



## **Greetings to the participants in "The Bible and Scholarship: Bridging the Gap between the Academy and the Church" International Conference timed to the 20th anniversary of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute**

Dear participants and guests of the Conference!

I believe the scholarly theological symposium on such an important theme as bridging the gap between academic theology and church practice to be well timed. This gap has been gradually emerging during centuries. The situation was quite different in the first centuries of Christianity.

Let us recall that the early Christian theological schools, for instance, the College of Catechumens in Alexandria, existed because of the necessity to prepare people for baptism. The great theologians of the past were, as a rule, church hierarchs or monks ascetics, and science and prayer were naturally blended in their theology. The Canon of Holy Scriptures, as we know, was compiled successively from the books, which the most of Christian communities used for worship.

Theology started to move apart from liturgical practice for different reasons at different times, and has shaped into an independent science discipline in academic circles by now. People dealing with this discipline are not necessarily people of Christian faith. Quite often, it is enough to gain knowledge of different religious systems to complete education, for instance, in politics, but we need scholars and teachers who are experts in religion to carry out the task of education. On the other hand, Christian theology has become a subject that can be studied in an outward form and researched as a certain phenomenon not affecting the person of a researcher and his views and way of thinking.

However, the Church has always been a centre of the living religious experience and knowledge gained not from without, but from within direct spiritual experience that shapes and asserts theological knowledge taught in the process of education. "Dogmatic consciousness is given to us in the Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit," a contemporary theologian and ascetic, archimandrite Sofroniy (Sakharov) wrote. The task of bridging the gap between the Church and academic theology should be seen in the light of reviving the direct and natural relations between faith and prayer which in the old times have born a great fruit – the Canon of Holy Scriptures accepted by all Christian confessions at present.

Embracing the opportunity, I wish to congratulate St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute on its 20<sup>th</sup>

anniversary and to note its services in publishing modern academic and educational literature on Bible studies, theology and history of the Church, on interconfessional and interreligious dialogue, as well as on a dialogue between faith and science. The Institute's Publishing House issues works of contemporary theologians and renowned scholars, and classical textbooks on Biblical disciplines that form the necessary science-based educational material for the students and postgraduates of many higher education establishments.

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**Metropolitan of Volokolamsk**

**Chairman**

**Department for External Church Relations**

**Moscow Patriarchate**

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