



## **Local Orthodox Churches' representatives express concern for persecution of canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine**

On September 20, the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Network of Centers for Study of Religions and Destructive Movements completed its work in Otocec, Slovenia. The conference, whose theme was 'Cults, Neo-Paganism, Secularisation: The Danger of Decay of the Orthodox Christian Ethos', also discussed the challenge of pseudo-Islamic extremism.

Among the attendees was a delegation which included Bishop Jonah of Obukhov, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's youth department; Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for church-society relations, Rev. George Maksimov, head of the Moscow Patriarchate mission department's section on apologetic mission; clergy from a number of dioceses of the Russian Church; Prof. A. Dvorkin, president of the St. Irenaeus of Lyons Center for Religious Studies; Mr. B. Lukichev, assistant to the chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for cooperation with the armed forces and the law enforcement, as well as church experts.

There were hierarchs and clergy from most of the Local Orthodox Churches, among them Archbishop Irenaios of Crete (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Archbishop Makarios of Qatar (Patriarchate of Jerusalem), Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb-Ljubljana and Bishop David of Krusevo (Patriarchate of Serbia), Metropolitan Seraphim of Nevrokop (Patriarchate of Bulgaria), Bishop Christophoros of Carpathia (Church of Cyprus), as well as representatives of non-Orthodox churches and communities, governmental bodies and the expert community.

During the opening of the conference, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin greeted its participants on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. According to the speaker, 'it is well known how dangerous is the activity of destructive cults, to which Orthodox Churches not unsuccessfully respond by their educational and apologetic works. The other two challenges named in the theme of the conference require considerable intensification of our thinking and efforts. These are the challenges of neo-paganism and secularization. Today, neo-pagan ideas and moods have penetrated the youth milieu and other sectors of society. Those who naively believe that they return to pre-Christian 'roots' are actually following the constructors of new religious movements which divide and weaken the society, stimulate aggressive xenophobia, enmity and cruelty. The obsessive secularization, just as the attempt to adjust Christianity to worldviews and tendencies which historically opposed it, test for our faithfulness

to the Gospel and ability to live it up and transform the societal life according to the word of Christ. And the best response to these challenges is our witness by word and life, witness before all people, including sceptics, who are hesitating and searching. History shows that our peoples cannot achieve success and happiness on the path of paganism or godlessness. Their genuine path is only the path of Christ”.

Bishop Jonah read out a message of greetings from His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine. It stated in particular, ‘You give your attention to very important problems which St. John Chrysostom described as display of the shadow of death covering real live. If we remember history, the bloodiest persecutions against Christians were perpetrated by pagans and atheists. The substitution of God by nature, state (nation) or man is always fraught with the danger of losing moral guidelines, which sooner or later will lead to tragedy and loss of human lives... Recently, a danger to our Churches and flocks has come from neo-paganism. The doctrine of these sects is adopted by extremist groups with man-hating views and then, in a thirst for historical revanche, they attack churches and clergy. Neo-paganism extols cruelty towards enemies and cultivates the right of revenge, expressed in the burning of our churches. Our task is to help people realize the fatality of these ideologies”.

Among the speakers was Bishop Johan, who spoke on ‘Speculation in History is the Basis of Neo-Pagans’ Conflict Proneness’.

Prof. A. Dvorkin presented a paper on ‘Neo-Paganism in Russia – A General Outline’.

The participants in the forum made a special statement expressing concern for the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“The participants in the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Network for Study of Religions and Destructive Cults take with a heavy heart the tragic events going on in the east of Ukraine. We, representatives of Local Orthodox Churches, pray that the fratricidal war that has already taken thousands of lives may be stopped as soon as possible.

At the same time, we are concerned for the persecution to which the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church is subjected.

We believe it unacceptable and inadmissible that the Ukrainian mass media disseminate provocative stories about the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, aimed at discrimination on religious grounds, which results in cases of violence against the UOC clergy and laity, as well as acts of vandalism towards holy places. Thus, the tension in the Ukrainian society is growing even more.

The participants in the conference resolutely condemn the capture of Orthodox churches perpetrated by followers of the schismatic group 'Kiev Patriarchate'.

We express support for His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine and all the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We call the Ukrainian people, especially the parties of the conflict, to a speedy reconciliation and restoration of peace commanded to us by Christ.

Adopted unanimously on September 20, 2015.

The city of Otocec, Republic of Slovenia.”

*From the report of the Press Service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church*

*and the website of the Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations*

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