

Press release

XXIII International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox spirituality

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

Bose, 9-12 September 2015

in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

“Mercy and Pardon” is the title of the 23rd International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality, which was held at Bose on 9–12 September 2015.

In the dramatic times in which we are living, marked by wars and intolerance, by the logic of the marketplace prevailing over common solidarity, the theme was intended to be a reminder of the practice of pardon along with the search for justice, to rediscover the idea of the common good and reciprocal trust, which can be translated into responsibility for the other.

Attentive to Scripture and to the Orthodox spiritual tradition, the conference proposed a series of reflections on pardon. How can God’s forgiveness be announced today? How can wounded memory be healed? Where can the joy of pardon between Churches and between men be found? What are today the places of Christian forgiveness? How are justice and pardon to be seen in the public and historical dimension?

Representatives of all the Orthodox Churches, of the Catholic Church, of the Church of England, and of the Churches of the Reform, biblical scholars, patrologists and theologians, monks of the East and of the West, philosophers and writers from around the world participated at the conference.

The International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality has become a point of reference for ecumenical dialogue and the study of the spiritual tradition of the Christian East, in a broad vision of ecumenical dialogue.

The work of the conference began with an inaugural address by the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, and discourses by cardinal Walter Kasper, retired president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and by metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Dioklea, whose talks centered on the theme of Christian forgiveness and reconciliation between the Churches.

The messages sent to the Conference by the heads of the various Churches reminded the assembly that “mercy and compassion towards our fellow-men occupy a central post among the other virtues in the Lord’s teaching,” as patriarch Bartholomeos of Constantinople wrote. The message sent by metropolitan Ilarion of Volokolamsk, president of the Department for External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, who spoke in the name of patriarch Kirill, observed that the evangelical appeal to be “merciful, as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6,36) testifies to “man’s highest dignity, called to collaborate with God. Pope Francis, in the message sent through cardinal Pietro Parolin, underscored that “mercy is the great light of God’s love and tenderness, which brings with it forgiveness”.

If the experience of evil, of suffering that men inflict on one another marks the beginning of the human experience, mercy is the face of God that Jesus reveals to men. His life given on the cross is the truth about good and evil and opens the time of God’s mercy. This is the pardon that Christians are called to receive and to transmit to their brothers and sisters.

The conference talks were divided into several sections: Scripture and the fathers, forgiveness in the monastic tradition and in its anthropological dimension, witnesses of mercy in the various Churches, and finally justice and forgiveness. The speakers came from the United States, Greece, England, Russia, and Ukraine.

The delegates of the Churches gave ecumenical breadth to the conference. Present were delegations from the patriarchate of Constantinople, the patriarchate of Moscow, the patriarchate of Alexandria, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Greece, the Church of Cyprus, the orthodox Church of America, the patriarchate of Antioch, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church. There were also representatives of the Church of England. For the Catholic Church, besides cardinal Walter Kasper, present were various archbishops and bishops. The World Council of Church was likewise represented.

The presence of numerous monks and nuns of the East and of the West constituted an important occasion of fraternal meeting and exchange.

During the conference there was a presentation of the Acts of last year’s conference, on Blessed are the peaceful.

At the end of the conference, after the conclusions read in the name of the scientific committee by br. Sabino Chialà, the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, closed the conference with words of thanks to the participants and to the Churches that sent representatives and messages. He also announced the date of the 24th International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality: 7–10 September 2016. The theme will be announced after the scientific committee meets in October.