

Final press release

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XXII International Ecumenical Conference of Orthodox Spirituality

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Bose, 3–6 September 2014

in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

“For the peace of the whole world, for the peace of God’s holy Churches, and for the well-being of all, we pray to the Lord”. The invocation of peace as God’s gift recurs continually in the Orthodox Liturgy.

These words, which have become inappropriate, almost scandalous in the dramatic times of crisis in which we live, sounded at the opening and at the conclusion of the XXII International Ecumenical Conference of Orthodox Spirituality, dedicated to the theme Blessed are the peacemakers (Mt 5,9), held at the monastery of Bose on 3–6 September 2014. For four days about two hundred participants from all over the world and representing all the Orthodox Churches, those of the Reform, and the Catholic Church, prayed and reflected together on the Gospel of peace, which asks Christians to be leaven of reconciliation and peace among today’s men and women.

As Enzo Bianchi, the prior of Bose and president of the scientific committee, reminded those present in his welcoming address, peace is the Lord’s gift, a gift from on high, a Messianic promise, while enmity, violence, war continue to seduce human beings. It is necessary to discern the roots of violence and to offer reasons for an authentic education for peace, accepting those who are different, working for reconciliation, striving to forgive.

Now in its twenty-second year, the International Ecumenical Conference of Orthodox Spirituality has become a point of international reference for ecumenical dialogue and for the study of the spiritual tradition of the Christian East, according to a broad vision of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which includes Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Russia, and the Middle East.

The participation of the Churches

The presence of delegates of the Churches was especially great, documented in messages sent to the Conference by the heads of the Churches. At the opening of the Conference the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, read the greeting expressed in the name of pope Francis by cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State. Metropolitan Athenagoras of Belgium represented patriarch Bartholomeos of Constantinople and archimandrite Athenagoras Fasiolo the metropolitan of Italy Gennadios. The delegation of the patriarchate of Moscow was led by bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk, who brought greetings from patriarch Kirill and read the message of metropolitan Ilarion of Volokolamsk. The Russian delegation was made up also of igumen Arsenij (Sokolov) and father Aleksij Dikarev of the Department of foreign relations, and present at the conference was also archbishop Zosima of Vladikavkaz. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was represented by bishops Filaret of Lviv, who brought greetings from metropolitan Onufrij of Kiev, and Ilarij of Makariv, vicar of Kiev; present were also archimandrite Filaret (Egorov) and hieromonks Dosifej (Michailiuk) and Leontij (Tuptalo) of the Kiev Lavra of the Caves. Bishop Stefan of Homel together with father Nikolaj Bolochovskij represented the Belarusian Orthodox Church, bringing a message from metropolitan Pavel of Minsk. Bishop Andrej Ciledžic (Vienna) read the message of patriarch Irinej of Serbia, and father Atanasie Rusnac that of patriarch Daniel of Romania. The Romanian metropolitan Serafim of Germany also participated in the conference. From the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were present metropolitans Dometian of Vidin and Antonij (Mihalev) of Western Europe, who read greetings from patriarch Neofit. The Church of Cyprus was represented by bishop Gregorios of Mesaorias, who read the message of archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, and the Church of Greece by metropolitan Ioannis of Thermopylae, with a message of archbishop Hieronymos II of Athens, the Orthodox Church of America by bishops Alexander of Toledo and Melchisedek of Pittsburgh. Youhanna X, the patriarch of Antioch, was represented by father Porphyrios (Giorgi). Father Adam Makaryan read the message of Karekin II, catholicos of all the Armenians, and bishop Jonathan Goodall of Ebbsfleet the message of archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury.

For the Catholic Church, archbishop Antonio Mennini, apostolic nuncio in the United Kingdom, participated, as well as bishops Marco Arnolfo of Vercelli, Luigi Bettazzi, bishop of Ivrea, Pier Giorgio Debernardi of Pinerolo, Alberto Silvani of Volterra, mons. Andrea Palmieri, and father Hyacinthe Destivale, delegate of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who read the message of its president, cardinal Kurt Koch. During the conference were read messages of cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and of monsignor Nunzio Galantino, secretary general of the Italian Bishops’ Conference.

Michel Nseir read the message of Olav Fykse Tveit, secretary general of the World Council of Churches. Among the many other messages that were received, mention can be made of those of patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria, bishop anba Raphael

, secretary of the Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and of metropolitans Antonij of Boryspil, rector of the Kiev Theological Academy, and Chrysostomos of Messina.

Especially significant was the presence of numerous monks and nuns of East and West.

The work of the Conference

Listening to and studying Scripture, the liturgical experience, the words on peace by the holy fathers, the teaching of the monastic and spiritual experience of the Christian East, the testimony of the martyrs — these are the phases of this conference.

Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York) gave the opening talk, “For a Christian anthropology of peace”, showing how the virtue of peace is able to offer resources for illuminating and transfiguring the human experience of violence and to be inserted in man’s aspirations for theosis, divine and human communion. On the other hand, the purification of violence begins with a scriptural hermeneutics that can discern in the person himself God’s enmity and at the same time his mercy, for example, according to the path proposed by Michail G. Seleznev (Moscow) in his analysis of violence, reconciliation, and peace in the Psalms, and by Christos Karakolis (Athens), who spoke of “peace, the gift of the risen Christ”, with reference to Jn 20,19–21. The source of peace, in fact, is the Paschal mystery, celebrated in the Divine Liturgy, epiclesis of peace, about which spoke bishop Andrej Cilerdžic (Vienna).

If people operate justice and show mercy, peace inhabits the earth, as the fathers of East and West tirelessly repeat; their message was explained from various viewpoints, historical exegetical, spiritual. Porphyrios Georgi (Balamand, Lebanon) presented how peace was understood by the fathers in their commentaries; Daria Morozova (Kiev) looked at the historical figure of a great father, who worked for reconciliation in the Church, St Clement, bishop of Rome, and his reception in the old Slavic tradition. John Behr (New York) examined the activity of St Irenaeus of Lyons among Christian communities in promoting peace among the Churches, calling for tolerance of differences. Symeon Paschalidis (Thessalonica) studied the complex spiritual dynamics of conflict and of reconciliation in the Eastern ascetical tradition.

If the holy Fathers pray special attention to the spiritual aspect of peace rather than its political and social dimension, the topic of peace remains an open challenge for contemporary theology. The tradition of holiness in East and West offers and answer to this search as a style of life capable of narrating another way of living in the world and imagining a future of peace for a humanity torn by political, economic, social religious antagonisms.

This is what the section “Witnesses of peace” proposed, introduced by the reflection of Cyril Hovorun (Yale) on the recourse in history by the Churches to coercion and on the need of an evangelical purification of the relations between the political and the religious spheres, centered on the freedom of the human being.

The witness of authentic operators of peace, ancient and modern, constituted the central part of the conference. Presented and discussed were the figures of Saint Francis of Assisi (Panagiotis Yfantis, Thessalonica), of the holy Armenian bishop Nerses of Lambrun in the twelfth century (Adam Makaryan, Etchmiadzin), of Saint Sylvan of Athos (sr Magdalene, Maldon, Essex), of Nikolaj Nepluev (1851–1908) and his workers’ fraternity of the Exaltation of the Cross (Natalija Ignatovich), Moscow), of patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (Athenagors Peckstadt, metropolitan of Belgium), of the Bulgarian Orthodox theologian Stefan Zankov pioneer of the ecumenical movement (Viktor Mutafov, Sofia), of father André Scrima, a great witness to dialogue between religions (Anca Manolescu, Bucharest).

Christians in the world are called to an existence of the reconciled in order to translate the novelty of Christian peace into today’s history. The pressing questions that are posed to us by our times were treated in the Round table coordinated by Jim Forrest, international secretary of the Orthodox association for peace, in which participated Amal Dibo (Beirut), Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Volos), Aleksandr Ogorodnikov (Moscow), and Konstantin Sigov (Kiev). Peace as the practice of friendship on all levels, personal, social international, indicates an alternative to the structure of fear that generate oppression and war.

The round table was preceded by a few minutes of prayer, to remember together the victims of the wars being wages, in particular of the two bishops of Aleppo, Paul Yazigi of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and Youhanna Ibrahim of the Syro-Orthodox Church, who are still in the hands of their kidnapers, together with many other hostages.

The final day of the conference, thanks to the papers of John Chryssavghis (Boston) and metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia (Oxford), offered concrete indications. The former proposed a reading of the entire series of beatitudes in Matthew, on the model of the liturgical invocation (for the peace of the whole world”, which “includes every corner of God’s creation, up to the last grain of dust”, consigning it to the responsibility of Christians. The latter, basing himself principally o liturgical and patristic texts, brought out various aspects of Christian peace, which is an “eruption of eschatological peace into today’s world”, therefore it is a revolutionary reality and by no means a passive condition. The peace that comes from on high, from God, has necessary and precise social implications, to be met together with all men and which call on every believer to be open to service and to charity: “Doxology must become diaconal service”.

The conclusions of the conference, in the name of the scientific committee, were confided to father Michel Van Parys, who among other things brought out the close bond between the unity of the Church and peace in the world. At the end the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, in the name of the Community, expressed a thanksgiving to the Lord for these days of grace and peace, which once again, in reciprocal meeting, have permitted us to renew confidence in each other. To educate for peace, in fact, “is for each one of us a verification of one’s own quality in community” and a seed of the

transformation of society.

The XXIII Conference will be held on 9–12 September 2015.