



Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople attends reception on occasion of concert in church of Agia Irini

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[/caption]After the recital of Metropolitan Hilarion's oratorio *Passions According St. Matthews* at the museum church of Agia Irini in Istanbul, the composer gave a reception in honour of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and other prominent guests who were present at the concert. Among those invited were Metropolitan Athanasios of Chalcedon, Metropolitan Irinaios of Myriofytos and clergy of the Church of Constantinople, Russian Ambassador to Turkey V. Ivanovsky, Russian General Consul in Turkey A. Yerkhov, diplomats from various countries, compatriots and local public figures.

Greeting his guests, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

For me and for our delegation it is a great joy to be in this city held sacred by us all. Founded by the great Emperor Constantine at a crossroads of the civilizations, it remains today one of the greatest holy places of the Christendom.

For us as representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, every visit to this city is a reminder of the spiritual roots, for we, Christians in Rus', received the Orthodox faith from Constantinople; for us the Church of Constantinople will be forever the Mother Church.

For me personally, Constantinople is also associated with the name of a saint whose life and teaching was the focus of my studies for many years and whose name I bore before taking monastic vows. It is St. Gregory the Theologian, a great theologian of the Church, who together with St. Basil the Great and his brother Gregory of Nyssa defended Orthodoxy at a time when the Arian heresy was prevalent. It was

in this great city that great Gregory pronounced his immortal words about theology. It is here that he ascended the archpastoral throne to rebuff heresies and defend Orthodoxy. It was here, in the Cathedral of Agia Irini, that the Second Ecumenical Council took place and St. Gregory made his speeches.

With special emotion I heard in this church today a recital of my musical composition, remembering that this church is associated with a great event, the Second Ecumenical Council, and that St. Gregory the Theologian used to preach in these very walls. Under the shadow of the cross depicted in the sanctuary of this magnificent building, there resounded the words about our Saviour's passions and death on the cross. It was not the liturgy; it was a concert, but the music performed was inspired by the liturgy and devoted to Christ.

The musicians who have come from Russia – the choir, orchestra and soloists – together with me presented this music to Your Holiness and to this beautiful city. It is a token of our respect, our esteem and our love.

Thank you, Your Holiness, for your presence at the concert, for your kind attitude to this initiative. I would like to thank the ambassadors and diplomats who came for the concert as well as all those who participated in the preparations of this event, especially conductor Alexy Puzakov, Moscow Synodal Choir and Russian National Orchestra.

I would like to wish Your Holiness God's help, so that the Church of Constantinople may prosper and that the theological school on the island of Halki may be opened in the nearest months. It is an event awaited by the whole Orthodox world, not only the Church of Constantinople.

We are looking forward with love to Your Holiness's coming to Moscow and St. Petersburg. I wish all the present here many good years of life.

In his response to Metropolitan Hilarion's greeting, His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople expressed deep satisfaction with the fact that thanks to one of the fellow-hierarchs many people in Constantinople had an opportunity to be present at a spiritual concert on the eve of Easter at the historic church of Agia Irini. Metropolitan Hilarion's oratorio *Passions According to St. Matthews* performed in these walls is an introduction to the Passion Week, he said.

'I wholeheartedly congratulate His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, whom God endowed with many gifts and talents: he is an outstanding theologian and excellent musician, very dynamic worker of the Church and the right hand of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia', Patriarch Bartholomew said. He also congratulated the DECR chairman on his elevation to the rank of metropolitan.

Speaking about fraternal cooperation between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Russian Orthodox Church, the Primate of the Church of Constantinople noted that thanks to this cooperation, in which a prominent role belonged to Metropolitan Hilarion, the preparations for a Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, his longstanding hope, reached their final stage.

His Holiness remarked that he anticipated the joy his coming on a fraternal visit to the Russian Orthodox Church to take place in May. It will not be just reciprocity to the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Constantinople but also an excellent opportunity to strengthen relations between the two Churches.

'We will be able to share a brotherly embrace in Christ in the atmosphere of Easter, to exchange ideas and a common vision of the future of Orthodoxy and its witness before the modern world, to proclaim the unity of the Holy Orthodox Church which we all make up in spite of our belonging to different nations and church jurisdictions', Patriarch Bartholomew said.

In conclusion the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople thanked the participants and organizers of the concert, wishing them further success and God's help.

In his speech, Russian Ambassador to Turkey V. Ivanovsky described the concert as a great event which brought people together, whatever religions they might belong to. Especially significant is this cultural event, he said, for Orthodox Christians as it contributes to further consolidation of mutual understanding, love and good and close relations between the two sister Churches.

DECR Communication Service

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