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### Russian Orthodox Church To-Day

By

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After years and years of persecution, we can say that the continuing and all-embracing revival of church life of the Russian Orthodox Church is going on and the general tendency to the development of all aspects of her diocese, parish and social activities is becoming more and more vivid.

There have been some most important events – landmarks of starting the new epoch of Russian Orthodox Church:

1988 – Celebration of the Festival of Thousand Years of Baptizing Rus.

2000 – The Archpriests Council: Canonization of the Tsarist Family of Nicolas II;

Attitude to the other Christian Confessions;

Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church.

There are 128 dioceses now (instead of 67 ones in 1989) and 19000 parishes (instead of 689 ones in 1989) in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church.

According to modern statistics Russian society is becoming more and more religious: for example, 57% of the St. Petersburg population call themselves Russian Orthodox, in Russian Federation – even 61%. Unfortunately, their religiosity is sometimes neither dogmatically nor ethically oriented, and the people who say that they are Russian Orthodox can very often practice occultism. If we take, e.g. the key question of abortion and ask about the attitude to this question, then we will get 34% who will blame abortion as a sin and murder, 36% do not agree with them, the other 30% do not have any definite an-

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swer or special concern about the problem. More than 10 000 children are dying each day because of abortion – this loss is comparable with the losses during the Second World War. So as a consequence in the perspective of 25 years we may witness a reduction of Russian Federation population up to 100 million of people or even less.

I use this example to show the state of morality in Russian modern society and to show how much should be done in order to improve the situation in Russia. And we know that the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the main forces and institutes in Russian society which can find real resources for this improvement. Let us see what and how it was done by Russian Orthodox Church during the recent time.

### *Education at Ecclesiastical Schools and the Society*

The Educational Committee of the Moscow Patriarchate is responsible for the activity in organizing education and upbringing in the ecclesiastical schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. The priests are prepared during their 7 years of education in seminaries and then in academies.<sup>2</sup> Up to the last period the ecclesiastical schools remained under the academic status of the Patriarchate. Only recently in 2004 the Archpriests Council has approved that the ecclesiastical schools should receive governmental accreditation as soon as possible, with the traditions of church education taken into account.

This will bring another status to the graduates of the academies, giving them the opportunity to be employed at state and non-state organizations, too. This could bring a necessary improved level of scholarly work in ecclesiastical educational institutions. In this regard the Russian Orthodox Church considers all-church co-ordination of scholarly and research work, of technical support, and funding church scholarships as an important task.

The recent decision of the Council also points out once again that it is necessary for the persons being ordained as priests to have seminary or corresponding education, or to be students of ecclesiastical schools.

For the development of church testimony in the modern world, for its worthy position in society and the improvement of its standing, as well as for the development of theology and education, there are many new initiatives to promote the dialogue and interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and lay culture, science and scholarship more actively.

The St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy (SRPh) is involved in several projects like “The Church and State Relationship in the Light of the Social Doctrine of Russian Orthodox Church”, “St. Petersburg Educational Center for Religion and Science” (SPECRS), the Inter-Institutional Educational Center “Pokrov”, etc.

### *Lay Education in Religion*

There are many attempts of the Church to work in the sphere of religious education among the lay people in order to bring about real changes in the society. The Church's educational activity cannot be confined to the internal life of the Church only. The cooperation between Church and lay schools and higher educational institutions are devel-

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<sup>2</sup> The first Ecclesiastic (Spiritual) academy was started in St. Petersburg in 1809 for the higher theological education, then afterwards another three were opened during the 19th century, and two others in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

oping: joint conferences for students and teachers of both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical schools gathering, competitions involving young people, concerts of spiritual music organized by the church together with the popular young singers and bards.

There are also important initiatives to restore the church school system for the lay people, which was almost totally destroyed during the years of persecution, and thus religious education remained unattainable for many citizens for a long-long time. It has to be remembered that joining the general state school education with Orthodox upbringing forms a harmonious individual from a very early age.

There are few Orthodox secondary schools in most dioceses. Now many local churches have the opportunity to address Orthodox parents with an appeal to attend the Sunday schools together with their children, as well as to struggle for enabling their children to study the course of the foundations of the Orthodox culture in the curriculum of the state secondary schools. The Church is really active to improve the situation in religious education, but this work has to be considerably improved.

The Church tries to bring spiritual enlightenment to all social groups, in particular to parentless children in orphanages and boarding schools. In special shelters and houses of charity, where staff consists entirely of church people, they are working on adaptation of children to normal life, training them in labor and everyday life activities, drawing the children into the church life of the fraternity, transferring the children into church families (church group), etc.

#### *Youth Activities*

The Church concerns and worries about the spiritual state of the younger generation. Working with young people is becoming a priority for all church structures and every member of the Church individually. The Council finds it necessary to co-ordinate activities of the Educational Committee, the Missionary Department of Moscow Patriarchate and the corresponding diocese structures in the area of working with young people. To achieve some stable success in perfecting the youth-oriented work, the informative and publishing activities of the Youth Department has much to be improved.

There are attempts to develop more and various forms of free time activities for the young people, including concerts, exhibitions, summer camps, construction brigades etc. filling them with Christian contents.

#### *Consecrating Saints in the Russian Orthodox Church and Theological Creativity*

During the Communist regime many Russian priests and clergy men were persecuted. According to the last calculations there were about one million people who were persecuted in connection with the church affairs during the period of 1937-1938. 150 000 priests and active parishioners were shot. To commemorate the martyrs of Russian Orthodox Church a special commission was established. In the frame of this commission an important and serious work is held to commemorate and consecrate saints: many priests are working on preparation of materials for consecration, by careful consideration of proposals of diocese consecration committees.

The Divine Services Commission is trying to develop liturgical creative process that reflects the urgent needs of Orthodox Christians, and at the same time they try to control the quality of texts presented to the Synod Commission. While confirming the pious atti-

tude to the liturgical texts sanctified by the centuries of the Russian Orthodox Church's prayer practice, we believe it necessary to charge the Divine Services Commission, together with ecclesiastic schools, to continue adjusting these texts so that they more easily understood by the church people, however on the condition of careful and circumspect attitude to the church legacy.

#### *Publishing Activities*

It can be said that the recent years have seen the continuing successful development of Orthodox publishing. One can find a considerable variety of books, dealing with the religious and ecclesiastical issues, inside the church buildings, book stores, state libraries and other places. At the same time, in some cases the quality of editorial preparation and the technical level of certain publishing houses are still not well developed. There are many joint publications of church and non-church organizations. Such cooperation helps to broaden the contents of edition's problematic and shows patterns of church-society cooperation.

One can find beautiful posters of the church issues in the streets of big cities, though it is still a rare thing, and it is needed to do many special efforts (decisions, approvals from the state and the church administrations, etc.) to put such a poster at a place open to the public.

Church periodicals circulation has increased through the last three years: newspapers, brochures, newsletters can be received in churches.

#### *Charity and Social Service*

Russian Orthodox Church pays more and more attention to the local social services. The Department of Charity and Social Service is in charge of improving the co-ordination of the projects, with a special stress on the establishment of almshouses, orphanages, boarding schools, charity canteens, as well as the organizations of medical help to orphanages, hospitals and hospices, to the elderly, the condemned, drug and alcohol addicts, immigrants, victims of natural disasters and terrorist acts. It has also stimulated such traditional activity as congregational charity: distribution of clothes and food to homeless people by parishes and monasteries.

Monasteries are advised to take active part in the educational and social programs organized by the dioceses. The monastic charity service is realized through opening almshouses for the elderly and the needy people, providing free medical help, assistance in buying the necessary medication. The monasteries which have subsidiary farms provide as many jobs as they can to the unemployed.

#### *Church and State Relations*

In acquiring a new level in the partnership between Church and state in the sphere of cooperating with the Armed Forces and the law-enforcement agencies the new legislation is considered, particularly the laws regulating the status of chaplains, which agrees with the historical traditions and the world practice. The law and agreement are supported in

dioceses with the activities directed to guarantee the stability of relations and mutual understanding of the Church and the military structures.

Church leaders and church administration take part in the main official state meetings together with the state officials, in public events of state importance, public and scholar conferences and not only as guests, but also as active participants.

Church is taking any opportunity to point out her opinion on this or that important matter for the country, or its external relations. For example, in connection with the remaining confusion on the systems of electronic registration of citizens, still existing among the faithful, the Department of External Church Relations and the Synod Theological Commission continue studying this problem and specially pointed out that it is unacceptable to encourage extremist attitudes in the Church and by this to give the opportunity for the mass media to slander the dignitaries of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Holy Synod is actively working on a document reflecting the Russian Orthodox Church's position on the problems of globalization, too.