



## Lectures on Orthodox ecclesiology held in Belarusian Exarchate's dioceses



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From 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024, Hegumen Dionisy (Shlenov), abbot of Saint Andrew's Stavropegial Monastery in Moscow, professor and head of postgraduate studies at the Moscow Theological Academy, visited Belarus at the invitation of Metropolitan Veniamin of Minsk and Zaslavl, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus.

The visit was undertaken with the view of giving lectures on theology and holding meetings as part of the theological and educational work carried out by the Belarusian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 2017, the Exarchate of Belarus launched advanced courses for its clergy at the Minsk Theological Academy and Seminary. Theological and educational meetings for the diocesan clergy also became a tradition.

In the course of his visit, Hegumen Dionisy delivered a lecture entitled “In Defence of Conciliar Ecclesiology: Critical Review of the Theory of Primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople” for the clergy of the Exarchate’s eastern dioceses – of Turov, Mogilev, Vitebsk, Polotsk and Molodechno. Previously, on 13<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> November 2023, he already **gave lectures** on the same topic in several dioceses of southern and central Belarus.

What is going on in the world of Orthodox Churches? What tenets describe and justify the conciliar ecclesiology that the Russian Orthodox Church is committed to and defends, and in what way is it different from the ecclesiology of primacy underlying the wrongful anti-canonical actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople and his representatives? What makes Constantinople’s primacy unacceptable from the viewpoint of theology and ecclesiastical canons? What do Patristic writings tell about primacy and conciliarity?

Those were the questions Father Dionisy addressed in his lecture from the perspective of church history and canons.

On 11<sup>th</sup> March, the lecture **was held** in the city of Mozyr, Turov diocese. Hegumen Dionisy began it by speaking about the Book of Faith. Its copy published in Grodno is now in the collection of the diocesan museum of the Gomel diocese. The Book of Faith was first published in Moscow in 1648 and republished in Grodno in 1785. Its Chapter 19 entitled “On the Thrones of Patriarchs...” explicitly formulates the conciliar ecclesiology based on the principles of equality between the Local Orthodox Churches.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March, Father Dionisy addressed the clergy of the Mogilev diocese.

On 13<sup>th</sup> March, the lecture was given at the Vitebsk Theological Seminary, attended by local clergymen and seminarians. To begin the meeting, Father Dionisy presented to Archbishop Dimitry of Vitebsk and Orsha several books, including his own translation of The Rights of the Churches and Unity of the Church – a book by Hieromonk Luke (Athos, Gregoriou Monastery). That and other books published by Poznaniye Publishing House will be added to the seminary’s library.

On 14<sup>th</sup> March, Hegumen Dionisy delivered his lecture at the Convent of Christ the Saviour and St Euphrosyne in Polotsk for the clergy of the Polotsk diocese. Along with the conciliar ecclesiology of the Russian Orthodox Church, the focus was also on the virtue of fasting in the Patristic tradition – a topic of particular relevance in view of the forthcoming Lent.

The last lecture, which took place on 15<sup>th</sup> March, was delivered for the clergy of the Molodechno diocese and was followed by a lively discussion on various topical issues.

That same day, in Minsk, Hegumen Dionisy (Shlenov) met with Metropolitan Veniamin of Minsk and Zaslavl. The hierarch thanked him for his research into the topic of ecclesiastical unity and presented him with the Medal of St Cyril of Turov – an award of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.

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