



‘Religious dimension is a precondition for harmonizing the social system’ – Archbishop Hilarion’s interview to the Religion and Mass Medial internet portal

- Your Eminence, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has made a great deal of trips to dioceses both within and outside Russia, namely, to Constantinople, Ukraine, Belarus. Considering the scale of the Patriarch’s personality, one may assume that he set the Church a task of global nature. In this connection can all these trips be considered to be consistent steps to an established goal? What is this goal?

- The task of global nature was set to the Church by its Head – Jesus Christ at His Ascension: ‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Mt. 28:19-20). At the same time, the task of every primate of a Local Church is not only to preserve and multiply the faith in the territorial bounds assigned to the Church but also to maintain unity among all the Local Churches. The latter goal is achieved, among other things, through communication between their primates. These can include joint divine services and bilateral and all-Orthodox meetings and private visits during which common problems are discussed and bewilderments in church relations are resolved in a spirit of fraternal love.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill’s trips to dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church within its canonical bounds – and these are today all the countries of the former Soviet Union except for Georgia and Armenia – are above all internal ones. The primate meets his flock, looks at the life of a diocese and leads festive celebrations. In addition, during his visitations to various regions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other countries, the primate of the Russian Church has used his exclusive status to meet regional authorities in order to advocate the interests of his flock, to outline his vision of church-state and church-society relations, reminding the society of the priority of spiritual over material values. Finally, the patriarchal visitations have a broad cultural significance as they help to support the existence of the unique Eastern Slavic civilization, which has nourished the worldview of whole nations and states for over a millennium.

The fraternal visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, you mentioned, is of a fundamentally different nature. In the family of Local Orthodox Churches, there is an immutable custom that all the Churches should be informed by special messages

about the election and enthronement of a new Primate. At our time, the relative ease of locomotion has added to this old custom an opportunity for a newly elected primate to make personal visits to his fellow-primates so that they could celebrate the Eucharist together and testify to brotherly relations. The order in which these visits are made conforms to the adopted list of primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, which is called 'Diptychs'. After his enthronement His Holiness Patriarch Kirill visited first His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople who is the first in the Diptychs. The next visit will be made to His Beatitude Theodore II, the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

Along with talks with his fellow-primates during these visits, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill have used these opportunities to meet with our compatriots living abroad to give them spiritual support, as well as with state officials and public figures to discuss matters of mutual concern.

- Last spring you became chairman of the Department for External Church Relations. In this capacity you have introduced major structural changes in the department. After six months have passed, what are the results of these changes as you see them and what are priorities in the DECR's work?

- Indeed, the Holy Synod has limited the Department's term of reference to external church relations alone, while earlier the DECR had to deal with some areas of internal church life. As for the rest, the work of the Department has remained the same. At the same time, it should be noted that even before the changes, external contacts made up the bulk of our work.

The reorganization of the Department has not decreased its role in the life of the Church. On the contrary, it has only increased the effectiveness of its work as a leading synodal institution, enabling the Department to use its resources more intensively in the priority areas of external church work. Today these priority areas include maintenance of inter-Orthodox relations on a high level, continuation of dialogue with non-Orthodox Churches and international Christian organizations, cooperation with governmental structures and authorities in other countries, interaction with political parties, civil society institutions and international organizations in other countries.

Within these areas we expect to achieve serious results in coordinating efforts with compatriots who live outside the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, in promoting the project for institutionalizing dialogue between world religious communities and international organizations and in achieving established goals in maintaining inter-religious peace.

The Department has worked in most of these areas for more than one decade, but modern times have

brought about new challenges which we hope to meet in an adequate way.

- The meeting between Patriarchs Kirill and Bartholomew has opened a new page in relations between Moscow and Constantinople. After the patriarchal visit, the Russian Church expected the Patriarchate of Constantinople to make concrete steps. Quite recently a delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople met with leaders of 'the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church' and 'the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kievan Patriarchate'. Can these talks be viewed as the decision that the Russian Orthodox expected from the Ecumenical Patriarchate? How far have relations of the Church with other Local Churches and other Christian confessions changed? Quite recently, during your meeting with the Pope of Rome, you pointed to problems faced by Orthodox Christians in Western Europe. Can it be assumed that it is the situation of the Orthodox in Ukraine that will become an acid test for further building relations with Rome and Constantinople?

- The talks between the primates of the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople and Russia, which took place in early July 2009 in Istanbul, have opened up a new stage in relations between our Churches. They are characterized by a greater degree openness and mutual trust. Thus, in accordance with these principles of relations and also during the trip of the Patriarchate of Constantinople delegation to Ukraine in October 2009 as well, the delegation kept in continued contact with our department. We on our part try to discuss together with this sister Church the major problems facing the world Orthodoxy.

During my chairmanship in the Department, our Church's relations with both Local Orthodox Churches and non-Orthodox confessions have been actively developed. From among the major event in inter-Orthodox relations, along with the above-mentioned visit to Constantinople, I will point to the 4th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference on 6-12 June 2009 in Chambesy, Switzerland. As a result of constructive and fruitful work, the delegations from various Local Orthodox Churches made a good progress towards a solution of the problem of Orthodox diaspora so important for Orthodoxy.

You have already mentioned my visit to the Vatican. I hope that the dialogue with the Catholic Church will also develop in a constructive spirit. It will enable us to resolve old problems, such as the situation of Orthodox Christians in Western Ukraine. As for the state of Orthodoxy in Ukraine in general, the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill this summer has shown how important this matter is for the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, I would not reduce all the problems existing in relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox and non-Orthodox worlds to this problem alone.

- Your Eminence, you are the rector of the recently established Church Post-Graduate

School. Speaking at the Polytechnic Museum you said that the theological schools often offer only a sum of knowledge while giving inadequate attention to academic methods. Will the Post-Graduate School become the institute that will raise the historical, humanitarian and theological studies in Russia to a new level?

- The present theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church do not offer all the study instruments a future theologian needs. The reason is that for a long time the church scholarship in our country was actually forbidden. In the Soviet time it was actually impossible to establish contacts with academic institutions in other countries and to be integrated into the European scholarship. Due to the traditional inertia of the academic system, this state of Russian theology's isolation from that of other countries, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, have survived to this day in many ways. However, it cannot be denied that there are still some positive changes.

In this atmosphere the Church's Post-Graduate School has a great advantage as it is built from scratch. We can involve fresh personnel from various academic centers both in Russia and other countries. Among the professors we have already invited are graduates of departments of philosophy and theology in leading European universities. They can teach our post-graduate students the methods used in the academic and theological work in the West, for instance in the universities of Oxford, Friburg and others universities. At the same time we are going to consider also the best traditions of Russian humanitarian scholarship. A combination of various principles and approaches, which have proved sustainable and effective, will help to enrich and broaden theological studies in Russia.

- His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has given special attention to church-state relations in today's Russia. In the history of the Russian Church for the last century there were many tragic pages linked with the change made in the model of church-state relations. In this connection, what is your assessment of the prospects for concluding an agreement between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church, which is mentioned from time to time in the mass media?

- Christianity views the human being as a creation of spirit and body, who can harmoniously exist in the world only if the spiritual and material needs are met equally. This vision is also true for a society as a totality of human individuals. The building of a cohesive and prosperous socium is impossible without the right combination of these two principles. It is on the basis of this vision that a model of church-state relations should be built. And the 20th century with its tragic events vividly showed the rightness of this approach.

Today we are witnesses to the destructive consequences of a purely materialistic ideology which had as its aim eradication of the spiritual dimension from social life: there is a growing indifference in the people's consciousness as they in their actions are no longer motivated by lofty ideals of truth, genuine love and sharing. This in its turn has created a soil favourable for crises. Thank God, many people in the power circles, public and political organizations have now come to recognize the religious dimension as a precondition for harmonizing the social system and the Church as an ally in resolving a number of urgent problems.

In my view, today's Russian model of church-state relations is satisfactory in many ways. For some 20 years now these two institutions have carried out mutually beneficial cooperation in various spheres of Russian society. This cooperation has also developed in international arena. As examples of positive dynamics in the church-state cooperation one can mention the agreement reached on teaching religious culture in secular educational institutions including general education schools, accreditation of theological higher education institutions, presence of clergy in army units and participation of the Church in preliminary discussions on bills involving society's spiritual values to be adopted by the State Duma.

The integration of scattered evidence pointing to the desirability of church-state cooperation into a single document will make it possible to fix in law the established format of relations and thus safeguard it against any subjective personal actions by functionaries and to define the areas of mutual concern and responsibility and to give an impetus to the development and implementation of joint projects.

- Your Eminence, you are responsible for dialogue with Russian Old Believers. G. Fedotov, a well-known historian and thinker of the mid-20th century, described the emergence of the Old Belief as 'a spiritual tragedy of the Russian Church'. Can we hope that this spiritual tragedy will be over some day and what is to be done for it?

- Almost all the Russian historians believed the 17th century church schism to be a national tragedy. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for instance, even believed the 1917 Revolution to be a direct consequence of the Old Belief schism. But we should seek church unity not only because we are aware of the great evil that the church schism brought to our people. Christianity has a moral imperative given by the Lord Himself 'that all may be one' (Mt. 17:21). It is commanded us from above to take the path of church unity. And we must walk along this path, whatever prognoses, hopes and expectations may be.

Many believers in today's world, especially the younger generation, no longer believe ritual differences to be convincing enough grounds for division. The Old Believers sometimes cite other reasons for the

division, such as differences in the understanding and implementation of canon law, the rules of church order, in the structure of parish and church governance. These age-old differences should not be underestimated. Nor should they be overestimated, as however hard some tried to deny it, we share doctrinal unity, and this, according to Church Fathers, means that church unity is possible in principle in the future.

However today, taking into account the historical pain and the burden of the past, it would be more correct to speak not about church unity, for it is too early, but rather about rapprochement, overcoming prejudices, ability to understand each other, a new experience of joint work. We share not only the faith but also the Motherland and common responsibility for her. We see this concern for the spiritual and moral state of society and preservation of the cultural and historical heritage in the documents of Old Believers' Councils and church forums. And this creates pre-conditions for mutually beneficial cooperation in many areas of church and public life.

The interview was taken by a. Shchipkov,

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