



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Department for External Church Relations

Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill on the occasion of the 75 th anniversary of Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia congratulated Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and the staff members of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations on the 75th anniversary of the foundation of this Synodal institution.

Your Eminences!
Dear staff members of the Department!
Dear brothers and sisters!
Christ is Risen!

With these joy engendering words I cordially greet you all and congratulate Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and the staff members of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church

Relations on a significant date – the 75th anniversary of the foundation of this oldest Synodal institution in the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the distant 1946, when for a brief period of time the state policy of godless authorities regarding religious organizations somewhat softened, there appeared a possibility for the Church to establish an administrative body for its relations with the outside world. No one could have imagined then what role the Department would play for the future life of the Church.

For the past three fourths of a century our state and society have seen many fast-going changes, and all this time the Department has been defending our church frontiers playing a highly important role in building up relationship of our Church with the authorities and people in the countries of our canonical responsibility, as well as with the leadership of other states, with our compatriots abroad, with Local Orthodox Churches, with non-Orthodox world and representatives of other religions. The activity of the Department was taking different forms, and its staff was growing, but the goal remained unchanged. The Department's ministry has always been dedicated to the edifying of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12). This is not just a metaphor. Preserving and strengthening the unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, defending its canonical foundations as well as taking care of the purity of the Orthodox doctrine have always been high-priority tasks for the Department.

I worked at the DECR as its chairman for almost two decades, while my involvement in the external affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church started more than half a century ago, in 1968. I can say with certainty that the Department for External Church Relations is of strategic importance for the Russian Church as a whole. Its leading role in the modern history of our Church and in its revival is difficult to overestimate.

It has never been an easy task to proclaim the evangelical truth to the world and to preserve the apostolic faith. Christians have to avoid two extremes: on the one hand, not to conform to the spirit of this world, so as not to be subjugated to it in the end, and on the other – not to shut off from the world to which the Church is called upon to bring the good news. For Christianity, both self-isolation and the way of compromise are fatal.

As early as it goes, the Old Testament describing the duties of priests of the Jerusalem Temple, most of whom were the descendants of the Tribe of Levi, mentions that some leaders of the Levites were over outside works of the house of God (Neh 11:16; 1 Chr 26:29). As for the Church of the New Testament, communication with the outside world is a distinct part and parcel of the mission.

Orthodox witness implies an all-sided coverage of people's life, both in its personal and social dimensions, so that all other people may seek the Lord (Acts 15:17). Today this witness does not only

consist in conveying the church assessment of modern worldwide trends of development to the leadership of different countries, not only in the appeals to take care of the authentic national spiritual life foundations of people that define their identity and determine their self-awareness or to raise their voice against the spreading of sin while defending absolute moral principles in the world, but also consists in the service for the good and edification of people all over the world (Rom 15:2)

Joining our efforts in different spheres of this witness both with other Christian confessions and non-Christian religions and remembering the words of the Saviour that whoever is not against us is for us (Mk 9:40), our Church seeks to manifest the spiritual power of the apostolic faith and the Holy Tradition, the continuity of which is upheld by Holy Orthodoxy. This activity is especially relevant now when Christians all over the world have been called upon to meet the difficult challenges of our time together. The most important is the fact that the content of the witness of our Church never changes. Changing is time alone, which is why the apostle makes it a point for us to walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time (Col 4:5). The necessary prudence is expressed in the ability of Christians to adapt to current circumstances. It is gratifying that the Department's staff members are always ready to follow this important rule carrying out their mission and helping millions of people get to know the truth of Orthodoxy.

I recall with gratitude the former DECR heads. I would like to give prominence to the first two who by their tireless sacrificial labours had laid the foundation of the current multilateral large-scale activities of the Department. These are the founder of the DECR and its first chairman, Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich) of Krutitsy and Kolomna, and his successor, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod. These hierarchs had built the Department which later used to carry an uneasy burden of structuring relations between the Church and the state and between the Church and society. One cannot help recalling the other two DECR chairmen – the now living Metropolitan Juvenaly (Poyarkov) and the recently deceased Metropolitan Philaret (Vakhromeyev). They had made a weighty contribution to the strengthening of Christian solidarity, social justice and good-neighbourly relations among nations.

Our Church was fated to live through the collapse of the Soviet Union, the disruption of the long-held public relations, and divisions that followed. The period of my chairmanship of the Department coincided with the most difficult time of political and governmental crisis. As I recall those years I come to the conviction that we had managed to endure them and keep the integrity of our Church by God's grace and thanks to the intercession and prayers for our land of the assembly of the new martyrs and confessors of the Russian Church, to the faith of people and their responsibility for the destiny of future generations.

We live at the time of church revival and new challenges, including the most acute and burning ones – the split of world Orthodoxy made by the Patriarch of Constantinople and the emerged necessity in

additional efforts for upholding the integrity of our Church. The interference of politicians in church affairs that we have seen in Ukraine, an attempt to destroy unity of the Russian Church for geopolitical gains and immediate advantages is a crime against people living now and against future generations. This unity is a historical fact and the most important and integral component of spiritual and cultural community of the fraternal people – Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Moldavians, Latvians, Estonians, and many others.

The defense of persecuted Christians all over the world, but above all in the Middle East and Africa is increasingly in demand today. I am confident that the Russian Church in cooperation with other Christian confessions and religious communities will continue to raise its voice in defense of the persecuted Christians both in dialogue with political, religious and public leaders and at the venue of various international, governmental and public organizations, reminding the world of the real situation of our suffering brothers and sisters.

Among the tasks confronting our Church in the field of foreign relations I am bound to mention the following:

- Standing up for Gospel values in the civilized global space;
- Efforts for overcoming divisions in the family of the Orthodox Church;
- Further development of relations with Christian communities all over the world, from which the history of the Department has begun and which is the important dynamic part of its work;
- Active involvement in the work of inter-Christian organizations necessary for conveying our position to the broad world public;
- Coordination of common work with the state structures aimed at the support of our compatriots living abroad;
- Consolidation of common efforts with other religious communities in defense of the moral dimension of social life;
- Participation in civil society dialogues, which is a youngest direction for foreign ministry of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Faced with manifold tasks in the sphere of international relations, the DECR strives to remain a multifunctional and efficient church body and at the same time intensify its work and upgrade its quality,

seeking new forms and means of witnessing in order to go by the new and living way (Heb 10:20), promptly and adequately respond to emerging challenges, develop unconventional approaches, determine clear priorities, provide new perspectives, and find fresh opportunities. Every new epoch requires special commitment. May God grant the current generation of the DECR staff members to respond to today's challenges just as successfully as their predecessors.

- The Department for External Church Relations, the people employed therein are always dear to my heart, and the agenda of this church institution has a prominent place in my own agenda. With satisfaction I note the DECR's constantly increasing efficiency. I appreciate the help I receive from the DECR in carrying out my Patriarchal ministry and thank all those who used to work or are working now in the sphere of external church relations – hierarchs, pastors, theologians, and church officials. Your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58), and your contribution to building up our Church and defending its frontiers is hard to overestimate.

- To conclude my address, I would like to express my firm belief that the Department for External Church Relations will continue to bear much fruit in serving the Lord.

- I wish God's help to you, dear Vladyka, and to all those labouring at the DECR in the demanding service. Please continue to work faithfully in building up the church life and remain zealous warriors of Christ, mindful that our speech and proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor 2:4).

- I invoke the blessing of the Risen Lord upon you and your labours.

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- **+KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA**

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