



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill chairs plenary session of the 34th International Christmas Educational Readings



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On January 27, the plenary session of the 34th International Christmas Educational Readings entitled “Education and Morality: Personality Formation and the Challenges of the Time” chaired by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus’ took place at the State Kremlin Palace in Moscow.

Gathering in the hall of the State Kremlin Palace were over five thousand people, including members of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council; heads of exarchates, metropolises, diocesan bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church; representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches; members of the Interreligious Council of Russia; plenipotentiary representatives of the President of the Russian Federation in the federal districts; representatives of both chambers of the Russian parliament; heads and representatives of federal and regional authorities; rectors and representatives of over 250 Russian

and foreign universities; heads and lecturers of institutions of general education; clergymen; parish consultants; and workers of science and culture.

Among those who attended the plenary session were Metropolitan Vikenty of Tashkent and Uzbekistan, head of the Central Asian Metropolitan District; Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga; Metropolitan Pavel of Krutitsy and Kolomna, Patriarchal vicar of the Moscow Metropolis; Metropolitan Grigory of Voskresensk, chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Metropolitan Kirill of Stavropol and Nevinnomyssk, chairman of the Synodal Department for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies and chairman of the Synodal Committee for Cooperation with the Cossacks; Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; Metropolitan Konstantin of Cairo and North Africa, Patriarchal Exarch of Africa; Archbishop Foma of Odintsovo and Krasnogorsk, head of the Administrative Secretariat of the Moscow Patriarchate; Bishop Alexy of Ramenskoye, personal secretary to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill; Mr. Vladimir R. Legoyda, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's relations with society and mass media; Mr. Sergei Yu. Rudov, deputy head of the World Russian People's Council; Mr. Mikhail M. Ivanov, deputy head of the World Russian People's Council and chairman of the Supervisory Board of the All-Russian Public Movement "Orthodox Russia."

The honourable guests at the opening ceremony of the Readings included Mr. Igor O. Shchegolev, plenipotentiary representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Central Federal District; Mr. Andrei V. Yatskin, first deputy chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation; Ms. Anna Kuznetsova, deputy chair of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation; Mr. Sergei Kravtsov, Minister of Education of the Russian Federation; Ms. Olga V. Petrova, deputy minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation; Ms. Zhanna Alekseyeva, state secretary-deputy minister of culture of the Russian Federation; Mr. Yevgeny S. Ivanov, state secretary-deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; General of the Army Viktor Goremykin, deputy minister of defence of the Russian Federation and head of the Main Military-Political Department of the Russian Armed Forces; Mr. Igor Kagramanyan, former director of the Department of Health of the Government of the Russian Federation; Mr. Alexander N. Gorbenko, Moscow deputy mayor for regional security and information policy; and Mr. Vitaly I. Suchkov, head of the Moscow Department for national policy and interregional relations.

The event was hosted by Metropolitan Yevgeny of Yekaterinburg and Verkhoturye, chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Readings and chairman of the Synodal Department for Religious Education and Catechization.

Addressing His Holiness and all the forum participants, Metropolitan Yevgeny said, "Your Holiness,

allow me, on behalf of all those gathered, to welcome you and all participants of the plenary session of the 34th International Christmas Educational Readings. By the decision of the Holy Synod and with your Primatial blessing, this year's Readings are dedicated to the theme "Education and Morality: Personality Formation and the Challenges of the Time.

"The international stage was preceded by an extensive regional stage held from September to December last year. All regions of Russia were involved, as well as several other countries within the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. Over one million people participated. The regional stage programme included numerous events in various fields, united by the idea of the importance of the moral component in education.

"Education is of paramount importance to personal enhancement, the development of God-given talents and abilities, and, most importantly, to moral education and the formation of moral qualities. This formation is not just important, it must be the basis of any field of education, be it natural science or arts and humanities."

Then a meeting-themed video was shown.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, chairman of the International Christmas Readings, delivered the keynote address.

The greeting from Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, was read out by Mr. Shchegolev.

Minister Kravtsov read out the greeting from Mr. Mikhail V. Mishustin, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, and addressed his personal greeting to the participants.

The greeting from Ms. Valentina I. Matvienko, the speaker of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, was read out by her deputy Yatskin.

The greeting from Mr. Vyacheslav V. Volodin, chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, was read out by his deputy Kuznetsova.

General Goremykin read out the greeting from Mr. Andrei R. Belousov, Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation.

The greeting from Mr. Sergei V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, was read out by his deputy Ivanov.

The greeting from Ms. Olga Lyubimova, Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation, was read out by her deputy Alekseyeva.

The greeting from Valery N. Falkov, Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, was read out by his deputy Petrova.

Mr. Suchkov read out the greeting from Sergei Sobyanin, the Mayor of the Russian capital.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed the audience with a closing speech, in which he noted the importance of the forum and expressed gratitude to all its participants. The Primate of the Russian Church said, "I would like once again to thank everyone attending the International Christmas Educational Readings, which has become a forum of great importance and unites clergy, educators, and members of the public for discussing issues related to education and upbringing, thus shaping the future of our people and our country.

"It is my strong conviction that the experience gained through the Christmas Readings is unique. Nothing like this happens anywhere in the world. When creating this remarkable forum, we were guided by very concrete tasks. We aimed at ensuring that the words of Orthodox Christians about religious topics as well as about various aspects of life would reach consciousness of our society and our people.

"Why is this important? It is because not everyone goes to church. Some remain in doubt, others cannot be on their feet for a long time, and still others cannot listen carefully to sermons. Television now helps, and there are very good TV programs informing viewers about church life, but no television can compete with real communication, when experience and knowledge are shared and a real lively discussion is revolved around important topics.

"We work for awakening potential facilities of our parish activists, so that the important message that the Church is bringing to the world could be heard not only from the ambo, but also from laypeople, thus helping those far from the Church to understand the Russian Church at the present time, to appreciate its activity, and see its significance for the well-being of our people.

"We are carrying out this important mission to the best of our abilities, and I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks to all those who have organized the event, worked, delivered speeches, and to those who have listened and will bring the ideas found in this hall to their parishes, to the youth and public organizations, where these ideas can help people understand the situation of the Church in our country, and, most importantly, hear the voice of the Church on issues that are addressed in sermons not so often.

“I invoke God’s blessing upon all of you and ask you to convey my blessing to those who delegated you. I do hope that, by God’s grace, the wonderful tradition of holding the International Christmas Readings in the capital city will continue well into the future.”

The meeting was broadcast on “Russia 24”, “Soyuz” and “Spas” TV channels; on Patriarchia.ru, the official website of the Russian Orthodox Church; as well as on the portal of the International Christmas Readings and in the “PravObraz” mobile application.

After the official part of the meeting, a concert took place.

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