His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's meeting with members of the Working Group for Coordinating Bilateral Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church



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On April 25, after the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Cathedral of the Archangel in Moscow Kremlin, a meeting took place at the Kremlin's Faceted Chamber between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and members of the Working Group for Coordinating Bilateral Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church.

Participating in the meeting from the Malankara Church were Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos, head of the Diocese of Great Britain, Europe and Africa, and Rev. Ashwin Fernandez, executive director of the Malankara Church Department for External Church Relations.

From the Russian Orthodox Church there were Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, Patriarchal Exarch for Africa, co-chairman of the Working Group; and Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, secretary of the Working Group.

Greeting the guests, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted that the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church have a longstanding history during which 'there were not a single dark spot, even the slightest one'. 'This shows that we share very substantial coincidences in our world outlooks and our spiritual practice. We cherish these now already traditional good relations with your Church', His Holiness stressed.

The Primate of the Russian Church recalled that the bilateral relations actively developed and were of trustful nature in the period of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios (Varghese) and Metropolitan Hikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod of eternal memory. 'The outstanding hierarchs from your side took part in developing bilateral relations with our Church. I remember the Most Reverend Mar Gregorios whom I had known when he was yet Paul Varghese. We worked together in the World Council of Churches and on many other international platforms. Back then His Eminence Mar Gregorios represented your Church in the sphere of external relations and my spiritual father, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) represented our Russian Orthodox Church. His Eminence Nikodim was the first to propose to invite students from the Malankara Church to the Leningrad Theological Academy. This coincided with my studies at the Leningrad Academy. This is why I remember your representatives with whom we were friends and who represented your Church in a worthy manner'.

According His Holiness, at present the bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church continue developing actively and fruitfully. In 2019, the negotiations with His Holiness Catholicos Baselius Marthoma Paulose II of eternal memory resulted in the establishment of a Working Group for Coordinating the Bilateral Relation, which gave a new impetus to the inter-church dialogue.

'I am very glad that such a group does exist', Patriarch Kirill stressed.

His Holiness noted that 'today a special importance should be given to the coordination of joint efforts on international platforms, primarily in the World Council of Churches, for discussing topics of mutual interest and speaking in one voice in defence of our shared stance on the most acute issues. This interaction is relevant and called for since we are very close in our commitment to our spiritual and cultural heritage, our firmness in asserting the Christian understanding of morality and our view of the developments in the world'.

'Last year, at my instruction the secretary for inter-Christian relations, Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov),

visited India to participate in common Christian festivities during which seven new metropolitan of the Malankara Church were consecrated, including you, Your Eminence Mar Stephanos', Patriarch Kirill noted.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church spoke about the latest examples of bilateral cooperation - the shooting and showing, on the Orthodox TV channel 'Spas'. a documentary about St. Thomas the Apostle and his Indian legacy: 'The film came out on the first Sunday after Pascha when the Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of the holy Apostle who has a special importance for Christians in India. Please, convey my gratitude to my bother His Holiness Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas for his assistance in preparing this film and the interview in which he many times stressed his love for Russia and the Russian Church and recalled his studies in the Leningrad Theological Academy. I remember him as he was at that time. Back then I was young, recently appointed rector of that theological school. I would like to note the considerable work to organize the shooting of the film in India carried out by Father Ashwin Fernandez and to express to you my special gratitude for your efforts'.

Speaking about today's challenges facing Christianity, His Holiness mentioned secularization as one of them, reminding that the Russian Orthodox Church has a considerable historical experience of surviving under the pressure of a secular ideology.

'However, if formerly it was connected with attempts to separate the Church from the secular society on the basis on the Marxist atheistic ideology, which was far from being shared everywhere and by all, today the situation is much more extensive. Going on in the world in an extended front the suppression of the religious by the secular in the guise of externally attractive ideas - freedom, equality of sexes etc. And it is much more dangerous than what we used to encounter in the past. By God's mercy Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church after decades of persecutions is going through a period of spiritual revival, and we appreciate that by God's mercy this happens today in our Motherland'.

His Holiness gave concrete examples of the multiple increase made in recent years in the number of dioceses, parishes, monasteries and educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

During the talk, His Holiness Kirill pointed to the importance of further development of relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Malankara Church and other Oriental Churches. He asked the representatives of the Malankara Church to convey to its Primate an official invitation to visit Russia this year.

In his response, Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos conveyed to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church a greeting from Catholicos of the Malankara Church Baselios Marthoma Mathew III. He also expressed joy over visiting Russia and thanked His Holiness for the warm welcome and

hospitality extended to the Indian delegation.

On his part, Metropolitan Mar Stephanos noted the importance and usefulness of the Working Group for Coordinating the Bilateral Relations, as well as its effective work in a number of areas such as cooperation in the academic sphere, interaction in the area of monasticism and social service.

As one of the most promising areas of bilateral cooperation, the head of the Indian delegation mentioned the project for exchanging experience initiated by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill - the exchange of experience of medical institutions of the two Churches, in particular, the St. Alexis of Moscow Hospital and the St. Gregorious of Parumala in the State of Kerala, India.

The Malankara hierarch stressed the lively interest of Christians in India in the spiritual tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church, in particular, its patristic heritage. Metropolitan Mar Stephanos described as topical the translation of the Lives of Russian saints and books on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church and its theology and their publication into languages prevailing in India.

Metropolitan Mar Stephanos spoke about the growing veneration in India for Blessed Matrona of Moscow. His Holiness Baselios Mar Thomas Paulose II of eternal memory personally deeply venerated Blessed Matrona after his visit to the Convent of the Intercession in Moscow during his official visit to Russia in 2019 when he spent much time in prayers at the shrine with the relics of Blessed Matrona. Not long before his demise, His Holiness left a dying note mentioning that he experienced a spiritual renewal when he prayerfully addressed St. Matrona. Metropolitan Mar Stephanos showed this note to Patriarch Kirill while reflecting further on it as with the growing veneration of the Saint, procedures would be initiated in the Church to include the Saint's feast in the liturgical calendar of the Church in India. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said that in the eventuality of the introduction of a Russian saint into the calendar of an Oriental Church is the first in history.

The head of the Indian delegation wholeheartedly supported Patriarch Kirill’s opinion about the growing level of secularization in society and the need for Christians’ joint efforts to oppose the pressure on the spiritual sphere. According to him, the Malankara Church considers it important for Christians to come out in one voice in defence of the traditional values as the Russian Orthodox Church and personally His Holiness Patriarch Kirill have always called.

Addressing the Primate of the Russian Church, Father Ashwin Fernandez in his capacity of the executive director of the Malankara Church Department for External Church Relations noted: ‘I remember the attempts to discriminate the Russian Orthodox Church on the platform of the WCC 11th General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022 and I would like to assure Your Holiness that the

Malankara Church of India is categorically against such insinuations'. 'I would also like to stress the paramount necessity of cooperation among all the Churches of the Eastern Christian tradition on international platforms', he stated.

Then the participants of the meeting discussed particular projects concerning various areas of the work of the Working Group.

In conclusion, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill wished the guests from India a blessed stay in the Russian land, and to all the members of the Working Group he wished God's help in their work to develop cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church.

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