

# Documents

## Patriarch Speaks at WCC

*His Holiness Patriarch Pimen spoke to members of the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 17 September, 1973 (see report in RCL Vol. 1, No. 6, p. 30). The following extracts were translated from the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, No. 11, 1973, pp. 57-59.*

We have been members of the World Council of Churches for a relatively short time, since the Third Assembly in New Delhi in November 1961. Even the World Council of Churches itself is still a comparatively new phenomenon in the history of the Christian Church – we marked its 25th anniversary last August. However, the questions that stand before the ecumenical movement and the tasks which the World Council of Churches has made its basic aim, as we all well know, are certainly not new. Long before the appearance of the World Council of Churches these questions troubled the hearts and minds of many Church leaders, theologians and representatives of both clergy and laity and have urgently demanded a solution.

If one turns to the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, to its theology, to its religious and philosophical thought, and to the social-religious streams that have held sway during the second half of the nineteenth century and now in the twentieth century, then one clearly sees that the problems of the Church's renewal, the re-organization of Christian congregations with the aim of more effective witness to Christ in the modern world, problems of Christian unity and relations with non-Christians and unbelievers – one sees that all these questions were raised, discussed and debated heatedly and passionately, and that solutions began to appear in our theology, in our Church circles, in the very life of the Church long before they were raised in the West and by the ecumenical movement. When the Roman Catholic Church began its renewal at the Second Vatican Council, we noted with amazement that many questions of this *aggiornamento* had faced our Church, we had studied, discussed and tried to find solutions to them many decades earlier. At the same time, as often happens with those who are the first to pave the way into the future, we in our Church too, unfortunately, were not protected from serious mistakes and failures. In the desire to help you avoid these, I would mention to you the past experience of our Church in matters of renewal and relations with people of other creeds, convictions and ideologies. Our past experience is a lesson to us and should serve as a graphic example to you, that the renewal of the Church can and must be attained exclusively through the Church and by means of the Church, through the development and deepening of the *sobornost*\* which has been

\* *Sobornost* is the Orthodox concept of Church wholeness, fellowship, community, a unity based on love and prayer. The Greek word *koinonia* is the nearest equivalent.

inherent in the Church since ancient times. Orthodox theology puts forward teaching on *sobornost* as an example and a pattern for all Christian unity. *Sobornost* is not only conciliarity, that is the system of Church government and fellowship through discussion of all the most important questions at Ecumenical or Local Councils. *Sobornost* is an inherent ontological quality of the Church, bestowed on it by its Divine Founder and Head – Jesus Christ our Lord. In Him the *sobornost* of the Church finds not only its basis, but also its completion. What is alien to *sobornost* is the principle of domination and of external authority ruling over the Church and in the Church, which does not represent the voice of the Council or the conscience of the whole Church, as it freely and unanimously solves Church problems in a spirit of complete brotherhood, a spirit of love and respect for each other, in complete obedience to God's revealed truth and to the Holy Spirit, who lives and works in the Church and directs its corporate mind and will.

The renewal of the Church can and must constantly take place within the Church itself, for the good of the Church, through organic growth and a deepening corporate consciousness among the people of God and the whole Church. Those means which are not in keeping with the spirit of the Holy Gospel of Christ, with the aims of the Church's authentic witness and service in the world, cannot lead to its genuine renewal. This is one of the basic conclusions, drawn from the experience of our Church's recent history, which we present to the ecumenical movement and to the World Council of Churches as a recognized instrument of this movement.

. . . Amidst all the necessary dynamism of our work in satisfying the physical needs of mankind, a work of compassion and love, the World Council of Churches must not of course reduce the potential of its sphere of concern which is directly related to the problems of believers' spiritual life, to questions of faith, to the proclamation of Christ Crucified and Resurrected, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1: 23-24).

We maintain that the World Council of Churches must harmoniously combine the vertical and horizontal directions of its activities.

Also, the experience of our Church during past centuries teaches us that when the Church succumbs to the temptation of dominating and exercising complete sway over the people of God, instead of serving and being ready to share their fate in both joy and sorrow, then the Church, or rather its historical structure, isolates itself from the people and gradually loses their love, respect and trust.

Divine Providence has chosen to remind us of all this by means of the historical experience, handed down to modern Christianity.

It is now quite clear to us that a Church can only be alive, active and able to fulfil its mission if, led by the Holy Spirit, without recoiling an inch from its divine calling and remaining entirely true to its Divine Founder and Head, Jesus Christ our Lord, it simultaneously takes heed of the life, thoughts, needs and aspirations of the people with sensitivity and faithfully works for their good. Only under such conditions can success accompany the preaching of the Church on repentance, its proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to its people and the call to everlasting salvation in this Kingdom.