



## **Pan-Orthodox Conference on heresies and para-religions held in Greece**

The 28<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Conference of authorized representatives of Local Orthodox Churches and metropolises of the Greek Orthodox Church on heresies and para-religions under the theme 'Heretical and Occult Ideas of the Human Being and Human Rights' took place from October 31 to November 2 in Agrinio, Greece.

It was organized by the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod committee on heresies under the aegis His Beatitude Hieronymus, Archbishop of Athens, and chaired by the chairman of the committee, Metropolitan Ignatius of Larissa and Tirnava with the participation of Metropolitan Cosmas of Aetolia-Acarmania. The conference was attended by Archbishop Irenaeus of Crete and hierarchs from the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Bulgaria, as well as city secular officials.

The participants were warmly welcomed by the Agrinio Mayor George Papanastasiou.

Participating in the conference were ten authorized representatives of the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Poland, and Greece and over one hundred representatives of metropolises of the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as professors from the Universities of Athens, Thessaloniki and Sofia (Bulgaria). Hegumen Feofan (Lukyanov), head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations protocol office, participated in the conference as authorized representative of the Russian Orthodox Church.

After the prayer service presided over by Metropolitan Cosmas of Aetolia, messages from Primates of Local Orthodox Church were read out. On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a message of greeting to the conference was sent by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECR).

The message stated in particular, 'The theme of the present forum concerns the notion of human rights as one of the key ones for today's Western European civilization. The Russian Orthodox Church has expressed her attitude to the human rights problems in the document "The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights' adopted by the Bishops' Council in 2008. The same topic is dealt with in the book by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia entitled 'Freedom and Responsibility: In a Search for Harmony. Human Rights and Dignity of the Personality', which has been translated into 16 languages including Greek.

'Human rights and freedoms and the essential contribution made by Christianity to their development are often artificially torn out of the original context, thus being deprived of the most important thing, which is the definition of the source of these rights and freedoms in God and the right understanding of the place of man in God's design for the world. As a result, the modern Western worldview becomes utterly anthropocentric, returning to the heathen thesis on man as 'the measure of all things' (Protagoras).

'The theory of the rights of self-sufficient man presented as an inviolable dogma acquires some features of para-religion by replacing God by man with all his passions and lusts. In doing so it gets close to the ancient occult ideas of man as called not to obey the will of God but to subjugate the surrounding world through various occult practices'.

Papers were presented on the following themes: 'The Teaching of the Orthodox Church on Man', 'Reincarnation: a Critical View in the Light of Orthodoxy', 'Be Like Gods: Occult Teachings on Man', 'Jehovah's Witnesses' Misconceptions in Anthropology', 'The Mormons' Misconceptions in Anthropology'.

On the closing day, reports were heard from representatives of the Greek Church about the problems of heresies in dioceses.

The work of the conference was summed up in a final document 'Proposals for the Holy Synods of Local Orthodox Churches', which warns against heretical anthropological teaching: 'In some occult and para-religious cults with different approaches and practices (for instance, the methods of manipulation of consciousness) the basic human rights are grossly violated.

'The anthropology of modern heretical and quasi-Christian movements is often based on false and perverted interpretations of Holy Scripture's expressions and sometimes during ostensibly newest non-Biblical 'revelations' (for instance, those of the Mormons, 'Christian Science', etc.). Therefore their convictions are in stark contradiction to the Divine Revelation data about Christ set forth in Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

'In the teaching of heretical and quasi-Christian movements in the field of anthropology, the basic Christian terms (such as the fall, sin, salvation, etc.) have meanings radically different from Christian ones and unacceptable by both the Orthodox Church and the entire Christendom.

'In the heretical teachings on man there are also elements dangerous for human life, such as rejection of blood transfusion by the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses, who even try to present this dangerous teaching as correspondent to Holy Scriptures.

'Anthropological deviations from the Orthodox teaching in many occult and heretical movements lead to negative consequences for individuals who profess them and for whole groups of people'.

*DECR Communication Service*

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/48951/>