

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY



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A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Personal Dignity

Selected addresses by
Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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CONTENTS

Foreword by the publishers	9
	<i>1987</i>
A common approach to Church unity and the renewal of mankind (<i>Paper given at the 1st International Theological Seminar ‘Toward a Theology of the World’, Budapest, December 14-18, 1987</i>)	12
	<i>1999</i>
The contemporary environment: Liberalism, traditionalism and the moral values of a uniting Europe (<i>Article in ‘Nezavisimaya Gazeta’, May 26, 1999</i>)	27
	<i>2000</i>
Religious faith as the source of social norms. Correlating traditional and liberal values in individual and societal choices (<i>Address to the Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church ‘Orthodox Theology at the Turn of the Third Millennium’, Moscow, February 7-9, 2000</i>)	36
	<i>2002</i>
Human diversity and global integration (<i>Address to the opening session of the European Council of Religious Leaders, Oslo, November 11-12, 2002</i>)	55

2004	
Liberal ideology: a threat to peace and freedom (Published in 'Tserkovny Vestnik', No. 1-2 (278-279), January 2004)	61
2005	
God's plan for man and free will (Address to the International Theological Conference 'Eschatological Teaching of the Church', Moscow, November 14, 2005).....	68
No freedom without moral responsibility (From a meeting with journalists from the 'Literaturnaya Gazeta', published in no. 45-46, November 2-8 2005).....	80
2006	
Human rights and moral responsibility (Address to the 10 th World Russian People's Council 'Faith, Man, Land: Russia's mission in the twenty-first century', Moscow, April 4, 2006)	87
The Russian Orthodox Church and the Christian dimension of the problem of human rights and freedoms (Article published in the newspaper 'Izvestia', April 4, 2006)	100
'Giving a Soul to Europe' (Opening address to an international conference 'Giving a Soul to Europe – Mission and Responsibility of the Churches', Vienna, May 3-5, 2006)	104
Human rights and their moral foundations in European religious communities (Presentation at the seminar 'The Evolution of Moral Values and Human Rights in Multicultural Society', Strasbourg, October 30, 2006)	110
The value of the human being as the bearer of the Image of God and his dignity (Address to the seminar 'Faithfulness to Traditional Christian Values and Freedom of Conscience', Moscow, December 20, 2006).....	119
2007	
Human rights and religious principles (Address to the regional meeting of the representatives of Christian churches and communities of the CIS countries and the Baltic States preparatory to the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly 'Modern Europe: God, Man and Society. Human Rights and Moral Determination', Moscow, February 27, 2007)	123

Inter-Civilizational Dialogue (Address to the seminar 'Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations: a Bridge between Human Rights and Moral Values', Paris, March 13-14, 2007).....	127
Inter-relationship of human rights and religious and cultural traditions (Address to the conference 'Human Rights and National Identity', Moscow, April 18, 2007).....	135
2008	
Human rights and intercultural dialogue (Speaking at a panel discussion 'Human Rights and Intercultural Dialogue' at the 7 th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, March 18, 2008)	140
The Russian Orthodox Church's basic teaching on human dignity, freedom and rights (Report to the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow, June 26, 2008).....	146
2009	
Dangers of modern theology (From an address at the Kiev Pecherski Lavra to the bishops, clergy, monastics, laity, teachers and students of the Kiev Theological Academy, Kiev, July 29, 2009)	172
Freedom and moral sense – destruction of their inter-relationship (From the speech at the Jubilee Event marking the 200th anniversary of St. Petersburg Theological Academy, St. Petersburg, October 9, 2009).....	178
2010	
The Russian Church and European culture (Article in the magazine 'Expert', 2010. No. 4/690).....	181
Protecting dignity, freedom and human rights. (Message at a meeting with the Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Moscow, October 13, 2010)	191
2011	
Problems of today's world (From the speech at the meeting with the members of the Global Leadership Group of the Davos World Economic Forum in Davos, Moscow, March 12, 2011).....	194
Living according to conscience and truth (From the address at the Easter reception at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Moscow, April 28, 2011)	201
Human rights and traditional values in Europe (Address at the meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders 'Human Rights and Traditional Values in Europe', Moscow, June 21, 2011)	204

The crisis of contemporary secular morality

*(From an address to teaching staff and students**of Balamand University (Lebanon), November 16, 2011) 211*

2012

Spirituality, morality, law

*(From the speech at the round-table conference 'Spirituality, Morality, Law' at Moscow**University of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Moscow, March 28, 2012)..... 215*

Maintaining spiritual and moral purpose

*(From the speech at the 4th Congress of Leaders**of World and Traditional Religions, Astana, May 30, 2012) 218*

FOREWORD

The book 'Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Dignity' by Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, was first published in 2008, when its author was Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kalingrad and Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Relations. It was composed of articles and speeches that he had given up to that time on the subject of Human Rights and Dignity, as he and others sought to clarify and expound the Russian Orthodox Church's distinctive stance in this area, ending with the approval by the Bishops' Council and publication in 2008 of the text 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights.'

The book was translated into Spanish and German in 2009, the year in which its author became Patriarch. In 2010 it was published in Italian and Polish, followed by English, Arabic and Greek. 2012 brought translations into Estonian, Latvian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Japanese, Chinese and Hebrew. To date, this book by the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church has been translated into sixteen languages.

Patriarch Kirill has lived through crucial, often tragic, pages of Russian history. He experienced the severity of the Soviet era and its godless regime. He played an active role in the revival of the Church after the end of the atheistic era, and made an enormous contribution to the development of inter-Orthodox, inter-Chris-

tian and inter-religious cooperation. He has visited more than a hundred countries around the world, worshiping and meeting with religious, political and public figures. The breadth of his experience of the church, and of social life, has contributed to His Holiness' understanding of the fundamental notions of human freedom, responsibility and dignity. His thinking in this area constitutes the basis of this book, in which the primary idea is the connection between the individual's freedom and his responsibility before God, society and himself. The responsibility imposed by freedom originates in the moral nature of man, not in his philosophical or political views. Moral nature remains unchanged as a constant given to us by the Creator. Accordingly, moral standards cannot be overwritten for today.

According to His Holiness, the book was written to say one thing: Freedom to sin is not freedom. During one of the presentations of his work, Patriarch Kirill, speaking about the doctrine of St. Paul on freedom, emphasized: 'The freedom to sin turns humans into slaves of instinct. If such freedom forms the basis of human civilization, then we create a civilization of instinct; an unsustainable civilization.'

Today we are witnessing the distortion of human life associated with a false understanding of freedom. People are hoping to be convinced that they should themselves determine the moral postulates of life. Moral relativism imposed on modern society becomes the cause of many phenomena unacceptable for the believer, such as same-sex 'marriages', prostitution, abortion and euthanasia. The concept of sin is banished from such a system of values.

If morality becomes relative, freedom turns into permissiveness, because only morality is able to restrict and guide the individual, with his free will, towards good. There is no neutral freedom: there is either freedom from sin or freedom to sin.

The First Hierarch of the Russian Church sets out in this book the thesis of the absolute nature of moral values laid down by God in human nature. He states that it is from the religious tradition – in the Divine Commandments – that man is called to draw ideas of

morality; a morality that reflects the highest value of human personality.

We hope this book will contribute to discussions of the relationship between freedom and responsibility in human life. The ideas forming the basis of the writings by Patriarch Kirill can be the subject of an intellectual dialogue among theologians, philosophers, public figures, politicians and ordinary believers around the world.

The Publishers

A COMMON APPROACH TO CHURCH UNITY AND THE RENEWAL OF MANKIND

Paper given at the 1st International Theological Seminar 'Toward a Theology of the World', Budapest, December 14-18, 1987

The theme I have been invited to speak on – a common approach to Church unity and the renewal of mankind – immediately confronts us with a methodological problem: Church unity relates uniquely to the activities of Christians, while the renewal of mankind concerns every man and woman on our planet. How can we talk of a common approach to these two problems? We may discover one or the other general principle, but otherwise our approaches will be as different as are the two problems. At the same time, Church unity and the renewal of mankind are deeply inter-related. In other words, the title of my paper covers at least three themes: church unity, the renewal of mankind, and their inter-relationship, each of which calls for separate treatment. To keep within my appointed time frame, I want to focus on one of these themes and examine the bases for this common search for the renewal of mankind and look at the specific contribution Christians can make to it.

What do we mean by the 'renewal of mankind'? Implicit in this wording is the idea that the human condition is unsatisfactory and that action is needed to change it for the better. Also, the fact that we are talking about humanity as a whole and not individual nations and states, tells us that the problems that cloud our lives are global in nature, and that solving them will call for concerted ac-

tion across the planet. However, the ability to make take joint action presupposes a certain unity. Which begs the fundamental question: in what sense can one speak of unity in relation to mankind as a whole? What does such unity imply?

We can approach this concept on several levels. In the Acts of the Apostles, St Paul says: 'From one blood He (God) has made the whole human race' (Acts 17:26). From this affirmation comes the well-known theological concept of the unity of the human race, constituting a single family bound by invisible mystical ties. Evidence of this mystical unity is provided by the irresistible desire of people to enter into different forms of association. One of the axioms of our lives is that the human person can realize himself only through communication with other individuals. In isolation from his fellows, man cannot achieve fullness of life, he is doomed to destruction. All human activities, conscious and unconscious, associate us in one way or another with our fellow-men.

This mystical unity I have just mentioned is embodied in different social structures. The reasons for this unifying activity in our sin-damaged world can often be very prosaic, and this activity can also take on ugly and at times dangerous forms. But even this does not prevent it from being an expression of a universal human desire for unity, based on a sense of common ontological roots. Throughout history human communities have tried, with greater or lesser success (and at times have blatantly failed) to implement the idea of human unity. While at the level of family, clan, tribe, nation and state, these attempts have produced certain results, at the higher, inter-state level, they have almost always ended in failure. The most obvious historical example is aggressive wars and the empires emerging from them. As well as satisfying the ambitions, greed, power-lust and vanity of conquerors, and aside from the military-strategic, political and economic objectives, empire-building in a certain way expresses a subconscious desire for unity, for a blurring of national and other boundaries. Within the vast world of an empire, a single state body is created as the essential precondition for social communality. History tells us, however, that such experiments,

based primarily on force, are inevitably doomed. Counteracting this unifying force are the centrifugal tendencies generated by frustration at the uneven distribution of wealth and at the swallowing up of the cultures of the peoples brought into this union. In the very nature of things, a community of people achieved by force and maintained by a balance of power can never be strong and durable. But even on a voluntary basis and in the absence of any coercion, the unity of mankind can hardly be expressed and accommodated within a single state, at least in the foreseeable future.

What then do we have in mind in calling for the unity of mankind? How can we describe this unity in categories that are clear and convincing not just for Christians but for all our contemporaries? How can we proclaim the biblical message of the unity of the human race, without ignoring the cruel realities of the modern world? These realities require us to use more reserved language, at least towards the non-Christian world. The idea of 'unity of mankind', almost incomprehensible in itself, needs to be made explicit in concrete, realistic concepts if this Christian message is to have any chance of being heard in our divided and contradictory world. And even these concepts may only be partially able to convey the biblical message of the oneness of humanity. Maybe they will be, not solid food, but milk, for feeding not 'spiritual', but 'carnal' and mutually-separated people (1 Cor. 3: 1-2).

Our starting point in defining such concepts has to be the threat that hangs over all mankind. This is a global threat: in today's world there is no magic oasis where people can feel safe and secure. We live in a confined and interdependent world, and the only way in which we can resolve the global crises is for all of us, the whole of humanity, to do so together.

It is a well-known fact that an external threat has the effect of increasing the internal unity and cohesiveness of any state. A general danger forces people to put aside their internal differences. Without this unity, there is little chance of defeating the enemy. Today, the whole of mankind has common mortal enemies. The whole of human civilization finds itself under siege, faced with the

eternal question of 'to be or not to be?', posed, for first time ever, on a planetary scale. Faced with these threats humanity has no other path but to unite. In other words, the unity of mankind that is effectively achievable is a unity of action in the fight for universal human survival. It is important to state clearly at this juncture that such unity is a pragmatic one, falling far short of Christian aspirations. It is, rather, the first step on the long journey. At the same time it is also clear that without this first step there may not be any path to journey along at all.

The main difficulty in uniting humanity to overcome the crises threatening it lies in the very nature of these crises, not external to mankind, but generated by mankind itself. They are its internal diseases.

In the past, such diseases were treated on the familiar pattern: one state or one part of the world sought to solve its problems on the back of another state or another part of the world. Such 'therapy' was always carried out from a position of strength. The winner was the one who was stronger. This was the very basis of global politics. The driving force behind this policy was national self-interest, cloaked in the mantle of national security. The realities of today's interdependent world reveal the utter bankruptcy of this policy. Any attempt to improve one's own position at the expense of someone else's turns into a phantom gain, exacerbating the crisis and harming not only the weaker, but also the stronger side. Global economic processes provide convincing illustration of this. In the military domain too, sticking with the old patterns will logically lead to universal destruction. In other words, humanity must learn to overcome the threats facing it by working together, following a new principle that the preservation of the interests of each is the precondition for the achievement of the interests of all, just as the security of each is the precondition for the security of all.

However, the proclamation of this principle immediately leads to the question of criteria. What do we mean when we say the interests and security of everyone? States and peoples can have very differing understandings of these concepts. To represent the complexity of the

problem it is enough to take, for example, a category like material well-being, the understanding of which is always an individual matter. In other words, joint actions to address the issues facing humanity need to be based on a common world view. Without such a basis it is impossible to achieve any general coherent understanding of these issues, let alone overcome them. Without such a basis there can be no unity of humanity to confront contemporary crises.

Does this mean that we must reject any idea of a common ideological basis as pure utopia? The extraordinary variety and often contradictory nature of existing worldviews do indeed make the implementation of this idea very much more complicated. And yet in our day there are encouraging signs, suggesting that the ice has started to break, that faced with risks that threaten the whole of humanity, people are beginning to understand the need to find common principles. Principles that rise above ideological, religious, national and class interests and that could provide a true basis of unity and coordinated action in today's crises.

To understand in which categories this framework can be defined, we need to try and find a common factor in the various contemporary crises. Unfortunately, these crises are too numerous to list here. They are developing against a background of unprecedented scientific and technological progress – that same progress in which the romantics of the past saw a panacea for all ills, and through which they placed great hope in the future. 'Technological euphoria' was all too common in the 1960s in the search both for Church unity and the renewal of humanity.¹ But already by the 1970s the mood had become more realistic. The energy crisis of 1973 with all its economic and political consequences exposed the extreme vulnerability of our contemporary scientific and technological civilization and its dependence on resources that no longer appeared inexhaustible.

However, the 1970s brought something more important in the assessment of scientific and technological progress. Even those who

¹ Steinbuch K.: *Falsch programmiert.* – Stuttgart, 1968.

had been carried away by the earlier euphoria began to talk about 'changing course', of the need to 'consciously clarify the rules of our community' and 'reach agreement on the principles by which we wish live with each other'². Discussion about the dangerous consequences of scientific and technological progress included deep reflection on the moral condition of modern man and society³³. Indeed, the threat of self-destruction hanging over humanity began to be seen as a result of the triumph of its scientific thought, its power over the forces of nature. On the way people manage this power, it was realized, depends the future of life itself. The fact that the tremendous advances in science and technology have got us no further towards resolving global crises tells us that we are not making good use of our power. Indeed scientific and technological development serves to escalate crises, fuelled by material force (the arms race, ecology) and, in certain parts of the world, by economic oppression (transnational corporations).

Why? What is the mysterious rationale that converts scientific and technical progress into the flywheel of world crises? Let me quote here Russian religious thinker N.A. Berdyaev, who already back in 1932 said that 'when such terrible force lies in man's hands, the fate of mankind depends on man's spiritual condition'⁴. Science and technology today offer people an opportunity to do good or evil on a truly cosmic scale, engaging the very forces of nature in their activities. But good and evil are moral categories. They belong to man's inner world, a world that is revealed outwardly by actions of every kind. Are not the disasters that we see around us the outer expression of mankind's internal diseases? Do not the crisis-like consequences of scientific and technological progress point to a lack of spiritual progress, do they not witness to the ever-widening gap between the intellectual and moral state of the world? Some-

² Steinbuch K.: *Kurskorrektur.* – Stuttgart, 1973.

³ Of particular interest here is the WCC conference 'Faith, Science and the Future', held in Boston in 1979.

⁴ Berdyaev N. A.: *Duchovnoe sostoyanie sovremennogo mira* (Spiritual state of the current world) // (Put' – 1932, no. 35, p. 59)

how one divines an inter-dependence between the development of modern civilization and spiritual decline of the individual. Scientific and technological progress offers modern man a more comfortable lifestyle and an easier means of livelihood. At the same time, a lack of stable moral norms pushes people, with their increased power, to seek ever greater comfort and wealth. This upward spiralling of material power is accompanied by discouraging developments in the field of ethical values, with morality seen as an unnecessary obstacle in the search for happiness, irrelevant to the pursuit of wealth and power.

In turn, the neglect of moral values further increases the importance of material values, stimulating the accumulation of personal possessions. However, it is a commonly observed fact that when people become careless with moral values, individuals begin to focus exclusively on their own well-being and ignore the interests of other people, until we arrive at a complete disdain for human life. This is what is happening in the world today. This is the spiritual and moral essence of the multiple crises we constantly face. We can say that today's crises demonstrate a violation of the harmony of being that is achieved through the implementation in human life of absolute moral values. Therefore, without minimizing the role of well-known political, economic, historical and other factors in determining the face of contemporary crises, we can rightly state that their root causes lie in the human spirit, in human morality. And if so, then humanity must take up the fight against these crises on the basis of shared moral principles. In other words, the ideological basis needed to bring about a unification of the human spirit in the struggle for survival can be described in moral categories that are common to all.

Such an ideological basis seems, also, to be the only really feasible solution today. And the reason for this lies not only in the variety, contradictions and even mutual hostility of the world's ideologies, but rather in the unique, universal and absolute nature of human morality. Even if, arguing from the multiplicity of the ethical codes of people living in different social, cultural and economic

conditions, many thinkers cast doubt the moral consciousness of humanity, the possibility of arriving at generally accepted ethical objectives governing the behaviour of all human being, with a unified system of values, is widely accepted. The different codes that exist in different parts of the world are to be regarded rather as differing parts of the one whole⁵.

One result of a purely rationalistic, pragmatic attitude to the organization of human society has been to reduce attention to the importance of morality in public life. The mistake of politicians, scientists and lawyers has been to effectively separate politics, science and law from ethics. Of course, this separation has never been explicitly proclaimed by anyone, and in theory the moral principle is generally recognized as superior to the principle of law. However, in practice the moral order falls more into the field of 'good intentions', useful advice and exhortations. With its emphasis over many centuries on the personal dimension of ethics, the Christian Church has in a sense helped create an atmosphere which has caused an 'ethical secularization' of public life. This 'ethical secularization' has cost humanity dearly. Millions of victims, especially in the wars of the twentieth century, bespeak the neglect, in political life, of the undiminished importance of absolute moral values, or else the attempt to interpret morality in the direction of national, class or racial interests.

The bitter experience of both past and contemporary crises convinces us that social and economic relations, politics and science cannot stand outside the realm of ethics. The only way to improve the world we live in is by observing and protecting the eternal and immutable moral principles of life.

⁵ Cf.: Lossky N.: *Uslovyia absolynogo dobra* (Conditions of absolute good (Paris, 1949)). Drawing on ethnographic research, we are convinced that 'all the basic moral ideas contained in the Ten Commandments are the common heritage of all mankind...', and the moral codes of the different people give 'sufficient material for an inductive substantiation of the truth of unity of the moral conscience of humanity' (ibid., pp. 130). The surprising consensus among all religions on moral responsibility and moral values only confirms this conclusion, which is not only inductive but also finds an intuitive basis in people's personal experiences.