Research project

tories of the life of Ephrem the Syrian (detail) - Meteore, GREECE

Bose, 8-11 September 2010

XVIII International Ecumenical Conference

on Orthodox spirituality

in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

If we, who all form a single body in Christ, do not come together in concord in the Holy Spirit, but everyone prefers

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COMMUNION AND SOLITUDE

“If we, who all form a single body in Christ, do not come together in concord in the Holy Spirit, but everyone prefers to live alone, how will we be able, so divided and separated, preserve communion and service one towards another?”

The great father of the undivided Church, Basil of Caesarea, places at the center of Christian life the experience of communion in Christ: only in the daily sharing of life is it possible to experience and carry out the evangelical commandments. At the same time, nevertheless, the very personal experience of God in prayer requires an indefeasible space of solitude and truth with oneself: “When you pray, enter your room and, having closed the door, pray to your Father in secret” (Mt 6:6).

If for the fathers “a sole Christian” means “no Christian” (*Unus christianus, nullus christianus*), only in the unrepeatable uniqueness of every man is a free response to God’s gift possible. Christianity is an art of communion, not an ideology of the masses, it is a search for the unity of many and the reconciliation of differences, not a one-dimensional religion.

Perhaps never as much as on today’s horizon, marked by the disintegration of the traditional structures of common life, by the need of new forms of communication and association, but crossed by withdrawal into individualism, by isolation and forgetfulness of the other — of the poor, the immigrant, the outcast — man risks not knowing any more what to do with his own solitude and losing the sense of living one with another.

The 18th international ecumenical conference, dedicated to “Communion and solitude” in the Orthodox spiritual tradition (8–11 September 2010), desires to be invitation to rediscover communion and solitude as dimensions of the spiritual life that interpellate every authentic search of sense.

In interrogating the Scriptures and the teachings of the fathers (from Bail to Isaac, from the fathers of the desert to the fathers of Byzantine and Russian monasticism), but also the experience of solitude fertile in communion of great spiritual figures in today’s Orthodox world, the symposium wishes to trace an itinerary of learning these essential coordinates of human life.

The general theme of the conference, thus, will be treated in a deeper look at specific questions of communion in the Church, at the idea of person in Orthodox thought, at the value and at the same time the risks connected with solitude and with common life, in a comparison between the legacy of the fathers and the perspectives of human sciences.

The experience of Christian monks in history has always indicated a path from solitude to communion, from the hermitage to the cenobium, and vice-versa: an itinerary of exiting from self-sufficiency and of opening oneself to the other. For this reason a particular space will be reserved to the exchange of experiences of monastic life between East and West, in a comparison opened towards a spiritual and human balance between “living in solitude and living in communion”.

It hopes to be an occasion of fraternal getting to know one another and of sharing the gift of life.

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