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Address to the Ecumenical Patriarch
On the Summer School for Ukrainian Theologians
Organized by Volos Academy for Theological Studies
St. George Patriarchal Church
Phanar, Sunday, July 14, 2019

Your All Holiness,

On behalf of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies I would like to express our gratitude for the exceptional possibility of this encounter. It is always a joy and honor to visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Phanar, and to have the opportunity to receive your blessing.

This particular visit is also a pilgrimage we make together with honorable Ukrainian brothers. With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Ignatios of Demetrias, and with the generous financial support of the General Secretariat for the Religious Affairs of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, and the Huffington Ecumenical Institute in California, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies offered a Summer School training program on Orthodox theology and contemporary issues to 15 clergymen, theologians, students and seminarists of the new Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The participants came from the Theological Academies of Kiev and Volyn and also from the National University of Chernivtsi. Internationally recognized Orthodox scholars from Greece and abroad delivered lectures and taught classes: among them was the leading Orthodox theologian, His Eminence Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon, but also Professor Paul L. Gavrilyuk of St. Thomas University, Minnesota (USA), President of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA), and Mr. Georgios Vlantis, Director of the Council of Christian Churches in Bavaria (Germany), both present today in Phanar. The scholars lectured on a great variety of theological topics, while intensive classes of Modern Greek language have also been taught. The participants of the Summer School had classes on biblical theology, canon law, the history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its significance for Orthodox unity and inter-Orthodox relations, Orthodox patristic and systematic theology, current theological trends in contemporary Orthodox, and Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, ecumenical movement and the dialogue of Orthodoxy with Christian confessions, interreligious dialogue, but also challenges of the modern world for our Church. The theology of great figures such as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. Georges Florovsky, to whom you will soon devote a very important international conference, was also carefully studied. One of the major goals of the Summer School

was also to familiarize the participants with the way in which an independent Church functions within the environment and the structures of a State belonging to the European Union, where it is necessary to respect human rights and the democratic institutions and rules, since it is in this context that this new Church is called today to witness the Orthodox faith, addressing the challenges of secularism, globalization and religious pluralism, as well as open society.

The participants had the opportunity to visit the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies in Vlatadon Monastery in Thessaloniki and various other churches and monasteries in Thessaloniki, Meteora, and in Mount-Pelion. They experienced also the life of the local Church of Demetrias in Volos, and got information and impulses from the multi-faceted pastoral work of our diocese, under the inspired guidance of Metropolitan Ignatios. The Ukrainian brothers had also the opportunity to visit the Protestant church of Volos and the Jewish Synagogue.

As you know better than any other, the new Autocephalous Church carries in its body the wounds of a long schism. The majority of its believers have previously participated in a non-recognized ecclesial structure, cut from the world Orthodoxy, without the possibility of a meaningful spiritual exchange and pastoral care. The stigma of the schism hindered the osmosis with other traditions, while at the same time encouraging introverted behaviors.

We fully support the decision of Your All Holiness and the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to grant Autocephaly to the Church in Ukraine, and admire your courage and clairvoyance for which history will give you reason. By this bold and historic decision, the Mother Church of Constantinople granted the Ukrainian people its ecclesiastical dignity, healing a schism that struck a whole country, prevented millions of faithful, clergy and theologians from an essential communion with the world Orthodoxy.

With this Summer School, and its contact with the new Church in Ukraine, the Volos Academy wishes to contribute to the astonishing process of resurrection of canonical ecclesial life in this beautiful but so wounded country, a country that wants to leave aside the tragic memories of its Soviet past, to strengthen its democratic structures, and to exist and blossom in peace with its neighbors, not under the thread of war and the tyranny of heteronomies of any kind.

The Summer School of the Volos Academy is an act of appreciation towards the wisdom and courage of the Church of Constantinople, which did not wish to let its Ukrainian children in isolation and condemnation for sins for which they themselves were not responsible. It is an act of respect and fraternal love to the canonical new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine; we are happy to get to know and embrace our Ukrainian brothers who because of the schism were almost invisible to us. It is also an expression of the spirit of the Academy, which promotes high level theological thinking, dialogical openness and faithfulness to the genuine and generous tradition of the Eastern Church.

Your All Holiness,

A summer school on Orthodox Theology for brothers from the newly-established Church in Ukraine could not find a better close or a more honorable peak than the visit to Constantinople and the audience you provide to us. In the long and fruitful years of your patriarchal diakonia you always taught genuine and liberating Orthodox spirit, namely fidelity to the authentic Tradition, but also dialogue, generosity, unity, and courage. The Ukrainian crisis was an opportunity to realize once again the value of these virtues, which mark the task and the vision of the Mother Church. We express our gratitude for your inspiration and love and ask for your precious blessing.