



## Second round of theological consultations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church takes place



**DECR Communication Service, 28.10.2023.**

On 17-19 October, the second round of theological consultations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church took place at the Moscow Theological Academy, the MTA press service **reported**. The consultations were held within the framework of the activities of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, in accordance with his agreements with the Primate of the Coptic Church, His Holiness Patriarch Tawadros II.

In 2020, within the framework of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, a special Working Group for the development of theological consultations was

established, which included, on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church, Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), Secretary of the DECR for Inter-Christian Relations, Priest Pavel Lizgunov, Vice-Rector for Academic Work of the Moscow Theological Academy, and Deacon Sergiy Panteleev, Head of the Oriental Studies Department of the Moscow Academic Academy. On the part of the Coptic Church, the working group included Bishop Kyrillos, Vicar of the Los Angeles Metropolis and Rector of the Coptic Theological Academy named after Saints Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria in the United States, Priest Macarius Refela, clergyman of the Los Angeles Metropolis and Vice-Rector of the Coptic Theological Academy named after Saints Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria, and Hieromonk Daoud el-Anthony, representative of the Coptic Church in Russia.

Bishop Kirill of Sergiev Posad and Dmitrov, Rector of the Moscow Theological Academy and Abbot of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, has also taken part in the sessions.

Hegumen Adrian (Pashin), Associate Professor of the Department of Theology at the MTA, and Hieromonk Theodore (Yulaev), Senior Lecturer at the Department of Philology at the MTA, acted as additional experts from the Russian Orthodox Church in the second round of theological consultations.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, the second round of theological consultations was opened.

As the moderator of the meeting, Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) noted, "the expected end result of the theological consultations is the achievement of mutual understanding on each of the specific issues. Accordingly, neither the conclusion of declarations nor the restoration of Eucharistic communion falls within the competence of the working group. The consultations are primarily of scholarly interest. Their aim is to contribute to the common dialogue".

Thus, the bilateral theological consultations aim not to replace the official theological dialogue that took place between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ancient Oriental Churches for a long period of time in the twentieth century, but only to promote its continuation.

In accordance with the agreements concluded during the first round of consultations held in January 2020 in Leeuwarden (Netherlands), at the meeting at the MTA the parties discussed the wording of the Chambesy Agreement adopted in 1990 at the third meeting of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the Ancient Eastern Churches. They concern, first of all, Christological issues.

It is known that the Russian Orthodox Church and some other Orthodox Churches felt that the wording of the Chambesy Agreement required clarification. The Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1990s did a great deal of work to formulate questions concerning a

number of clauses of that agreement and to develop a position related to the further development of dialogue with the pre-Chalcedonian Churches. As a result of the Commission's work, the relevant decisions were adopted at the Councils of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1997 and 2000.

Accordingly, members of the Working Group on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church submitted comments on the Second Agreed Statement. The Coptic Church prepared responses to those comments, which were discussed during the meeting at the Moscow Theological Academy.

The meeting resulted in the adoption of a Communiqué, which, in particular, notes the cordial, fraternal atmosphere that prevailed at the meeting, which made it possible to thoroughly consider the issues that arose and to make great strides towards deepening mutual understanding between the Churches.

The meeting had enough time to agree on several important points. Thus, in the final Communiqué, the parties stated the following:

We find that a more appropriate formulation of our Churches' position on the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus than that articulated in the agreement signed at Chambesy is to support a clear definition of the 13th rule of the Second Council of Constantinople, based on the understanding that his other writings are considered fundamental to the theology of the Orthodox Church.

The Consultation agrees that St Cyril of Alexandria's formula "μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη", translated in the Second Agreed Statement as "one nature of the incarnate Logos", would more correctly be translated into English as follows: "one incarnate nature of the Logos".

A valuable highlight of our session was the detailed explanation by the Coptic side of their understanding of the fullness of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, including their properties such as will and energy, with a detailed reiteration of the agreed statements already formulated.

Holy Theological writings relevant to our topic, such as those of Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Cyril of Alexandria, were discussed in detail. In addition, the ideas and writings of Dioscorus of Alexandria, Severus of Antioch, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus were discussed."

The parties agreed to continue discussing Christological issues in the near future, recognising that there are other issues that will be discussed later according to the list approved at the Liévelde meeting.

In order to continue the fruitful scientific and theological dialogue, participants of the meeting considered it useful to meet at least once a year and to seek opportunities to discuss various aspects of

the dialogue in other formats, including theological conferences.

The parties agreed to continue to exchange sources that most clearly demonstrate the official theological positions of their Churches.

The next session is scheduled to be held in 2024 in Egypt, where terminology issues are expected to be discussed.

The results of these consultations will be considered at the meeting of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church and presented to the Supreme Authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church.

In between meetings, the delegation of the Coptic Church visited the Museum of Christian Art of the Moscow Theological Academy "Church-Archaeological Cabinet", as well as the Gethsemane Chernigov Skete of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius.

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