

## Welcome Address to the Conference Attendees

**Dmitry Gasak:** Reverend Fathers, dear colleagues, brothers and sisters, we are very glad to see the delegation from the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu at our St Philaret's Institute. A cooperation agreement between our schools was recently signed. Last year Alexander Kopirovsky and I attended a conference on the epoch of Constantin Brâncoveanu (the proceedings have been already issued). Today we host our Romanian colleagues at the conference on the most common distortions of church life, their content and ways to overcome them. In my opinion, the selected topic for our common discussion, in fact, the first one on this scale, is quite risky. But we can assume the risks of communication, dialogue and theological discussion in order to deepen our knowledge of Orthodox tradition, church history and to better understand what is going on in today's church life in Russia and Romania (and maybe on a broader scale). It is also important to think about the prospects of church life in our countries and churches.

Our conference will have a very simple format. Throughout the day and a half, four papers covering the topic will be presented. We hope that each of these presentations will be discussed accordingly. Everyone is invited to communicate freely and to discuss as much as needed. Perhaps, the debate will discover new topics for both present and future meetings.

Now I would like to give the floor for a welcome address to the Rector of St Philaret's Christian-Orthodox Institute, Professor Priest Georgy Kochetkov.

**Fr Georgy Kochetkov:** Dear friends! I am delighted that our conference is opening. We are at St Philaret's Institute, which has begun its existence in the mid-1980s in the Soviet underground, working at homes, when people did not even think that the Soviet regime would end. Then, in the new conditions, we have become a modern school and adopted the name of St Philaret of Moscow. With a view to the topic of our conference, I would like to quote a saying belonging to St Philaret. In the mid-19th century, he said: "The church has accumulated so many problems and contradictions that it is beyond any efforts to overcome

them.” When I first read these words, I thought what he would say in our times when these contradictions have enormously increased in number?

In our lives there is an incredible number of various difficulties – theological, liturgical, canonical, practical ones. Sometimes these are hushed-up in order to create an impression as if the church existed in its perfect condition. It is feared that people would be confused or tempted by seeing sins and imperfections of church members, church hierarchy, church structure, etc. Sometimes, on the contrary, these problems are over-discussed, and then it really becomes difficult to believe in the Church. As we know well, the faith in the Church is not accidentally included in the Creed. If there is no faith in the Church, as we often see among believers, even among bishops and priests, there is no faith in man. And if there is no faith in man, there is also no faith in God. Christ is true Man and true God. Believing in Christ, we believe in God and in man. This is not a unilateral humanist assertion but the very Christian basis of our lives, which has always existed throughout the entire Christian history, since the times of our Lord and the Apostles. Turns out, however, one should fight for this.

We know very well that the 20th century was a very terrible one. In our country this was especially frightful because the Soviet regime existed during the lifetime of three generations. The worst times were before the World War Two. Later on it was also hard to all but the worst was when millions of people were killed, the culture was ruined, everything was destroyed, nothing and nobody was spared in our country. The church was violently distorted and inflicted with rules of life that should not exist in the church. I hope we will have the opportunity to talk about it.

From the very beginning, our Institute has endeavoured to build its activity on the basis of the norm of life. To put it simply, we always wanted to live in accordance with our Christian conscience, without turning back and self-censoring. It is very difficult in our conditions. I suppose it is difficult everywhere and for everyone personally, but still we believe that the Lord is with us. He helps every Christian who wants to live by his conscience, regardless of whether one is ordained or not, irrespective of age, gender, nationality, culture, social or material status, etc.

Thus, I think, our workshop is a chance to speak to the point, on the basis of our actual experience. I am very glad there are many priests in your delegation. It is wonderful because priests are presumably most affected by these contradictions and imperfections, although, of course, every Christian experiences such moments of temptation.

I wish to all of you such openness before God, such an open spirit, that is, the spirit of faith, because the spirit of faith is the spirit of openness. If there is no

openness, there is also no faith. And we should be an example of faith to others. I hope this spirit will be with us and work through us. I wish our meeting to be successful with God's help and blessing.