Representatives of the Coptic Church's academic circles visit Russia



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From November 12 to 18, with a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church hosted lecturers of the Coptic Theological Academy in Cairo and Seminary in Al-Muharraq, church historians Hegumen Benjamin of el-Muharraq and Rev. Basil Samir Zaki.

The trip took place in accordance with the agreements for developing cooperation between the theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church as part of work carried out by the Bilateral Commission for Dialogue. The aim of the visit was the participation of Coptic scholars in an international round-table organized by the Moscow Theological Academy's Office on Oriental Studies on 'Monasticism in Egypt: Past and present'.

The program began with a visit to St. Sergius' Laura of the Holy Trinity. The representatives of the

Coptic Church venerated the honorable relics of St. Sergius of Radonezh in the crypt of the Cathedral of the Dormition and said the prayer for the repose of the late Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church who, in taking monastic vows was named in honor of St. Pimen the Great, an Egyptian Desert Father, one of the founders of Christian monasticism. The participants in the trip recalled the meeting between Patriarch Pimen and Coptic Patriarch Shenouda III (1971-2012), which took place exactly 50 years ago, in October 1971, when the latter became the first Primate of the Coptic Church to come in the fold of the Moscow Patriarchate. That meeting of the two First Hierarchs was an important landmark in the development of inter-church relations.

On November 14, the delegation visited the Church Archeology Office, icon-painting department, library and other education and research centers of Moscow Theological Academy. The guests from Egypt met with members of the Working Group for Bilateral Theological Consultations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, namely, Rev. Pavel Lizgunov, pro-rector for training, and Deacon Sergiy Panteleyev, as well as other representatives of the MTA leadership and faculty, as well as students.

The representatives of the Coptic Church had a talk with the rector of Moscow Theological Schools, Bishop Kirill of Zvenigorod. His Grace warmly welcomed the guests, related to them the history of one of the oldest educational institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate and expressed his readiness as its head to continue cooperation in academic contacts.

On November 15, Hegumen Benjamin el-Muharraq and Father Basil Samir took part in the international round-table conference organized by the Oriental Studies Office on ‘Egyptian Monasticism: Past and Present’. Hegumen Benjamin presented a paper on ‘History and Today’s Life of Egyptian Monkhood’. He spoke about Coptic monastic traditions originated in the early centuries of Christianity and cherished to the present day. He made a special mention of the strict statute inherent in Coptic monasteries and aimed to make every monk able to devote as much time as possible to prayer and reading Holy Scriptures. The report contained a detailed description of the daily life of a Coptic monk, which includes participation in liturgical hours and performance of various tasks.

Father Basil delivered a report on ‘Father Mina el-Baramousi and his disciples as an example of the modern monastic school’ He expounded on the life journey of Father Mina as one of the elders venerated by the Coptic people who lived in the late 19th century - early 20th century. Among his spiritual children was a young novice, also named Mina, who was to become one of the outstanding Coptic Primates - Patriarch Kyrillos VI (1959-1971) now glorified by the Oriental Churches as saint. Being a novice of the Egyptian Desert, Patriarch Kyrillos VI paid special attention to all that is connected with monastic practice.

The papers were followed by a discussion of representatives of Moscow Theological Academy and invited specialists in the history of Egyptian monasticism - A. A. Voitenko, Russian Academy of Science Center for Egyptological Studies; Ms. N. G. Golovina, deputy head of the See of Eastern Christian Philology and Oriental Churches of the St. Tikhon University of the Humanities; and Hieromonk Nikandr (Pilishin), MTA graduate, rector of the church of St. Blasius in-Staro-Konyushnny-Quarter in Moscow.

On November 16, the representatives of the Coptic Church visited holy places and historic-cultural sites in Pereyaslav-Zalesskiy.

On November 17, the last day of the visit, the representatives of the Coptic Church visited the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate to meet, with a blessing of DECR chairman Metropolitan Anthony, DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov), who pointed to the importance of the event held by MTA with participation of representatives of the Coptic academic circles for further development of academic cooperation with the Coptic Church. Present at the meeting was Hieromonk Daoud al-Antony, representative of the Coptic Church in Russia.

On the same day, the delegation visited St. Daniel Monastery in Moscow and the Convent of the Intercession, in which the guests venerated the relics of the Holy Prince Daniel of Moscow and Blessed Matrona of Moscow.

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