Russian Orthodox delegation led by Metropolitan Kirill visit Chinnai and Kerala, India

On December 7, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, together with his retinue visited the city of Channai, former Madras.

On December 8, Metropolitan Kirill blessed water at the grave of St. Thomas for the staff of the Russian General consulate in Chinnai. After the thanksgiving, he addressed the congregation, drawing in particular a parallel between the image of St. Thomas, who overcome his non-belief in the resurrection of Christ, and the history of the Russian people, who have gone through a difficult period of non-belief and is now returning to the path of faith. The metropolitan greeted the rector of the Roman Catholic basilica, in which the grave of the apostle is located, and passed over souvenirs.

Then the delegation visited the holy places in Chinnai, associated with the name of St. Thomas. According to tradition, the saint preached in that area for four years and suffered martyrdom there. The delegation also saw the cave in this the apostle hid himself from his persecutors and the hill from which he preached the gospel to the local population.

Later that day, Metropolitan Kirill and his retinue, accompanied by F. Rozovsky, director of the Russian Center for Culture and Science, and D. Topchan, a counselor of the Russian embassy, arrived in Kerala, the Indian state with the predominant Syro-Malankara population. At the airport of the city of Kochi, the delegation was welcomed by Metropolitan Philip Mar Eusebius, director for inter-Christian relations at the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. From the airport, the delegation proceeded to the residence of the head of this Church in Kottayam. They were welcomed there by bishops, clergy and laity of the Malankara Church led by their primate, His Holiness Mar Baselius Mar Thoma Didymos 1, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan.

Metropolitan Kirill took part in the presentation of the first volume of the five-volume edition of *Philokalia* in the Malayalam language, which took place at the Mammen Mappillai Hall in Kottayam. The presentation was held in the framework of a seminar on spirituality, which gathered together representatives of Christian communities from all over Kerala. Dr. Cherian Ipen, director of this publishing project, made an opening address. After his introduction, the choir accompanying

Metropolitan Kirill and led by I. Yakimchuk of the DECR, sang several hymns of the Russian Orthodox Church. After that, the seminar was addressed by His Holiness Mar Baselius Mar Thoma Didymos 1 who stressed the significance of *Philokalia* as an important testimony to the rich spiritual tradition of Orthodoxy. He said that the publication of this book in the vernacular would promote dialogue between Christian confessions and religious traditions in India. F. Rozovsky greeted the seminar on behalf of his center. The next speaker was Metropolitan Kirill who pointed to the importance of *Philokalia* for modern man. His Eminence welcomed the fact that this book, cherished so much by the Orthodox, was published in the Malayalam language. He said it would not only make the Orthodox spiritual tradition more accessible for the local Christian community but would also help to introduce it to people of other religions in India.

On December 9, the Russian Orthodox delegation visited the Kottayam Seminary, the main educational institution of the Malankara Church. His Holiness Mar Baselius Mar Thoma Didymos 1 welcomed the guest to the seminary. After a prayer at the smeinary's chapel, Metropolitan Kirill had the honour of opening the newly-equipped classroom for foreign languages. A token was placed in the classroom in memory of the occasion.

A solemn meeting took place at the seminary's assembly hall to welcome the Russian Church delegation. The rector of the seminary, Rev. K. M. George, was the first speaker. He made a survey of the relations between the Malankara and Russian Churches, referring to the historic visits made to Kottayam by Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia and Metropolitan Alexy of Tallin and Estonia, now Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Metropolitan Kirill's visit, the speaker said, continued the chain of these important events. The rector pointed to the metropolitan's special contribution to the development of relations between the two Churches, noting that Metropolitan Kirill, who had directed the theological schools in Leningrad for many years, was a teacher and mentor for many of those present in the assembly hall.

Catholicos Mar Thoma Didymos I, in his speech, stressed that the Russian Orthodox Church was highly esteemed by the faithful of the Malankara Church. He expressed the conviction that the visit of Metropolitan Kirill, an outstanding theologian and active participant in the inter-Christian dialogue, would contribute to the fostering of relations between the two Churches. Metropolitan Matthews Mar Sevir, who was the next speaker, spoke about the warm memories of his years at the Leningrad Theological Academy when it was headed by His Eminence Kirill.

The meeting culminated in the decoration of Metropolitan Kirill with a high award of the Malankara

Church – the Order of St. Gregory of Parumala. Metropolitan Kirill was the first to be granted this award. Metropolitan Philip Mar Eusebius described the visit of the DECR chairman as another step on the way to the strengthening of relations between the two Churches. He defined two areas for cooperation: training theologians and translation of major texts of both traditions.

In his response, Metropolitan Kirill added other areas for common efforts, namely, cooperation in developing a concept of human rights and dignity and an agreed position in the dialogue with non-Christina religions.

DECR Communication Service

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