



1700 years of the Edict of Milan

EVERYONE SHOULD BELIEVE AS HIS HEART WISHES

Proceedings with the title *Everyone Should Believe as His Heart Wishes*, book from the first of three planned conferences regarding the 1700th anniversary of the *Edict of Milan*, promoted at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade



Under the Committee of the Holy Assembly of Bishops for the preparation of celebrating 1700th anniversary of the *Edict of Milan*, at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, on November 3rd 2011, there was promotion of the proceedings written by participants of the Conference *Everlasting Value and Permanent Actuality of the Edict of Milan – On the Way to the Great Jubilee 2013*, which took place in the City of Nish, in February this year. The book has title *Everyone Should Believe as His Heart Wishes*. Co-organizers were: the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations of Southeast Europe – CIVIS, the Austrian Foundation PRO ORIENTE and the Swiss PEACE AND CRISES MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION. About the book at the promotion spoke: His Grace Bishop of Backa Dr. Irinej, His Grace Bishop of Jegar Dr. Porfirije, prof. Dr. Bogoljub Sijakovic, State Secretary in the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora, Mons. Andrija Kopilovic and Mrs. Mirjana Prljevic, International Secretary General of the CIVIS Association.

The promotion attended: His Holiness the Serbian Patriarch Mr. Irinej, Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Orlando Antonini, Their Excellencies: Ambassador of Hellenic Republic Mr. Dimosthenis Stoidis, Ambassador of the Republic of France Mr. François-Xavier Deniau, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary Mr. Oszkár Nikowitz, Ambassador of the former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia Mr. Ljubisa Georgievski, as well as the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia Mr. Aleksandar Necak.

Opening the promotion, Bishop Irinej said that the collection of works is very nice and technically equipped bilingual publication, as well as it is the testimony about what has been done in the City of Nis. He also added that this conference is “planned as first in a series of three which are preparing the

main celebration of the *Edict of Milan*, within our Church and in Serbia” and that it was mainly regional character, but that all conferences are planned to be “inter-church, inter-confessional and even inter-religious”.

The Bishop also said that everyone “gave his contribution and his interpretation of that historical period, that extremely important document”, so even “the goal of the conference was not strictly academic, there were such presentations”. In that sense, he added, historical insight was gained, the theological analysis was given, as well as the contextualization of that seventeen centuries old text in our time and our time challenges. The attempt was made to show, he said, “what is that the text is still actual and inspirational for, if you want provocative, even for us today; what can be the stimulus for our thought and for our exposure in Europe today (regarding even the issue of religious freedoms and other freedoms, the freedom of conscience, civil freedoms, it is not all simple and unambiguously in Europe today and in nowadays world), and it is even more complex the issue of real content of Europe’s unity which strives to consolidate, because economical and political consolidation is just not enough”.

At the end Bishop Irinej said that the plan is to have another conference with more versatile theme, which will be in European scope, when in 2013 big central overall character meeting should be held. In addition, Bishop Irinej commends Mrs. Mirjana Prljevic extraordinary effort, who is responsible for “lion’s work” regarding the proceedings publishing.

In her addressing, the editor of this publication, Mrs. Mirjana Prljevic, thanked His Holiness the Patriarch Mr. Irinej for his blessing, as well as His Grace Bishop Irinej for ceding space in the City of Nish and the opportunity for the first conference to be held with such a nice message. Expressing her gratitude to Mr. Antonini, the Apostolic Nuncio, as well as to Archbishop Mr. Hocevar, she emphasized the importance of religious communities’ representatives’ presence, several companies support, as well as the support of the City of Nish. In the spirit of the *Edict of Milan* referring to Ivo Andric’s words she said that “if we really build happiness of each of us in every soul, and carry out love with our deeds by the good of others, and treat every person close to us as it were we, I believe it is the only way to achieve something.” Mrs. Mirjana Prljevic announced that she will try throughout her further activities, not only by publications, to lighten some other aspect of the *Edict of Milan*, which is important for nowadays and for all of us.

Talking about the actuality of the *Edict of Milan*, prof. Sijakovic emphasized that words “which Constantine gives freedom to Christians and all the others, that everyone is free to believe as his heart wishes, are so instructive and important even today and not only that we listen them as contemporary words, but as everlasting”. Therefore, he added, in our context which shows “the burden of the religious rights theme, so called political correctness” they have the full meaning.



Further on, prof. Sijakovic mentioned differences in understanding secularity of the state and society, secularism as an ideology which is connected to atheism among our people, religious freedoms, the question of absolutely rights adequacy to be different etc. He emphasized that “state secularity is not opposed to the religious freedoms practicing, but actually it should enable it”. In that sense, he said that “today we need good hearing for theology melody and the melody of faith”. At the end he concluded that “the *Edict of Milan* freedom of belief in today circumstances means responsibility for freedom and justice devotion, because justice brings peace. Freedom, justice, peace, that is the mission of primarily believing people who, in their private life, and in community express themselves”.

Monsignor Andrija Kopilovic, summarizing the publication’s content, said that “thank to the cooperation of very distinguished institutions and individuals, this conference truly established three years effort for the great jubilee referring to the document which changed Christian’s path during the history, and left permanent challenge for all times, always problematical and never solved, and that is the question of freedom”.

He also added that we should do everything “so that the great jubilee do not remain as memory, but as an event and turnover, to become an outcome of new steps in accomplishing what still remains a permanent challenge and task for us, for people in XXI century, for us here in Serbia”. At the end he concluded that the “whole conference is a great first step, a solid foundation and unavoidable challenge” for further development, because we “are in front of the problem of society globalization which brings forth religious relativism, when Christianity during that process has an important assignment to save everlasting values which gave foundations and soul to Europe”.

The last in a speakers’ series, Bishop Porfirije showing recognition “to many people who recently gave efforts for representing Constantine the Great work and character in our community”, he said that this is not an ordinary publication promotion but “retrial to promote the *Edict of Milan* and see what it means for us today, to what extent is actual today”. In that sense, he added that the basic challenge of the epoch we are living in is “the mankind necessity to build at least civilization model of its existence in XXI century and further”. Therefore, he continued, “the West and the East have very difficult, but by no means, I am sure, hopeless assignment of joint search for balance between world progress, human rights respect and property respect, on the one hand, and national, cultural and religious identity preservation of individual nations, on the other hand”.

Ending the exposure, Bishop Porfirije concluded that “without exaggeration Saint Constantine stands at the beginning of Christian civilization and Christian law that just offers the true model of Christian tolerance and freedom, and becomes the landmark in modern age”.

Closing the promotion, Bishop Irinej said that these exposures should be “stimulus for all of us to be prepared for the next conference and for worthily celebrating of the *Edict of Milan* jubilee.”