



Speech by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia during fraternal meeting with Patriarch Bartholomaios of Constantinople in Constantinople

Your Holiness, the Most Holy Archbishop of Constantinople – the New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, Master Bartholomaios;

Your Eminences Fellow-Archbishops:

With special trepidation we have arrived today in Constantinople, the city whose image lives deep in the heart of the Russian Orthodox believer. In this land covered with glory we remember the distant events of our common history as they come alive at the sight of the magnificent the Church of Divine Wisdom and other monuments of the Byzantine era. We see reviving before our mental eye the pictures each of us holds so dear – the baptism of the holy Princess Olga Equal-to-the-Apostles administered by Patriarch Theophylactos of Constantinople and the visit to Constantinople by the ambassadors of her grandson, the holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles. Struck by the magnificence of the great Church of Christ and a keen experience of God's grace, they did not know, as they said, whether we were in heaven or on earth.

Those distant events predetermined the choice of our forefathers in favour of the true faith. Rooted in them is also our reverential attitude to the city of the holy King Constantine and the Patriarchal Throne of Constantinople adorned by the names of such great saints as Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom and many others.

In the very beginning of our meeting I would like to testify that these feelings are alive in the Russian Church to this day. With these feelings and sincere love in Christ we fraternally embrace you, greeting Your Holiness and your high-ranking hierarchs of the Holy Church of Constantinople.

This peace visit is the first from among those to be paid to Local Orthodox Sister Churches after the heavy cross of primatial ministry was placed on my shoulder by the will of the Holy Spirit and the election at the church Council. The burden of this ministry is too heavy to be carried by a weak man. It can be carried only with the help of God's grace solicited by all the members of the Church of Christ in their

prayers. It is especially important for me to feel the prayerful support of my fellow primates of Local Orthodox Churches, which gives me spiritual strength and keeps the all-Orthodox unity so dear to us.

Truly, in Christ Jesus we all who are considered worthy of the One Spirit of adoption as children – clergy and laity, Greeks and Slavs, male and female – we all are united by our common adoption as children of God to Whom we cry with one voice: Abba, Father! (Rom. 8.15).

The unity of the Universal Church is manifested in the communion of Local Churches. They are all tied to one another by the bonds of love. But we never forget that the Russian Church has special relations with the Patriarchal Throne of Constantinople, the first in the sacred diptychs. It is from it that we received the light of faith and the basics of book knowledge, church-building and sacred painting, divine service and the whole variety of church organization.

All this spiritual richness was taken up by our forefathers led by the holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles who baptized Russia in 988 in Kiev. From Kiev, the mother of Russian cities, the grace of the knowledge of God spread throughout Russia. Coming from the same Kievan font, Eastern Slavic nations made up the unshakable spiritual unity which lies in the basis of the Russian Church's life.

Acting first under the omophorion of Patriarchs of Constantinople and later independent in its governance, this Church worked much in the vineyard of Christ entrusted to her care – in Russia, in countries of the North, in Siberia through to the eastern end of the earth. Through her apostolic ministry the light of Christ's truth spread not only in those lands but also beyond.

Orthodoxy in Russia revealed a great multitude of saints – holy princes, sainted hierarchs, venerable fathers, fools for Christ's sake, saints. It was truly a way of the cross that the Russian Church covered in the 20th century as thousands of clergy, dozens of thousands of monks, nuns and lay people mounted the Golgotha and in their martyrdom shown forth by their feats of patience, generosity, gentleness and love of enemies. Through the intercession of these countless people of God the Russian Church has risen in all her glory and beauty in our days.

The seventy years of persecution for the faith and service of God carried out in very straitened circumstances have not passed unfruitful. Having passed through the crucible of hardships, the Russian Church has been given an opportunity for a free reflection on the historical journey she has made. This reflection has resulted in important conceptual documents generalizing the Church's experience in such

areas as church-state and church-society relations. The Church has also considered from theological perspective such themes as human freedom and rights and many other questions the answers to which determine today the fate of the entire Christian civilization.

These works, which hopefully can benefit the whole Orthodoxy, is a contribution of the Russian Church to the common Orthodox witness before the modern world which is losing its spiritual and moral guidelines.

Looking back today at the journey made by the Russian Church, we can state with confidence that the saving seed sown by the Church of Constantinople's missionaries in the Russian soil has brought forth rich and grace-giving fruits which belong to us all, to the whole Orthodoxy.

Your Holiness, we have come to your cathedral city with the hope that this visit will become a good beginning for renewing fraternal relations in Christ between our two great Orthodox Patriarchates of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. We wholeheartedly support the appeal Your Holiness made here last year to the Local Orthodox Churches to be aware of themselves and act as one Church. This vision of yours is also our sincere conviction. On this common basis we can do much to consolidate the God-commanded unity. From my heart I thank you for your generous invitation and hope to fully partake in these days of the spiritual feast of common prayers and fraternal fellowship.

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