious structures in the shaping of the foundations of value and of moral guiding lines. This, in turn, presents a fertile soil for pessimistic mood in society, for vices, and for undermining of traditional values. This prompts the Church and traditional religious communities that are conscious of their responsibility for the destinies of humankind to raise an urgent question about the ways of overcoming spiritual and moral crisis.

Many projects of social structuring based on material aspirations are failing today. This gives grounds to think about religious motivation that should find its worthy place in the strategy of social development. The voice of conscience and truth will always be a restraining force that does not allow a feeling of permissiveness, greed and injustice to be kindled in human hearts. It is important to lay a morally oriented behaviour in the period of personality formation. I believe this to be an important argument for the presence of spiritual and moral subjects in the system of secular education in schools.

The processes of globalization are gaining momentum in the modern world. People become closer to one another and cooperate more actively, but at the same time, migration intensifies and brings about the mixing of cultures. These processes are typical for European countries. The native population faces the problem of keeping their identity. I would like to remind you that national consciousness is defined by the culture of a particular nation and, first and foremost, by the precepts of religion which people profess. A rejection of traditions and their ousting to the periphery of public life undermine the vitality of a nation. Therefore, the strengthening of the foundations of statehood should always be accompanied by a witness before the young generation about religious traditions. Besides, I am confident that people can maintain a dialogue with representatives of other faiths and nationalities on equal basis and with mutual respect only if they are aware of their belonging to spiritual and cultural tradition of their own.

In Europe and in Germany in particular the teaching of spiritual and moral subjects is a widespread practice, although fierce disputes are unfolding about it. It is gratifying to see that religious education in our country is returning to schools after a long interruption. I am sure that this initiative will bring good fruits and will serve to the strengthening of spiritual foundations of Russian society, to the development of interethnic and interreligious dialogue and cooperation and, undoubtedly, will strengthen foundations of the state.

The Russian Orthodox Church and traditional religions of Russia have an important task to promote the shaping of the system of school teaching about spiritual and moral culture on a high professional level. Thus we shall be able to prove the usefulness of our efforts undertaken for many years to persuade the critics and those who have doubts in the value of this initiative. I am sure that our conference will contribute to the solution of this problem.

I would like to thank the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for support in organizing and holding of the conference. I am happy to see that the Foundation shares the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and traditional religious communities of Russia on the necessity of teaching religion in state schools.

I wish interesting and fruitful work to all participants in the conference.

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