

Final Press Release

XXI International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality

THE AGES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Bose, Wednesday 4 - Saturday 7 September 2013

in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

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On Saturday, 7 September 2013, the 21st International Ecumenical Conference ended at the Bose Monastery. Hierarchs and monastics belonging to the Orthodox Churches, to the Reform, and to the Catholic Church, after four intense days of meetings and dialogue, ended their work with a prayer for peace in the Bose monastery church, adhering to the appeal of the bishop of Rome, pope Francis.

The representatives of the Churches

The Bose conference wanted to listen to the wisdom of the fathers, to offer a space for reflection on the theme of spiritual maturity through the crises of passage from one age to another of life, believing that the spiritual dimension is essential for authentic human maturity. This is the idea emphasized in the numerous messages of greeting from the heads of the Churches, among them the messages of the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew I, read by the patriarch's delegate, bishop **Iosif of Patara**; of metropolitan Ilarion in the name of the patriarch of Moscow Kirill; and that of cardinal Tarcisio Bertone in the name of pope Francis.

For the Catholic Church, those present at the conference were bishop **Mansueto Bianchi** of Pistoia, president of the commission "Ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue" of the Italian Bishops' Conference, who read the greeting of bishop Mariano Crociata, secretary general of the Italian Bishops' Conference; archbishop **Antonio Mennini**, apostolic nuncio to the United Kingdom; bishop Gabriele Mana of Biella, our local bishop; and father **Hyacinthe Destivelle** of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who brought the message of its president, cardinal Kurt Koch.

Bishop **Konstantin (Ostrovskij) of Zarajsk** led the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate, with father **Dimitrij Sizonenko**, responsible for inter-Christian dialogue at the Department for external affairs. Bishop **Stefan of Homel'** and **Žlobin** read the message of metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, patriarchal exarch of Belarus. Present were also archbishop **Zosima of Vladikavkaz**, father **Stefan Domuschi**, delegate of the Moscow Theological Academy, archimandrite **Serafim (Petrovski)**, delegate of metropolitan Aleksandr of Alma Ata and Kazakhstan, hieromonks **Amvrosij (Vajnahij)** and **Pimen (Vojat)** of the Lavra of the Caves, who brought greetings from metropolitan Volodymyr of Kiev.

Bishop **Ignatie of Mureș** read the message of patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Participating in the work of the conference were metropolitan **Dometian of Vidin**, who transmitted the personal greetings of **patriarch Neofit** and bishop **Boris of Agatonitsa** (Bulgarian Orthodox Church); bishop **Melchisedek of Pittsburgh** (Orthodox Church of America); archimandrite **Athenagoras (Fasiolo)**, who brought the greetings of metropolitan Gennadios of Italy; canon Hugh Wybrew, who read the greeting of the archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby; bishop **Maxim of Western America**, who read the letter of Irinej, patriarch of Serbia.

The messages of Karekin II, catholicos of all the Armenians, of archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, of metropolitan Elias of Beirut, and of the secretary general of the World Council of Churches Olaf Fikse Tveit were read respectively by fr **Zakaria Baghumyan**, prof. **Spiridon Kontoyannis**, fr **Porphyrios Giorgi**, and **Michel Nseir**.

There was an important presence of monks and nuns from Orthodox monasteries (Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Mount Sinai, Armenia, France, England, United States), and Catholic and Reformed monasteries (Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary). In particular we may not fr **Joustinos** of the St Catherine Monastery on Sinai, fr **Evdokimos Karakoulakis** of the Koutloumoussiou monastery on Mount Athos, of fr **Vasilije Grolimund** of Geilnau. Participating in the Conference were also the ambassador of Romania to the Holy See **Bogdan Tataru-Cazaban** and professors **Gelian Prochorov** (St Petersburg), **Nikitas Aliprandis** (Athens), **Pantelis Kalaitzidis** (Volos).

The work of the conference

In his introductory talk, **Enzo Bianchi**, the prior of Bose, explained the meaning of the conference theme, which leads one to meditate "on the sign that the passage of time leaves in our body, in our mind, in our heart, but also in our spiritual life". Paul Evdokimov's book, *The Ages of the Spiritual Life*, inspired the choice of the theme. The pages of the prominent Orthodox theologian reveal the face of a holiness capable of entering into a relationship with God and with humanity, "the depository of divine philanthropy" (Gregory of Nazianzus). This "divine love for man" makes Christianity the manifestation of God who is love. Christian spiritual life, as far as it is "life in God", is a healing of the human capacity to love, as the

talk of bishop **Iosif of Patara** on Spiritual life and Christian unity showed. The first part of the conference interrogated Scripture and the tradition of the fathers of the Eastern and Western Church.

Michail Želtov, professor at the Moscow Theological Academy, offered a reflection on baptism as the source of life in Christ, the sacrament through which the believer dies to sin and is born anew, becoming a member of the Church, which opens for him a perspective of Christian life. The Biblical scholar **Andrej Desnickij** of Moscow, turning to the Life of Moses by Gregory of Nyssa, gave a Biblical-patristic interpretation of the prophet's life as an exemplary way of purification for the man in search of God. **Petros Vassiliadis**, professor of the New Testament in Thessalonica, in commenting on Ephesians 4,7–13, on the “full maturity of Christ”, recalled that Christian spirituality must integrate christological, therapeutic, and ecclesiological aspects. An analysis of the doctrine of infinite spiritual progress characteristic of Gregory of Nyssa's thought was presented by the patrologist **Andrew Louth**, retired professor of the University of Durham.

Development in the spiritual life according to the Syriac fathers, who in Paul's wake distinguish “carnal”, “psychic”, and “spiritual” man, was analyzed by professor **Sebastian Brock** of Oxford.

Symeon Paschalidis, professor of patristics and hagiography in Thessalonica, in considering how the term “perfect” in the New Testament indicates the “renewed” man, mature and well-founded in Christ, spoke on the idea of perfection in every Christian vocation according to the fathers. **Norman Russell** (Farnham) concentrated in his paper on the *Ladder* of John Climacus, at the culmination of which stands charity, as the goal of all monastic life and the road of assimilation to Christ.

The western monastic tradition was presented by fr **Michel Van Parys**, former abbot of Chevetogne and member of the scientific committee, who spoke on the “ladder of humility” of Benedict's Rule. Fr **Metodije Markovi?**, igumen of the St Nicholas Monastery in Vranje, offered some thoughts on the beginning of the monastic life, a response to the commandment to love God with all one's heart, in a daily commitment to conversion.

In the second part of the conference the speakers sought to relate the wisdom of the fathers to today's questions.

Can crisis aid spiritual growth? is the title of the talk by fr **Vassilios Thermos**, Greek priest, psychologist, professor of theology at the University of Athens and expert on the relationship between theology and psychoanalysis. Every crisis can be both a risk with a deadly end and a favorable occasion for spiritual progress and maturity. In particular, the Church, as space of community, ought to be a “laboratory where crises can be transformed into ways of salvation”.

Is there an art of growing old in the Christian life, asked **Andrei Ple?u**, a well-known Romanian philosopher and essayist, who had also been minister of culture and of foreign affairs in his country. What the Christian tradition defines as being an “elder” in a positive sense, as a source of spiritual authority and teaching, is not the fruit of a purely quantitative accumulation of experience due to advanced age, but is a quality that can be manifested in every age of life in the measure that time is lived as occasion, beyond the purely chronological flow and in contact with the origins and the transcendence of the world and of life.

The invisibility of death in the contemporary world conceals also the presence of God. The paradox of Christianity lies in the fact that Christ has revealed the face of God in dying as man. This was brought out by **John Behr**, who spoke about living the Christian death; he showed how, for the Christian, life is born from the decision to die to oneself, as a result of baptism, living no longer for oneself, but for others. This donation of oneself transforms one's own concrete dying into a manifestation of the paschal mystery. What indications does the Orthodox monastic tradition have to offer between the successive stages of human life and the ages of the spiritual life? What relationship is there between youth and spiritual fervor, between middle age and service to one's neighbor, between old age and Christian hope in sickness and in death? These are some of the questions posed at the round table on Christian hope in the ages of life, moderated by **Konstantin Sigov**, professor of philosophy at the Mohyla Academy of Kiev, in which participated metropolitan **Vassilios** (Karayiannis) **of Constantia-Ammochostos** (Cyprus), from 2006 moderator of the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches; **Athanasios Papathanassiou**, Athenian theologian, director of the theological journal Synaxis; **Antoine Arjakovsky**, from 2011 co-director of the department Society, Liberty, Peace, of the Collège des Bernardins in Paris.

Learning to discern the action of the Spirit in every age of life means also opening ways of hope for men and women experiencing suffering and solitude. Fr Porphyrios Giorgi, who teaches in Balamand, spoke on the teaching of Gregory Palamas on divinization, who shows this to be the fulfillment of authentic humanity. The church, as place of the eucharistic celebration and space of communion between men and God, is also the occasion for living a time full of meaning, as bishop Maxim of Western America of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Los Angeles) explained in the concluding talk.

The conclusions of the conference were read by br **Adalberto Mainardi**, monk of Bose, in the name of the scientific committee.

In his final thanks, **Enzo Bianchi** recalled how the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew and other heads of Orthodox Churches responded to the appeal of their “brother in Christ Francis”, bishop of Rome, to pray and fast for peace in the Middle East. And peace, in its christological significance and spiritual dimension, has been proposed as one of the themes for the 22nd International Ecumenical Conference, to be held in the first week of September 2014.

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The scientific committee