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XVIII International Ecumenical Conference

Bose, 20 September 2010

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Christians should know how to open those systems of human relations that tend to close in upon themselves, in order to give space to the Spirit's transfiguring energy, who in them and through them vivifies the universe

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XVIII International Liturgical Conference

on Orthodox spirituality

COMMUNION AND SOLITUDE

Monastery of Bose, 8-11 September 2010

Bose, 20 September 2010

"Communion and solitude" is the pair treated in the paper of the 18th International Ecumenical Conference held at the Monastery of Bose from 8 to 11 September 2010. The conference, organized in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches, for almost twenty years has been an important occasion for dialogue on the basic themes of the spiritual life, where the traditions of Christian East and West intersect the profound expectations of modern man. The course of he conference, in four intense days of study and fraternal encounter, has reflected on the ways the spiritual tradition of the Churches of the East can still today offer a sensible word to the searching and expectations of modern men and women.

Theologians, historians, philosophers, scholars, and official representatives at the highest level of the Orthodox Churches, of the Catholic Church, and of the Churches of the Reform, together with many other persons participated in the work of the conference.

The messages of the Churches

In his warm greeting to the participants **patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople** recalled the prophetic quality for Christian unity of the cenobitic and eremitical life, which do not cease to be present in the Churches. The monk, who is "separated from all and united with all", according to the saying of Evagrius, and who is always "with the others, although not together with them" (Barsanuphius and John of Gaza), is a living memory of the teaching that "solitude and silence" offer for "entering into a relation and being in communion with others".

The message of **patriarch Kirill of Moscow** in its turn showed how the dimensions of solitude and communion find a model of harmonious interpenetration in the very life of Jesus as it is given us in the Gospel narrative. **Pope Benedict XVI,** in the message that was given to the conference through **cardinal Tarcisio Bertone**, invited the participants "to contemplate in Christ the perfect model of harmony between communion and solitude in which exists personally the Triune God".

The many other messages for the most part converged in underlining the universally human dimension of a spiritual equilibrium between solitude and communion, which in the Christian experience, particularly in the monastic, finds its possible realization. We may mention the messages of metropolitan **Volodymyr of Kiev and all Ukraine,** metropolitan **Filaret, patriarchal exarch of Belarus,** archbishop **Ieronimos of Athens,** the **catholikos of all the Armenians Karekin II,** the **rector of the Kiev Theological Academy, archbishop Antonij, archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury,** the secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, **Olav Friske Tveit,** and of the presidents of important departments of the Catholic Church: **archbishop Kurt Koch,** president of the Pontifical Council for the promotion of Christian unity, **cardinal Angelo Bagnasco,** president of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

The work of the Conference

"It is difficult to see Christ in the midst of the crowd," wrote Augustine, "for that, solitude is needed. In solitude, in fact, if the soul is attentive, God lets himself be seen. The crowd is noisy; to see God silence is necessary." To learn to dwell in

solitude — that face to face with oneself that every man knows — means at the same time to learn to dwell in the space of relations with others, to acquire a hospitable heart that knows how to listen to the other. Solitude is correlative to communion.

The symposium, by listening to Scripture and the teachings of the fathers (from Basil to Isaac the Syrian, from the fathers of the desert to those of Byzantine and Russian monasticism), but also interrogating the philosophical and theological reflections of the Christian East and of some great spiritual figures of Orthodoxy, tried to rediscover the fruitful relation of these two poles that constitute human living.

After the greeting of the **prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi,** and the reading of the messages received, the opening talk by bishop **Irinej of Ba?ka** (Novi Sad) on *The Church and the monastic experience* underlined the roots of the monastic movement within the Church. The interpenetration between solitude and communion, as **Petros Vassiliadis** (*Communion and solitude: Biblical elements*) observed, is a constant both in Scripture and in the course of the Church's history, where two tendencies seem to be in contrast with one another: "on the horizontal plane of the people *called* by God (ekklesia — liturgy — community/communion) and on the vertical plane of the individual's relation with God (monasticism — anachoretism — eremitism)".

A point of equilibrium between the spiritualistic (and individualistic) impulse and the ecclesial dimension (the theological meaning of communion) of the monastic experience, but more in general by Christian spirituality itself, is represented undoubtedly in the fourth century, not by chance the period of the great Christological controversies, in the theological reflection of Basil the Great (**Michel van Parys,** *Communion and solitude according to St Basil of Caesarea*).
The coordinates of "communion and solitude", thus, constitute the space of understanding not only the phenomenon of monasticism, but also the very oscillations of Christian spirituality in various ways in both East and West. In this way the development of these lines of force in dissimilar contexts were presented diachronically. It appeared sufficiently clear, as a substantial convergence of views by various speakers showed, that a too rigid contraposition between "hermitage" and "cenobium", between solitary life and life in common, is arbitrary. Outlines of classification, which appear also in ancient writers, are abstract and totally inadequate if they are taken as a rigid mirroring of a living and fluid spiritual reality, always ready to place under discussion in concrete life every hasty theoretical approximation. This is true of Byzantine monasticism (studied by **Kriton Chryssochoidis,** *Cenobium and hermitage in the Byzantine monastic tradition*) and of Russian monasticism, analyzed by **Tat'jana Karbasova** and **Tat'jana Rudi** on the basis of hagiographical texts (*Cenobium and hermitage in old Rus': the hagiographic tradition, fifteenth to seventeenth centuries*) and by **Gleb Zapal'skij** with relation to the historical experience of Optina Pustyn' and its skete of St John the Forerunner. The indissoluble circling between personal search of God and opening to a universal communion is even central in the monastic experience and works of a father who is fundamental for the spirituality of the Christian East and West: Saint Isaac the Syrian (presented by **Sabino Chialà**). The continual inter-relation between solitary life and the community dimension, between desert and cenobium, applies also to the West, as father **Armand Veilleux,** abbot of Scourmont, repeated in his paper on *Cenobium and hermitage in the Western monastic tradition.*

The two dimensions of solitude and communion must not be disjointed if one does not want to risk a dangerous deviation. This is all the more timely on the post-modern horizon of the atomization of the subject. It is the Christian notion of "person" that permits a harmonious composition of the two needs of "subjective freedom" and "communal being". A close examination of what Orthodox thought reserves to the concept of person and communion (**Konstantinos Agoras,** Athens; **Konstantin Sigov,** Kiev), thus, introduced a reflection concerning today. This continued with an analysis of the spiritual experience of two extraordinary figures of contemporary solitaries, father Cleopa of Sihistria (1912-1998) and father Porfyrios of Kafsokalyvia (1906–1991), who were capable of a universal and cosmic communion, presented at the conference by metropolitan **Serafim of Germany** and by **Athanasios N. Papathanassiou.**

The Round Table dedicated to the monastic experience, *Living in communion, living in solitude,* completed this itinerary by listening to the concrete experience of the life of contemporary monks and nuns. Taking part in this were bishop **Nazarij of Vyborg,** supeior of the Holy Trinity lavra of St Alexander Nevskij (St Petersburg), father **Placide Deseille** (monastery of St Antony the Great), delegate of the igumen of the Athonite Simonos Petra monastery, igumen **Damaskinos (Gavalas)** of the monastery of the Prophet Elias (Santorini), sister **Salome** of the Panaghia monastery (Sayde), mother **Annamaria Canopi** of the monastery of Isola San Giulio d'Orta, father **Andrej (?ilerdži?)** of the Holy Archangels monastery (Kovilj).

In the context of those countries that until recently lived the dramatic experience of state atheism, the reconstitution of church communion can run the risk of a self-sufficient isolation in a ghetto-like sectarian closure. Christians should know how to open those systems of human relations that tend to close in upon themselves, in order to give space to the Spirit's transfiguring energy, who in them and through them vivifies the universe (**Kirill Hovorun,** *Initiation to ecclesial communion today: from its isolation to transfiguring opening*).

It is the energy of hope that shines even in the hell of isolation and of estrangement from God, as saints like Seraphim of Sarov or Silvan of Mount Athos have shown. "By becoming burning flames of prayer, the saints transform the surrounding world by their existence alone, by the simple fact of their secret presence" (**Kallistos of Diokleia,** *Communion and solitude yesterday and today*).

The official representatives of the Churches

A particular value on the ecumenical plane was represented by the official delegates of the Churches of East and West.

For the Catholic Church were present: bishop **Brian Farrell,** secretary of the Pontifical Council for the promotion of Christian unity, together with fr. **Milan Zust,** S.J., don **Andrea Palmieri,** and sr. **Barbara Matrecano** of the same department; archbishop **Antonio Mennini,** apostolic nuncio to the Russian Federation; cardinal **Achille Silvestrini,** former prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches; bishop **Piero Marini,** president of the Pontifical Committee for the International Eucharistic Congresses; bishop **Mansueto Bianchi** of Pistoia, president of the Commission for ecumenism of the Italian Bishops' Conference. In the course of the conference several bishops of the Piedmont Bishops' Conference also brought their greetings, among them is secretary, bishop **Arrigo Miglio** of Ivrea, bishop **Luigi Bettazzi,** retired bishop of Ivrea, bishop Gabriele Mana of Biella, and bishop **Massimo Giustetti,** retired bishop of Biella.

We list the official representatives of their Churches who participated in the conference. **Feognost of Sergiev Posad** led the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate, composed also of bishop **Feofilakt of Brjansk and Sevsk,** hieromonk **Tixon (Zimin),** and father **Aleksij Dikarev.** The Orthodox Church of Greece was represented by metropolitans **Ignatios of Dimitriados, Daniil of Kessariani, Vironas, and Hymettos,** and by bishop **Ioannis of Thermopyli.**
In addition, in the Conference participated as official representatives of their Churches: metropolitan **Serafim of Germany** (Romanian Orthodox Church); metropolitan **Grigorij of Veliko T?rnovo** and bishop **Kiprian of Trajanopol** (Bulgarian Orthodox Church); bishop **Volodymyr of Rovin'ky** (Ukrainian Orthodox Church); **Stefan of Turov and Mozyrsk** (Belorussian Exarchate of the Patriarchate of Moscow); father **Ruben Zargaryan** (Armenian Apostolic Church), delegate of the catholikos of all the Armenians Karekin II; archimandrite **Athenagoras (Fasiolo)** (Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Malta); canon **Hugh Wybrew,** delegate of the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams; **Tamara Grdzelidze,** delegate of the World Council of Churches (Geneva). Finally, we note the presence of **Anatolij Krasikov** of Moscow, **Spyridon Kontoyannis** of the University of Athens, **Pantelis Kalaitzidis** of Volos, **Gelian M. Proxorov** of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg.

The conference program was prepared in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches by a scientific committee presided by **Enzo Bianchi** and composed of fr. **Hervé Legrand** (Paris), fr. **Michel van Parys** (Chevetogne), **Antonio Rigo** (University of Venice), **Roberto Salizzoni** (Univeristy of Turin). The conference hoped to offer a space for fraternal encounter among the various Christian Churches, of communion and sharing of their multiform spiritual traditions, and this was borne out by the extraordinary participations of **numerous monks and nuns** from Orthodox (Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Mount Sinai, Georgia, Armenia) and Catholic (Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary) monasteries. Coming together around a common listening to the Word and in fraternal communion, as br. Adalberto Mainardi noted in his **Concluding Remarks,** testifies thus that solitude and communion are in reality an art of loving, the art of concretely , daily living love within he monastic fraternity, but also and above all within the Church and among the Churches and in the totality of the human community.

At the end of the Conference the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, after **expressing his thanks,** announced the dates of the next International Ecumenical Conference of Orthodox spirituality (7–10 September 2010) and a possible theme, "Scripture in the spiritual life according to the Orthodox tradition".

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