



Patriarch Kirill meets with a Roman Catholic delegation from France led by Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met on December 3 with Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux, Mgr Benoit Riviere, Bishop of Autun, and Mgr Jacques Blaquart, Auxiliary Bishop of Bordeaux. Present at the meeting was also Archbishop Antonio Mennini, Holy See Representative in the Russian Federation.

They were joined in their talk by Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, Archpriest Igor Vyzhanov, DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, and Rev. Alexander Sinyakov, rector of the Paris Seminary of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Welcoming the delegation His Holiness Kirill stress the importance of dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. He recalled that both in Russia and France, Christians had to go through severe hardships caused by revolutionary events and attempts to build the life of society without God. 'Today we encounter the challenges of secularism. It is necessary to meet them together, basing ourselves on historical experience', he said.

At the same time, the Patriarch noted, relations between Christians are complicated by many problems which have arisen recently. Speaking about a crisis experienced by the ecumenical movement today, His Holiness said, 'Therefore Churches, which base their service on the apostolic tradition, are called today to closer cooperation'.

His Holiness Kirill remarked that an increasing number of Russians come to live in Western Europe today, saying, 'They are not always emigrants but those who come to other countries to work. These are people of different social and property statuses. We attach a great importance to pastoral work with the Russian-speaking diaspora in the West because nothing can bring people belonging to different social groups closer together than a church parish. The Church can help to integrate these people in the western European society and to encourage them to respect the local culture and to observe local laws. This will certainly have a beneficial impact on the climate in their milieu'.

Patriarch Kirill made a special mention of the opening of a Russian Orthodox seminary in France and thanked Cardinal Ricard and his delegation for their support for this initiative. 'This seminary will help

not only to train clergy for our parishes abroad but will also enrich Russian dioceses with people who, among other things, will have a good knowledge of the cultural life of Western European and modern theology of the Catholic Church', he said.

Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard expressed joy over meeting with the Primate of the Russian Church. He recalled that two years ago His Holiness (then Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad) accompanied the late Patriarch Alexy II during his visit to France and later attended the presentation of the French version of the Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Social Concept published by Cerf Publishers.

'Your Holiness is well known in France', the Archbishop of Bordeaux assured Patriarch Kirill, and 'therefore it was a great joy for us when we learnt about your election as Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church'.

The archbishop also spoke about the inauguration of the Paris Seminary which took place on November 14 in the French capital. He said in particular that 'we are ready to give various kinds of assistance to this project.

He underlined how important it was in the situation of a deepening spiritual crisis in the modern society to bear common Christian witness to the eternal truths of the gospel and to the dignity of the human being as a God's creation.

Cardinal Ricard cited Pope Benedict XVI as saying that today social issues were essentially anthropological ones. He spoke of the danger of human society's losing moral values, saying, 'In today's world in which the pursuit of enrichment has become a goal, such goal-setting presents a threat to our entire human existence'.

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