

Message from Irinej, patriarch of Serbia

Metropolitan of Pec, metropolitan of Belgrado-Karlovci and patriarch of Serbia

Monastery of Bose, 4-7 September 2013

XXI International Ecumenical Conference

With His entrance into both space and time of the world, Christ as the Eschatological Reality (namely, as the Alpha and Omega of history) establishes the last days

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THE AGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

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Your Graces the Holy Bishops and the most devout clerics,
Eloquent gentlemen the Professors,
Beloved children in Lord,

We, participating in spirit in this spiritual feast highlighting such an important theme, "The Ages of Spiritual Life", do hereby communicate the greetings of the Holy Church in Serbia to all chosen to be present.

The One Who in every time and every hour is worshiped and glorified, Christ our God, Who is not bound by the condition of time, He is able to lead us through the stages and ages of the spiritual life to the pleroma of life and time, the completeness or fullness of time. According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, "Christ is the beginning, the middle, and the end. He Who is in the first is in all, and as He is in the first so He is in the middle and the end as well—Christ is all and in all." (Chapters 3.1)

With His entrance into both space and time of the world, Christ as the Eschatological Reality (namely, as the Alpha and Omega of history) establishes the last days, that is, the ultimate truth of the world in history and thus frees and heals it. Indeed, if Christ is the Alpha and Omega of history, it follows that the end of history in Christ through the Holy Spirit becomes present already here and now. Moreover, the light of the Eighth Day—of the consummation that has already begun—sheds its light on the historical and ephemeral time, and makes each and every thing visible.

For this reason, the subject of your conference is extremely important. Distractions of our epoch—of an unredeemed time—steal our possibility to meet and know God. But the depth of the ages and stages of the spiritual life is so rich that only the Church can encompass it. As a way of sacramental participation in Christ's life the Fathers of the Church very early developed the idea of mystagogical aging through Christ's life. For example, the Christological anthropology of St. Gregory is about man's passing through Christ's festal-liturgical path: "Travel without fault through every stage and faculty of the Life of Christ." This tradition, different from the Western *imitatio Christi*, expanded through Maximus up to the epoch of hesichasm, and is based on the conviction that all human life should go through the stages (*methelikioseis*) of Christ. Gregory speaks on the sacramental crucifixion of man and his resurrection with Christ.

In this perspective, according to the words of a contemporary Athonite Elder Vasileios, "how near to you or far away people are, depends not on the geographical or chronological distance between you and them, but on your degree of spiritual health; how far you live in the realm of love and sensitivity toward things that are true and enduring, which everyone awaits. And so with the passage of time which brings you to the sunset of your life, you feel within you, waiting to be born, a desire to articulate as an expression of gratitude the words, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

Your important conference takes place in a "time difference": between the First and the Second Comings, and the synchronic of the real-time in Bose seeks its validity from the diachronic moment of the Future.

Leaving a more professional and detailed analysis of the "ages of spiritual life" to the speakers and their lectures, we conclude by conveying to you all who are participating in the Symposium with scholarly contributions, and to those who have put effort into its organization in various ways, our fatherly and patriarchal wishes and blessings.

Your beloved brother in Christ and
fervent supplicant before God,

+ IRINEJ
Patriarch of Serbia