



DECR chairman's message to conference on Mount Athos's Contribution to Europe's Religious and Intellectual Tradition (8-9 July 2011, Salzburg)

Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, sent the following message to the conference on the Contribution of Mount Athos to Europe's Religious and Intellectual Tradition, which took place on July 8-9, 2011, in Salzburg, Austria:

Distinguished Participants in the Conference,

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I cordially greet the organizers and participants of the conference devoted to a unique spiritual and cultural center of humanity, the Holy Mount Athos, and its contribution to the European culture.

No person of common sense will deny that the existence of the European civilization is due to Christianity, as its basic values, mode of thinking and moral law, which has prevailed over centuries, go back to the evangelical mission of the disciples of Christ, the mission that embraced all the nations of the then oikoumene. Young European nations proved no less ready to adopt Christianity than the old Greeks and Romans. On this solid foundation Europe stood for as long as 2000 years and with this age-old legacy she has entered a third millennium.

The universal nature of Christian teaching and social order is organically combined with the individual characteristics of nations, forming various trends in the essentially united European civilization. Byzantium was a religious and intellectual focus of Eastern Orthodox trend for a long time and its role in forming the Orthodox mode of thinking and spirituality cannot be overestimated.

Among the most fruitful works of the Orthodox Byzantine spirit was the powerful civilizational center which has developed with time into a small monastic 'state' located on Athos Peninsula. By Providence the Holy Mount, which has gathered together a multinational brotherhood, has become one of the permanent sources of spiritual and intellectual development for many Orthodox nations and for their cultural and religious self-identification.

The lives of the Serbs and Bulgarians, Russians and Greeks are tied with Mount Athos by many threads. St. Savvas, a figure significant for Serbia, grew spiritually on Mount Athos and then united the people divided by fratricidal strife, becoming head of the Serbian Church. Under another Athonite, St. Euphemius the Patriarch of Tyrnovo, Bulgaria reached the zenith of her written language. His disciple, St. Cyprian the Metropolitan of Kiev, Lithuania and All Russia, along with new translations and liturgical reforms, spread to Russian lands the most precious spiritual treasure of Mount Athos – the old Christian tradition of hesychasm. The seeds brought over from the Holy Mount have given rich shoots in all areas of spiritual life, in the ideals of sanctity, church art, culture of writing, theology and education.

The influence of Mount Athos continues to this day. Moreover, it is spreading ever more broadly. After the historical cataclysms of the 20th century, which led to a mass exodus of the Greeks and Slavs to Western Europe and America, Orthodoxy today provokes an increasing interest throughout the world. The living tradition of hesychasm is now accessible through translations of books about Athonite ascetics into various languages. The monks who were tonsured on Mount Athos have founded sketes and monasteries everywhere in the world – in France, Great Britain, Germany, America. The exhibitions of treasures, which have been carefully preserved by Mount Athos monasteries, have succeeded in provoking a sincere interest everywhere.

The awareness of the contribution that Mount Athos has made to Europe's religious and intellectual tradition leads us to the important task to preserve for the generations to come the unique world of the Holy Mount which has been created by the hands of the multinational monastic brotherhood with their special way of life, various monastic achievements, warm hospitality towards pilgrims and strict internal silence.

I invoke God's blessing on the organizers and participants of this forum and wish them success in becoming aware of the phenomenon of the Holy Mount Athos and the tasks stemming from this awareness.

+ Hilarion

Metropolitan of Volokolamsk

Chairman

Department for External Church Relations

Moscow Patriarchate