

## Patriarch Kirill takes part in State Duma's Parliamentary Christmas Meetings



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the State Duma Chairman V. Volodin attended the opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Christmas Meetings organized at the State Duma as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Christmas Educational Readings under the theme '1917-2017: Lessons of the Centenary'.

The Parliamentary Christmas Meetings is a major part of the International Christmas Educational Readings. Patriarch Kirill attended the parliamentary meetings for the first time in January 2014 when he addressed the Council of the Federation. It was the first visit to be made by the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament. In 2015, the Parliamentary Christmas Meetings were held at the State Duma while in 2016 back in the Council of the Federation.

On January 26, 2017, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church was welcomed at the State Duma entrance by the State Duma Chairman V. Volodin and the head of the synodal department for religious

education and catechism, Metropolitan Merkury of Rostov and Novocherkassk.

At the Parliament's Walnut Room His Holiness and Mr. Volodin met with leaders of the State Duma factions. In attendance were also representatives of the Church including Metropolitan Merkury, Mr. Legoida, head of the synodal department for the Church's relations with society and mass media, and his deputy A. Schipkov.

After the meetings Patriarchate Kirill and Mr. Volodin saw the display of the works by the winners of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Contest of Children's Creative Work 'The Beauty of God's World' and the exhibition 'Russia's Heritage: Historical Pages and Spiritual Traditions'.

After that the descendants of great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, the poet's last direct descendant A. A. Pushkin, chairman of the Russian Nobility Union in Belgium, and his wife Maria Pushkina-Durnovo, presented Patriarch Kirill with an icon of the Holy Protomartyr Varvara, a family icon of the Pushkin-Durnovo family, as a gift to the Russian Orthodox Church. The icon painted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century used to belong to Maria Pushkina-Durnovo's grandmother.

Thanking the Pushkins, Patriarch Kirill said in particular, 'It is already the third icon with such a fate. The first one was presented to me by Bulgarian King Simeon. It was a baptismal Icon of St. Nicholas, which Emperor Nicholas II gave to enfant Boris, the future King of Bulgaria. He is the father of the present King Simeon who brought this icon to Russia and gave it to me. The second Icon of St. Nicholas is also linked with Bulgaria. It had been taken out by Russian White Guard officers. It had worked many wonders in Bulgaria. Someone of its last owners willed it to the Russian Patriarch. Two or three days after my enthronement, our ambassador, accompanied by people linked with this icon, presented me at the Moscow Cathedral of the Assumption with this icon, which exhumed myrrh the next day in my cell. I am a living witness to this event. These remarkable shrines have both historical and spiritual significance'.

After the meeting with Pushkin's descendants, His Holiness and Mr. Volodin proceeded to the State Duma hall for a meeting with parliament members, state officials and representatives of scientific and public organizations. There were also members of the Interreligious Council in Russia, Local Orthodox Churches and Muslim and Jewish communities. The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by the Holy Synod members, heads of synodal departments and several metropolias, as well as hierarchs and clergy.

Mr. Volodin opened the meeting with a brief speech of welcome. Then His Holiness Kirill addressed the assembly. His speech was followed by a report made by Mr. Volodin, remarks by leaders of the State Duma factions and a speech by the first vice-chairman of the Council of the Federation N. Fedorov.

Patriarch Kirill presented the State Duma with a set of his works published in the recent years.

Mr. Volodin thanked the patriarch and expressed hope that the parliament members would hear the voice of the Church and His Holiness's proposals 'voiced on behalf of Russian people and parishioners to be realized in the form of laws'. 'The aim of the Parliamentary Christmas Meetings is exactly to build an effective dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church, the State Duma, various confessions and society as a whole', he continued noting that the Russian Orthodox Church made a special contribution to the building of such dialogue.

Then Patriarch Kirill and State Duma Speaker V. Volodin presented awards to the winners of the International Contest for the Best Children's Creative Work and the National Contest 'For the Moral Feat of the Teacher'.

In conclusion of the meeting His Holiness thanked all the participants in the Christmas meetings and wished them 'God's help, peace of the soul, physical and spiritual strength and, most importantly, a calm and optimistic vision'.

The session of the 5th Parliamentary Christmas Meetings was broadcast live by Russia 24 and Soyuz TV channels and the website of the Russian State Duma.

After a break the work of the parliamentary meetings continued in issue round-table conferences.

*Patriarchal Press Service*

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