



**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's response to an open address of Archbishop Victor of Artsiz to His Holiness and members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church**



**DECR Communication Service, 01.08.2023.**

*His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', has responded to the open message of Archbishop Victor, vicar of the Diocese of Odessa, addressed on the 23rd of July 2023 to His Holiness and the members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.*

**His Eminence Victor  
Archbishop of Artsiz  
Vicar of the Diocese of Odessa  
Hegumen of the St. Elias Monastery in Odessa  
Hegumen of the Holy Dormition Patriarchal Monastery in Odessa**

Your Eminence,

I have familiarized myself with your open letter of 23 July 2023 addressed to me and to members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and I can explain the harsh and utterly impertinent tone you chose to express your feelings only by your strong emotional shock caused by the tragedy. I considered it necessary to reply to you frankly and openly.

The news about the destruction of the Cathedral of the Lord's Transfiguration echoed in my heart with great pain and deep sorrow. This magnificent church was built on people's money and through the efforts of Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail. I had a joy to consecrate it in the great rite in 2010. And to this day I warmly remember the wonderful feelings I experienced at the time when we *with one mind and one voice* together with the assembly of bishops, priests and devoted Odessites glorified Pre-Eternal God and prayed for *all and everyone*.

That is why I have no words now to describe the bitterness I experienced learning about the damage done to the church. I understand how hard your soul was hurt at the sight of the damages made to the Cathedral of the Transfiguration. It is in full measure that I share the sorrow of all the Orthodox people in the city, just as their joy over the main shrine of the church - the Kasperovskaya Icon of the Mother of God, which was not damaged by miracle and was found intact.

At the same time, your accusations and reproaches directed at me and my brothers, who attended the Bishops Convocation, appear, to put it mildly, ungrounded and unjust. A selective approach to facts in such situations is completely inappropriate.

The destruction of churches and the suffering of the peaceful populations began nine years ago in Donbass. Since then, the whole plenitude of the Russian Church has also been praying for each of the fallen and for those who lost their relatives and loved ones in the course of the conflict and for those who were left homeless. The whole plenitude of the Russian Church grieves over each destroyed or trampled-upon shrine. All these years we have been doing all that is possible for us to help the needy and those affected - whatever their faith, nationality and political convictions may be. This is what the Bishops Convocation discussed first, and at the same time, the Convocation re-affirmed the commitment of our episcopate to the canonical traditions of the Church.

At a time so difficult for the world Orthodox community, the Russian Church remains in unity with Local Churches and Orthodox hierarchs *who had not worshiped the beast, nor his image* (Rev. 20:4) who have remained faithful to the Word of God, Holy Tradition, canons and hierarchal oath. As a Primate, I invariably make the liturgical mention of Their Holinesses Orthodox Patriarchs, Their Beatitudes Archbishops and Metropolitans. I am very grateful to those of them who openly come out in support of the suffering Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

I understand well the difficulties of the archpastors and clergy of the Ukrainian Church living today in such a situation when a congratulation or a condolence become a ground for initiating a criminal case. For this reason, I cannot tell you much in this letter.

The Church of God is built on the rock of Christ's love, and we believe that *the gates of Hades will not overcome it* (Mt. 16:18), But we all, her servants, should *carry each other's burdens* (Gal. 6:2), *Be very careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise...making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil* (Eph. 5:15-16), and not *give an opportunity to those who want it* (2 Cor. 11:11) in order to avoid wounding the Church by careless public statements.

With invariable love in Christ,

**+ Kirill**  
**Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'**

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