



Patriarch Kirill meets with Presidium of Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference

On August 16, 2012, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met with the Presidium of the Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The meeting held at the Conference's building was attended by the following persons from the Russian Orthodox Church: Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations; Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's administrative secretariat, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Hegumen Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations; V. Legoida, head of the synodal information department; Protodeacon Vladimir Nazarkin, assistant to the DECR chairman; and M. Kuksov, acting head of the patriarchal personal secretariat.

Among the participants were also His Beatitude Metropolitan Sava of Warsaw and All Poland, Archbishop Jeremiah of Wroclaw and Szczecin and Bishop George of Siemiatycze, Polish Orthodox Church.

The Catholic Church in Poland was represented by Metropolitan Jozef Michalik, president of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Poznan, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwicz, Archbishop of Krakow; Cardinal Jozef Glemp, former Archbishop of Warsaw and primate of Poland; Cardinal Kazimierz Nyc, Archbishop of Warsaw; Archbishop Jozef Kowalczyk of Gniezno, primate of Poland; Archbishop Henryk Muszynski, former Archbishop of Gniezno, former primate of Poland; Archbishop Stanislaw Budzik of Ljubljana; Archbishop Henryk Hoser of Warsaw-Prague; Mgr. Jaroslaw Mrowczynski; deputy general secretary of the Polish Bishops' Conference; and Mgr. Jozef Kloch, press secretary of the Polish episcopate.

Patriarch Kirill and other high guests were welcomed by Metropolitan Jozef Michalik, who said, 'Today the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, a Church of great saints having over a millennium-long history, a Church of the multitude of passion bearers, together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Poland wishes to address a joint message to the faithful of the both Churches, to all people of good will. This step becomes a testimony to faith; it speaks volumes. It is not only a symbolical gesture; it is a common concern for the world in which we live; it is a reaffirmation of the faithfulness to the Gospel and the life in faith according to the commandments of Christ'.

'The Patriarch and the whole Russian Orthodox Church are faithful to their mission. They preach the Gospel of Christ. They love their people and daringly defend them from the misunderstood secularity, the one-sided liberal progress devoid of the feeling of God's presence in the life of modern man and society. The failure to address ethical norms in the legislations of states and documents of international organizations certainly disturbs responsible people', Metropolitan Michalik continued. He emphasized that he fully shares the His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's opinion that 'the moral and spiritual regeneration of humanity should begin in the Christian milieu with Christians' commitment to the immutable norms of the gospel's ethics, with organic combination of the personal and public dimensions of Christian ethics in everyday life', and stressed that repentance is the most important condition for revival.

In his address to the participants in the meeting, His Holiness Kirill noted that in visiting Poland at the invitation of the primate of the Polish Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Sava, he attached

great importance to the meeting with the episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland as a Church to which most of the Polish people belong.

Speaking about the forthcoming ceremony of signing a Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland, Patriarch Kirill expressed joy over the fact that the initiative he had put forward several years ago found support and understanding in the Catholic Church in Poland.

It was noted that the signing of the document coincides with the 400th anniversary of the liberation of Moscow from Polish troops, a significant event for Polish-Russian relations. 'This date reflects the whole complexity and contradictoriness of relationships between the two nations in history who experienced both alienation and open hostility. However, the political struggle was preceded by the loss of Christian unity in which the Church of East and West used to live originally. It was impossible to achieve true peace between the Russians and the Poles without a dialogue between the two Churches that have formed the religious identity and culture of the both nations', Patriarch Kirill reminded the meeting.

Among the most tragic events in history of the two nations was the 20th century. Both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland together with the people of their countries had a tragic experience of the 20th century totalitarian regimes. There were millions of innocent victims, many of them suffering for the confession of Christian faith. Patriarch Kirill expressed the conviction that it was the feat of new martyrs and confessors that helped their people to preserve their national identity, to overcome atheistic regimes and to withstand the influence the atheistic regimes made on people's religious life and consciousness.

Both the Orthodox Christians and Catholics face the same challenges in today's world, Patriarch Kirill said. These are the secularization of the European society, which increasingly becomes a consumer society, the rejection of ethical principles in personal and public life, the attempt to oust religion from public sphere and to remove Christian symbols from public space. Posed before Christian Churches once again the task to bear witness to Christ before the modern society which is forgetting about its Christian roots, His Holiness emphasized.

'Both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland have experienced a period of atheism and they do know how pernicious can the neglect of God's commandment be for people', Patriarch Kirill said and called to consider a great deal of examples offered by history, showing that the rejection of God leads the violation of the lofty dignity of man created in the image of God. Our witness to Christ the Saviour before the modern world and the protection of the human personality in various spheres of public life require our joint efforts and point to the way in which Christian Church should interact, he stressed.

Patriarch Kirill also stated that the Roman Catholic Church in Poland is one of the major allies of the Russian Orthodox Church in Christian education, since the tasks facing Catholics in Poland are very similar to those which the Russian Church seeks to fulfil in the countries of her pastoral responsibility. Both Churches advocate the preservation of traditional Christian values in the life of society.

In connection with their pro-active social position, both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Poland have encountered criticism and opposition, Patriarch Kirill continued, mentioning that in recent time Russia has seen more frequent actions of anti-church people who would like to prevent the Church from entering the sphere of school education and to restrict her influence in various areas of public life. In Poland, too, there are political movements displeased with the Church's influence on the life of society, which was manifested in particular in the attempt to remove the Crucifix from the Seim.

'These disturbing tendencies call the Orthodox Christians and Catholics to dialogue on socially

significant problems and to closer cooperation in defending Christian principles in politics and public life', His Holiness stated. He expressed the conviction that the signing of a Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland will become an important step in this direction.

In conclusion of the meeting Patriarch Kirill was presented with a copy of the Icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

Accepting the shrine, His Holiness said, 'On the anniversary day of the tragic crash of the plane with the Polish President on board near Smolensk, Bishop Panteleimon of Smolensk and Vyazma, acting on my behalf, presented our Polish brothers with a copy of the Icon of Our Lady of Smolensk as a gift to Catholic believers in Poland. But while in Poland, I as a former ruling bishop of Smolensk would like to give an image of Our Lady of Smolensk as a gift to the Bishops' Conference.

Patriarch Kirill expressed the hope that this icon will occupy a worthy place and remind the faithful of the ties existing between the peoples of Russia and Poland in spite of various historical circumstances – ties rooted in the Gospel and common system of Christian values.

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