

Concluding Thanks of Enzo Bianchi

Bose, 7 September 2013

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THE AGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

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To conclude this 21st Conference, I simply want to express a great thanksgiving to our Lord. It is the Lord who always accompanies us in these conferences; it is the Lord who is in our midst with his mercy and his love; it is the Lord who allows us to meet, to listen to each other, to exchange gifts, the gifts that our Churches have and that ought to be shared among those who call themselves Christians. We will, of course, express our gratitude to the Lord in prayer, but it is also a deeply-felt sentiment in our hearts, hence we must express it at the end of these our meetings. And this year this thanksgiving is united forcefully to an invocation of peace, a prayer for peace that we will have now at midday and again tonight at vespers. The patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew and other heads of Orthodox Churches have responded to the appeal of their "brother in Christ Francis", bishop of Rome, to pray and fast for peace in the Middle East. Patriarch Bartholomew has written: "Let us pray that peace prevail. Only peace will permit the Christians of the Middle East to live without any impediment in the lands where they were born and which are also their lands." In this appeal for peace we will remember the two bishops of Aleppo, Paul and Yuhanna, abducted and not yet released. We will also remember Egypt, especially the Coptic Church, in this moment of great anxiety.

Listening to the talks of great quality that have followed one after another during these days on the ages of the spiritual life, I felt underlying them some words of Dorotheus of Gaza (*Discourse 10*), words that always accompany us and are always topical: "We are pilgrims who have as the goal of our journey the city of peace".

Often in the various talks the necessity of humility in traversing the phases of the spiritual life has been underlined, when great attention and great discernment are also required of us. I recall the words of Alexander Schmemmann: "Christian, brother, be always simple, joyous, radiant. Do not lecture, avoid all external, unauthentic, untrue attitudes like the plague." These our conferences, which from the beginning have had the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of the Patriarchate of Moscow, who have always supported and encouraged us, and for some years now also of the other Orthodox Churches, would like to be in that very sense an occasion of sincere, loyal, human friendship, in which are to be found also ways of humility, of reconciliation, of discernment.

The concluding remarks have been given by brother Adalberto, and I certainly do not want to repeat them. I only wish at the end to thank again the patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew, the bishop delegate Iosif of Patara, not forgetting the archimandrite of the patriarchal throne Atenagora, whom we thank also for celebrating vespers last evening; patriarch Kirill of Moscow and metropolitan Ilarion of Volokolamsk; metropolitan Zosima of Vladikavkaz, who has graciously returned among us; bishop Konstantin of Zarajsk, the head of the delegation, with father Dimitrij Sizonenko; the monks of the Lavra of the Caves, sent by metropolitan Volodymyr of Kiev, who is always in our prayers; bishop Stefan of Homel and Zlobin of the Belarusian Exarchate, again among us as representative of metropolitan Filaret, with whom we have old ties of esteem and friendship.

A thank you to the Churches that have sent their representatives or messages of fraternal participation; to the bishops who have visited us during these days, especially to the metropolitan of Vidin Dometian of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, dear to us, who has honored us by returning. We do not forget that he came here in 1971, when our community consisted only of a handful and was simply not only a small, but a minute thing, yet he visited us then, and we are grateful that he has returned, we have never forgotten him over the years, because at that time it was a great grace for us to have his visit, the visit of Antony Bloom, the visit of Emilianos Timiadis, the visit of other Orthodox bishops who came to see us even though there was hardly anything here, we were six, seven brothers, two, at the most three sisters, but in sum they instilled great hope in us and caused our love for the Orthodox Churches to grow. I wish to thank bishop Boris of Agatonitsa of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, with father Polikarp and dear Vasilij Grolimund; bishop Maxim of

Western America of the Serbian Orthodox Church, whom we have heard speak this morning; bishop Ignatie of Mure?, representing the Romanian patriarchate; metropolitan Vassilios of Konstantia, representing the archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostom II, a Church very dear to us; prof. Kontoyannis, punctually present at our conferences with various colleagues, representing the archbishop of Athens and all Greece Ieronymos; Melkisedek, bishop of Pittsburgh of the Orthodox Church of America, which is present also in the person of father John Behr, dean of the St Vladimir Theological Seminary in New York, who presided at this final session, a thank you to father Zakaria, representing the Armenian Apostolic Church; to canon Hugh Wybrew, representing the archbishop of Canterbury; and to Michel Nseir, delegate of the World Council of Churches.

I thank the speakers who have offered us papers of great spiritual quality and intellectual passion and kept attentive our assembly, not easy to do, since we have been 200 to 250 persons. I thank the members of the scientific committee; the monks and nuns of Eastern and Western monasteries, with whom we have a sincere communion in the same perseverance in following the Lord, a presence that is especially important for us and that we wish to increase still more. I thank the interpreters; the technical staff, Mr. Panzica and his collaborators; those of you who are our friends who faithfully return, support, and accompany us with prayers, and all participants.

We would like to say to you: we will see you next year, if the Lord grants us this.

Finally, I wish to tell you that so far we have been able to have the Acts of the conference come out in time, so the Acts of last year's conference, Man — Custodian of Creation, have been published. For the theme of next year's conference, we have been asking ourselves: prayer and beauty? peace? The scientific committee will meet on 5–6 October, but your suggestions are truly precious for us. Let us know what you wish, what would be opportune to meditate on together and deal with for the life of your Churches. As for the dates, we will keep this time at the beginning of September, which the last few years have shown to be favorable as far as the weather goes; we have not had, as in the past, the inclemency and cold of early fall.

Thank you all. You are in my prayer, in that of the community, you and all your Churches. I believe that truly we can say this, we love you sincerely, we feel a sense of belonging also to your Churches, we do not feel at all strangers and we carry you in our prayer as if you were our Church, the Church that the Lord recognizes. May our affection and our prayer accompany you.

Thanks to everyone.

Enzo Bianchi