Patriarch Kirill visits the Holy Resurrection Theological Academy of the Albanian Orthodox Church

On April 30, 2018, in conclusion of the of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's visit to Albania, the Primates of the Russian and Albanian Orthodox Churches visited the St. Vlash Monastery and the Holy Resurrection Theological Academy of the Albanian Orthodox Church.

At the entry to the monastery compound, Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Anastasios were welcomed by Metropolitan Nikolla of Apollonia and Fier, the monastic community as well children clad in folk dress, students of the Albanian theological academy and numerous parishioners.

Patriarch Kirill was accompanied by a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church including Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, Archpriest Andrey Bondrenko, acting head of the Patriarchal Protocol Service, and Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal press service.

In the St. Vlash church, the Primate of the Albanian Church, addressing His Holiness Kirill, said in particular, 'When in 1991-1992 I arrived in Albania as Patriarchal Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, our priority concern was to open a theological academy without delay. The twenty years that I had spent as professor at the University of Athens department of theology and my experience as a missionary in East Africa, which began with the opening of the first theological seminary in Nairobi, developed in me a firm conviction that this school must become the corner stone of restoration of the Orthodox Autocephalous Albanian Church.

His Beatitude also said that despite all the difficulties, the Resurrection Seminary was transferred to the monastery compound 37 kilometers from Tirana.

'My dear Holy Brother, we are aware of your unflagging interest in theological education', Archbishop Athanasios continued, 'you were professor and rector of the famous theological academy in what was Leningrad. You continued your active participation in inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian events to which you made a contribution based on your rich theological knowledge and spiritual experience. With great satisfaction, we heard during our latest meeting in Moscow the stress you make on Orthodox theological education'.

According to Archbishop Anastasios, Orthodox theology, while using the achievements of the modern scientific methods, 'should constantly feed on the saps of the biblical and patristic tradition and the Cross-Resurrection spirit of Orthodoxy'.

'It is quite clear', he noted, 'that in the 21st century it is necessary for theology and church work to exercise mutual penetration. Actual theology, constantly observing "signs of time" and the general development of humanity, should direct and inspire missionary work as well'.

Archbishop Anastasios thanked Patriarch Kirill for his visit to the Albanian Church and wished that His Holiness may 'walk a firm path being constantly inspired by the theological depth and universal spirit of his heavenly patron St. Cyril Equal-to-the-Apostles. May God give you that all your work may always be sealed with God's grace and illumined with Paschal light'.

Then Patriarch Kirill made his address:

> 'Your Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania,
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> Your Eminence Metropolitan Nikolla of Apollonia and Fier,
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> Your Eminences and Excellencies,
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> Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters:
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> Chris Is Risen!
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> I am delighted at the opportunity to visit this holy monastery and the Resurrection of Christ Academy located in it.
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> I came to this place for the first time in 2005 and now I can attest to the brilliant implementation of the plans which you, Your Beatitude, told me about fifteen years ago. For the last years, the academy has become a most important center of theological education and spiritual enlightenment in the Albanian Church, a symbol of the revival of Orthodoxy in the country. I know that, along with students and members of the monastic community, there live orphaned children and children from extended families for whom an orphanage has been organized.
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> Knowing Your Beatitude for 50 years, I cannot but note that in everything here I recognize the stamp of your personal involvement. All these achievements are based on the enormous experience of missionary, educational and pastoral work that you have gained also in the years

of your service in the African continent and here in Albania and, stemming from this experience, the awareness of the importance of training church cadre and of social work.

I hope that the academy graduates will become zealous workers in the church field, your faithful helpers who will strengthen Orthodoxy in Albania looking at the example of Your Beatitude's selfless service. From my heart I wish His Eminence the Rector, as well as lecturers, staff and students – all those who work and study here, blessed success in your work and grace-giving strength from God.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like once again to thank you for the generous welcome and brotherly hospitality accorded me and my companions in the course of this visit to your Holy Church. I am leaving this country bearing with me the warmest remembrances about the Albanian Orthodox Church, her vitality, her God's cause zealously advanced by her Primate, bishops and priests. I hope that the bilateral relations between our Sister Churches will develop with the same dynamic'.

Patriarch Kirill presented the academy library with 12 new volumes of the Orthodox Encyclopaedia in addition to the 36 volumes given by His Holiness three years earlier through Russian Ambassador A. Karpushin. He also gave other books in several languages and an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov and an Easter egg painted by Russian iconographers.

Archbishop Athanasios presented Patriarch Kirill with several books published by the academy, noting that since its inception it has published over 150 editions.

Then Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Athanasios planted two cypresses in the academy garden as a token of the visit made to the academy by the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

His Holiness also familiarized himself in detail with the life of the theological school, visited classes, the library and the St. Vlash Monastery in the territory of this the academy is located.

After the visit to the monastery, Patriarch Kirill went to the airport. He and his delegation were seen off by Archbishop Anastasios, Albanian clergy, Ambassador A. Karpushin and other officials.

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The St. Vlash Monastery is situated 37 km from Tirana, in the village of Shenavlash (*Alb*. St. Vlash) near the town of Durres. In 1967, it was closed and destroyed to its foundation. With the destruction of this monastery, the extermination of other churches and monasteries began throughout the country.

It was revived in 1996, and in the same year the Resurrection Theological Academy was transferred to the monastery compound. The academy was founded in 1992 and transformed into academy with a four-year curriculum. Metropolitan Nikolla of Apollonia and Fier is the rector of the academy, the abbot of the monastery and its only monk.

At present, there are 40 students in the academy, both young men and women. The academy has a church of the Resurrection, a library and two dormitories.

The monastery compound included an orphanage (30 inmates), a women's hermitage with only one nun, Sister Rachel, who had taken monastic vows at the Greek Convent of 14 000 Bethlehem Infant Martyrs.

The monastery is regularly visited by pilgrims from Russia.

DECR Communication Service

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