

beliefs. We should educate them for respect for each other – the respect which exists in our relations as Christians and Muslims. Indeed, we in Russia have lived in peace and harmony for centuries.

We have worked out simple rules for co-existence; we observe them and do not quarrel. But those who consciously try to shake our interreligious peace and our homeland on confessional grounds by consciously distorting religious dogmata seek to destabilize the situation. Among very serious threats to our common life is Wahhabism or Salafism. Perhaps not all our TV viewers understand well what it is. Could you explain what stands behind these terms?

F. Salman: Salafism and Wahhabism are the same phenomenon only named differently. Lying in the root of this false teaching is a misanthropic theory. In the modern language this trend can be called a totalitarian cult which developed in the depths of Islamic faith and uses Islamic clothes and Islamic slogans. These slogans create a false impression that it is authentic Islam. The age of this phenomenon is a little over 200 years. Throughout its existence this totalitarian false teaching has sown doubt and discord in peoples' hearts to lead to what we see today – a great number of God's places and symbols have been defiled by this sect and many clergy have been eliminated. It has even come to the murder of a man who exclaimed azan, that is, an appeal to prayer, only for his mentioning the name of the prophet after the reading of this prayer. This shows how far this sect is from Islam, for in canonical Islam, just as in the whole Abrahamic tradition, the shedding of innocent blood is almost equated with the destruction of the entire humanity.

A person who is inspired by this false teaching is not a Muslim, not a believer. He acts not in the name of the Lord but in the name of the evil one, Satan, and all these designs and intentions are diabolic. Therefore, speaking about this teaching, we can presume that it will continue bringing a great deal of trouble, including in Russia. And these troubles have already come. We are witnesses to a situation in which day by day our Islamic thinkers committed to the Islamic tradition are killed. One of the postulates of the Islamic worldview states that the love of the motherland is part of your faith. Russia, wherever we may live – in Kaliningrad or Sakhalin, Yamal or the North Caucasus – is our homeland, and we are obliged to respect and honour her. For Wahhabism it is unacceptable. Wahhabism does not accept ethnicity or different faiths. For them all those who do not follow this false teaching are enemies.

To combat this false teaching the state and traditional religious institutions should unite their efforts, for, according to Islamic faith, that which cannot be eliminated by the holy scripture of Koran should be eliminated by the sultan, that is, with the help of the secular power. Only the state in union with traditional religious institutions can rectify the situation. I believe, in this struggle we will be among those who will succeed in this world and we will not be ashamed in the other.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you for these very important and powerful words; first, for your explanation of the roots of Wahhabism and terrorism and these people's motives coming from the devil rather than religious beliefs. We take with compassion the news which have come in recent years from various regions in Russia, from Dagestan and Chechnya, about the murder of muftis and leading Islamic theologians. Clearly, these people inspired by some diabolic misanthropic ideology commit these lawless and immoral acts to split our society, to destroy the interreligious peace that has been built for centuries. The victims of terrorists are precisely those who, like you, fearlessly testify that these people are moved by the devil. It is a true feat of confession, which should be performed by each of us. We should call things by their proper names, and there is no room for political correctness here. We have mentioned the defilement of holy places, but it is not the only point. The point is that believers are killed and for their faith at that precisely because some believe their faith is wrong.

We can see this undeclared war waged against traditional Islam in our country, in the North Caucasus. We see an undeclared but large-scale war against Christianity in the Middle East. We understand that underlying it is the same phenomenon, which is religious intolerance. Let us look at the Middle East. For instance, in Iraq there used to be about 1,5 million Christians only ten years ago. Today only one tenth of them have remained. Whatever attitude we may have for Saddam Hussein's overthrown regime, but it was the authority, the very sultanate you have mentioned, which used to restrain some internal contradictions and which made it possible for Christians to live protected by law. Now this external restraining factor has gone, and Wahhabism has raised its head. As a result, Christians have been actually driven away from their own land. We can see what is happening in Egypt to the Copts, who have lived there for centuries. They are subjected to attacks, their churches being burnt down and they being killed. I have met a prominent Islamic leader, the president of Al Azhar University, and he, just as you, said that this phenomenon runs contrary to Islam. We can see what is happening in the places in Syria where radical forces have come to power. Their first victims are Christians who are killed, who are driven from the places in which they have lived for centuries. It is our common problem; it is our common tragedy, and we should struggle together for a life in peace and accord.

F. Salman: Your Eminence, a few months ago we were in Syria. Syria has always been a country close to us. The other day when I spoke live at the all-Arab TV channel Al Mayadeen, we were asked, 'Why did you go to Syria?'. We said, 'Because Russia and Syria, Russia and the whole Arab world have always had good relations'. Russia, however much we may try to accuse her of all cardinal sins, was and will be a friend, brother and partner of the Islamic world. We were simply horrified by what was happening in Syria. We witnessed how bandits in Aleppo, with religious slogans but actually part of the Satan's host, robbed a house of God, a church, taking away icons and trying to kill the priest. The Muslims who lived around this church managed to beat off the priest, to take the icons back and to drive them away from that block, saying that they should never set foot there. It is an example of good cooperation: people know that a person who believes in God, whatever his confession may be, is their brother.

What we are speaking about may come to Russia as well. Indeed, Syria is a springboard for refining numerous informational, psychological and other scenarios of future wars. Russia is the last stronghold of interreligious peace. The traditional confessions in Russia are the very union which does not give a moment's rest to many outside our country. We often remember the events of September 11, 2011, when the two buildings of the World Trade Center in New York were destroyed, but we actually do not remember that under the debris of these skyscrapers, two houses of God were buried – a church and a mosque. It has been forgotten in fact. But it can become a beginning to the end predicted to us. The only thing that can bring Christians and Muslims close together in this situation is a strategic union of Orthodoxy and faithful Islam in Russia.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you for these words, Venerable Mufti. I would like to say that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill was in Syria a year ago. He met there with Christian leaders and Syria's Supreme Mufti. It was only a few days after the mufti's son was killed. He was unable to stanch his tears because it was his personal tragedy, but in it, like in a drop of water, the present situation is reflected. Recently I met Syria's Mufti when he came to Russia. Everybody says today that if the power, whatever it may be, perishes, Christians and Muslims will be the first to become victims because this radicalism, unfortunately, can be overcome by none other than the common efforts of the state power and traditional confessions.

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