

UNITY AND MISSION

The report of the Xith general Assembly of Syndesmos, August 14-19, 1983

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“From our neighbour is life and death...”

Let me begin with some words from a book which, next to the Holy Bible, has had the greatest influence upon my personal life: the Gerontikon or Sayings of the Desert Fathers. It was through reading this book, at the age of sixteen, that I was set on the path that led me, seven years later, to become Orthodox, and then, another eight years after that, to become priest and monk. In the Gerontikon the sayings of the different desert fathers and desert mothers -the abbas and ammas, as they are called -are arranged alphabetically, beginning with St. Antony the Great, who lived in Egypt in the fourth century. Under his name we read, almost at once:

From our neighbour is life and death. If we gain our brother, we gain God; but if we cause our brother to stumble, we sin against Christ.

We turn a few pages, to the sayings of St. Agathon, another Egyptian monk who flourished a generation or two after St. Antony; and we find exactly the same insistence upon personal relationships:

Abba Agathon said: “If I could find a leper, give him my body and take his, I would gladly do so. For this is perfect love.”

It was also said of him that, going to the city one day to sell the things he had made, he found a man lying ill and neglected in the market place, a stranger, with no one to look after him. The old man rented a little room and remained with him, working with his hands to pay for the rent, and spending the rest of the money on the other things the sick man needed. He stayed there for four months until the sick man regained his health. Then the old man returned in peace to his cell.

From our neighbour is life and death : such is the basic character of Christianity. St. Antony was a hermit, but he was acutely conscious of the bonds linking him to his fellow humans. Life in Christ, so he recognized, is not solitary but corporate and social: not the private search of an individual for his God, but a life lived in and for other people. Christianity means solidarity, identification with others, coinherence. We are, in St. Paul's words, “one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:5), “members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). The Christian is the one who has brothers and sisters, the one who shares, who comes before God as the member of a family. The Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, is given to each one of us personally, but to none of us in isolation. “If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). This is said of the Church; and if we do not feel this, we are not within the Church. Unity is of the Church's very essence.

Unity in its turn has to express itself in mission, in acts of practical service; for missionary witness, martyria, is identical with service to others, diakonia -they are two sides of the same coin. “If I could find a leper, give him my body and take his I would gladly do so.” But it is not enough to feel sorry for others in a sentimental way;

our compassion should issue in specific action, of the kind that Abba Agathon undertook. The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 is to be engraved deeply in our hearts. At the Last Judgement I shall not be asked how many conferences I attended, how many speeches I delivered, how prostrations I made in the course of my prayers, how strictly I fasted. I shall be asked: Did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoners? That is all I shall be asked. The way to God lies through love for other people, there is no other way. In the words of a modern desert father, who lived in the wilderness of London, Archimandrite Lev Gillet: "There is no social system that can replace the tenderness of a living person."

Such is the message of St. Antony and St. Agathon for our Assembly. Unity, mission, and service are inseparable, three aspects of a single reality; and without these things there is no life in Christ, no Church, no salvation.

Sharing the Onion

The theme of unity and mission is well illustrated in a peasant story heard by Feodor Dostoevsky which he included in his masterpiece The Brothers Karamazov. There was once an old woman, highly respectable in her own eyes, who woke up after death to find herself -much to her indignation -in a lake of fire. Seeing her guardian angel on the bank, she called out: "There has been some mistake; I am a highly respectable person; I should not here in this lake of fire." Anxious to do what he could on her behalf, the guardian angel sought to recall some occasion when she had helped others. But he could remember only a single good deed in her whole life: once she had given an onion from her kitchen garden to a beggar woman. Luckily he had the onion with him; so he told the old woman to catch hold of one end, and with the other he began to pull her out of the lake. Now she was not the only person in the lake; and when the others saw what was happening, they crowded round and hung on to her in the hope of being pulled out as well. In alarm and indignation she started kicking them 'Let go', she cried. 'It's me who's being pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours.' The moment she said that, the onion broke in two and she fell back into lake; and there, so I am sorry to say, she still is -burning to this day.

That is the story, and it shows us two things in particular. First, what the angel tried to do was to recall some occasion w the old woman had helped another person. Such was the criterion of judgement applied in her case: how far had she expressed her faith in the form of diakonia, of missionary service towards others! Secondly, the onion snapped in two as soon as she said 'It's my onion, not yours', as soon, that is to say, as she repudiated her unity and solidarity with her fellow humans. If only she had said 'It's our onion', would it not have proved strong enough to pull them all out of the lake of fire? But once she cried out 'It's mine not yours' , once she refused to share, she affirmed the basic dogma of hell. The devil is the one who says 'me' and 'mine', whereas Christ teaches us to say not "me" but "us", not "mine" but "ours" -not just "My Father" but "Our Father", not "Give me this day my daily bread", but "Give us our daily bread". When the old woman said "It's mine, not yours", she denied her essential humanity and became sub-human. For the human person is made in the image of God, in the image of God who is not just one but Trinity. Only by sharing, only by relating to others after the likeness of the tri-personal Deity, do we become truly what we are. There is no genuine man unless there are at least two men entering into communion with each other.

'Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond, the syndesmos of peace' (Eph.4:3). Our task in SYNDESMOS is to learn how as Orthodox we are to say 'us' and 'ours', how we are to share our Orthodox onion with one another, with non-Orthodox Christians, with the world. Sharing the onion: this unfortunately is something that as Orthodox we do not achieve very effectively. We are not good at sharing, at mutual relations. It is surely a sobering fact that, apart from SYNDESMOS, there exists at present in the Orthodox Church no organization making it possible for youth and laity, and for that matter clergy and hierarchs, to meet each other regularly on an international level across the frontiers of the different Patriarchates and autocephalous Churches. No organization was fulfilling this task before 1953, and apart from SYNDESMOS none is doing so today. In expectant hope we await many things from the Pan-Orthodox Conferences which, in preparation for the Holy and Great Council, are being convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, by virtue of its position as first among equals and the bond of unity within the worldwide Orthodox communion. But these Pan-Orthodox Conferences, while potentially of great significance, do not occur on a regular basis: the last such meeting was in 1982, but we cannot tell when the next will be, still less do we know when and if the Holy and Great Council will meet. We have, therefore good reason to thank God for the thirty years SYNDESMOS has been able to perform its vocation in promoting Orthodox unity. Our continuing existence, however, and our uniqueness should not make us complacent, but should rather impress upon us the alarming responsibility that rests on our shoulders.

Four years ago I was attending the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches at the Orthodox Academy in Crete, and I vividly recall what was said to me by one of the Protestant delegates. "You Orthodox", he said, "have a marvellous theology, a beautiful Liturgy, a rich, tradition of spirituality and prayer. But when I look at the way you behave in practice, I am not impressed." He was referring in particular to the ethnic and jurisdictional fragmentation of Orthodoxy in the Western world, to the absence of mutual love, to the lack of missionary zeal.

We must frankly realize the truth in his criticisms. We should apply to ourselves the parables of the barren fig tree (Matt 21:9) and of the servant who buried his talent in the earth (Matt 25:25): do not these two parables point with, distressing accuracy, to the shortcomings of our Orthodox testimony in the modern world? We have to admit the tragic gap between theory and practice. In theory we hold that our Orthodox Church is collegial and conciliar, but where in practice is the spirit of sobornost? All this makes evident how greatly we need the work of SYNDESMOS.

UNITY

Let us now look more closely at the theme of our conference. Unity and Mission. In thinking of unity, we should distinguish three basic levels, closely interconnected: God, Christ, the Church. We need to reflect:

first, on the unity of the three persons in the one Trinitarian God.

second, on the unity of the divine and human in the person of Christ the theanthropos, the God-Man;

third, on the unity of human persons within the Church that is Christ's Body.

(1) The Unity of God. The divine unity is an absolute but not a monolithic unity; it is on the contrary and organized unity, a unity that is not static but dynamic, a unity-in-diversity. We Christians believe, not simply in one God, but in God who is one-in-three. God is not a single person, turned in upon Himself, loving Himself alone, but from all eternity He knows Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons joined in an unceasing movement of love. At the very heart of God there exists an inter-personal relationship. Our God is not just a unit but a union, not just unity but community. There is in Him a variety as well as oneness. There is in Him, on a level infinitely surpassing all that we can understand, something equivalent to what we mean by society, friendship, interdependence.

I beg of you to use this congress as an occasion when each of you will renew your faith in God as Tri-unity. Ask yourself: What am I doing each time that I make the sign of the Cross and say: “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Holy Spirit”? Ask yourself: What difference does it make to me that I believe, not just in one God as do the Jews and Muslims, but in God one-in-three? Ask yourself this, not so as to assert your superiority over others, but so as humbly to understand what is the distinctive treasure that has been entrusted to you as a Christian. Ask yourself: What are the practical, daily consequences of my faith in the Trinity? Is the dogma of the Trinity for me no more than a matter of abstract speculation, to which I give my formal assent, or does it constitute a life-giving source, transforming all my actions? My theology teacher, an Anglican, used to say that the doctrine of the Trinity “marks a saving revolution in human thought”. What did he mean? And what did the nineteenth century Russian philosopher Nikolai Feodorov mean when he said “Our social programme is the dogma of the Trinity”?

(2) The Unity of Christ. The mutual love of the Trinity is not a closed circle. God is “ecstatic” in His love: He goes out of Himself in creation -more especially, in the creation of human persons made in His own image, endowed with moral choice, and so capable of responding to His love with a freely given love of their own. Here already, in the very act of creation, there is on God’s part a gesture of kenosis, of sacrificial self-emptying. And when these human persons turn away from their Creator and choose sin, God carries this act of kenosis much further: He unites Himself to them in the closest of all possible unions -by Himself becoming a man. Through the Incarnation God Himself shares totally and unreservedly in our human condition. He knows exactly all our feelings, our hopes and fears and anguish, because He Himself experienced all these things from the inside. He saves us by completely identifying Himself with us. He shares in the whole range of human life: more than that, he shares in human death. By virtue of the Incarnation, the idea of God created on a distant throne is once and for all dead. It is replaced by that of God with us, Emmanuel, God who is immediately involved in life, in the suffering of each one. “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4) -all our griefs, all our sorrows. God is the wounded healer: He makes us whole by making our injuries His own. By virtue of the Incarnation, God suffers, God is “tempted in everything just as we are” (Heb. 4:15); indeed, we should go further -He is tempted in more than we are; He knows sin better than we do. A total unity, unreserved solidarity. In Christ, God is entirely identified with humankind. Jesus our Saviour, fully and completely God, is at the same time fully and completely man; and yet He is not two, but a single and undivided person. Each time we stand before the ikon of Christ, that is the truth which confronts us.

Such is the second level of unity. Let us use the congress, then, as an occasion to renew our faith not only in the Trinity, but in the Incarnation, and let us apply to ourselves what we see in the Incarnate Christ, identifying ourselves with the griefs and sorrows of others just as He has identified Himself with ours. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

(3) The Unity of the Church. That brings us to the third level of unity, that of the Church. This third level is closely connected with the other two: for the Church is both the ikon of the Holy Trinity and the Body of Christ. Both these "models" underline the true character of the Church as unity-in-diversity, as a domain where unanimity and freedom are held in balance and reconciled. In the Trinity there is true unity combined with genuine diversity: the three persons constitute one God, yet each is authentically personal. The same is true of the Church: a multitude of human persons is united within the Church into a single communion, yet each retains unimpaired his or her distinctive identity. There is unity without uniformity: we are all one, yet we each remain free.

The same is implied in the image of the Church as Body of Christ. A body, so St. Paul insists in I Corinthians chapter 12, has many limbs; and these limbs, while interdependent, are yet distinct and different -the eye cannot fulfil the function of the ear, nor the hand that of the foot. Without the unity and cooperation of the limbs, there could be no human body: but equally without their diversity there could also be no body. So it is with Christ's Body in the Church. It is a sacrament of unity-in-diversity: unity without uniformity, diversity without fragmentation. Within the Church our unity does not destroy our freedom, nor does our freedom undermine our unity. The Holy Spirit makes us all one, but He makes us each different. Sin is monotonous, but the saints display and inexhaustible variety. It is not holiness but wrongdoing that is dull. There are no new sins -although the old sins sometimes take new outward forms- but there are always new ways of shewing love to other people. Such is God's message to each of us: Discover your uniqueness by discovering your unity with others.

The parish: ethnic ghetto or eucharistic centre?

In the light of what has just been said about church unity, let us reflect on three particular aspects of church unity:

- (a) the unity of the local parish;
- (b) unity on the level of the diocese;
- (c) unity between the Orthodox Church and other Christian communions.

(a) The unity of the parish. This is the level at which most of you can contribute directly to the work of unity. At Valamo in 1980 the Tenth General Assembly issued a moving appeal to the Holy Synods of all the Orthodox Churches, expressing sorrow and concern about "the painful and canonically unclear situation" of the Orthodox communities in the West. The Assembly was altogether justified in doing this. But, while looking to a solution from above, let us also set to work from below, whether we live in the so-called "diaspora" or in the traditional Orthodox countries. Love for my neighbour means love, not for distant people, but for my immediate neighbour -for the people that I meet Sunday by Sunday at the Divine Liturgy in my local parish. Let us begin by establishing a living dynamic unity on that level.

The parish, the local eucharistic centre, possesses an importance in contemporary Orthodoxy that it has not possessed for very many centuries. In the past, for almost all Orthodox, the Church was closely identified with the nation and the state. Ethnic consciousness, together with (in many cases) moral and financial support from the civil government served to strengthen the Church in its mission. Now this is less and less the case. The ethnic boundaries have largely broken down in the West. Even within the traditional Orthodox countries, the growth of secularism means that Church and nation can no longer be baldly identified. Almost everywhere the parish priest can now no longer rely on the local schoolmaster and the local policeman to do his job for him. To some this weakening of ethnic bonds and removal of state support may seem an impoverishment; others will prefer to regard it as a providential liberation. What is certainly means is that we are being challenged to see the Church no longer primarily in national terms, but as a eucharistic organism: not primarily as the protector of cultural values, but as the place where bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood. Our ethnic heritages, however precious, are secondary; the eucharistic catholicity of the Church comes first. And since the Eucharist can only be celebrated locally, in particular places, this has resulted in a renewed sense of the vital significance of the parish.

The point has been well made by the Greek theologian Christos Yannaras: 'Today more than at any other time our personal existence must be anchored in the local parish. The truth of the Church, the reality of salvation, the abolishment of sin and death, the victory over the irrational in life and history -all these for us Orthodox derive from the local parish, the actualization of the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The liturgical unity of the faithful has to be the starting-point of all the things for which we hope: the transformation of the impersonal life of the masses into a communion of persons, the authentic and genuine (rather than the merely theoretical and legal) observance of social justice, the deliverance of work from the bondage of mere need and its transformation into an engagement of personal involvement fellowship. Only the life of the parish can give a priestly dimension to politics, a prophetic spirit to science, a philanthropic concern to economics, a sacramental character to love. Apart from the local parish all or these are but an abstraction, naive idealism, sentimental utopianism. But within the parish there is historical actualization, realistic hope, dynamic manifestation.

Yannaras, however, feels obliged to add:

Our parishes today represent largely a socio-religious (sometimes and ethnic and chauvinistic) phenomena rather than the eschatological dimension.

Let us, then, each ask ourselves certain questions:

What kind of unity exists locally in my own parish?

How far is my parish a vital, creative eucharistic centre?

In my parish do we treat the Divine Liturgy, and other parish activities, as something performed by the priest for the people? Does the laity play no more than a passive role? Or is the liturgical and pastoral life of the parish seen as a shared work, in which priest and people have differing ministries, but in which

there are no spectators, in which all the baptized without exception are actively involved? (Let us remember here the literal meaning of the word “liturgy” : the work of the people, a shared, corporate task.) Do we think of our parishes in terms of co-responsibility?

What kind of activities are there in my parish apart from the celebration of liturgical services? Are there any occasions when we pray together in a non-liturgical manner?

What forms of service in my parish are specifically open to women?

And what do I personally contribute to the local unity of my parish?

(b) Diocesan unity: Here I wish to put some questions to those of you who live within the so-called “diaspora” in North and South America, Australia, and Western Europe. What kind of links, if any, has my diocese with the other “jurisdictions” in the same area? (I use the word “jurisdiction” between inverted commas, mindful of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s comment that it is a horrid word, not to be found in the Gospels.) We all accept -so at least I fervently hope- that a plurality of jurisdictions in the same area is an unhappy anomaly that needs to be set right as soon as possible. But what is being done locally to overcome this anomaly?

Do we have locally a “Standing Conference” of Orthodox bishops or an inter-episcopal committee? (In the case of Britain the answer is: no, not yet.) If it exists, what does this conference or committee actually do?

Do we have local fraternities of Orthodox priests? (In the case of Britain the answer once more is: no.)

Do we have local inter-jurisdictional fellowships involving laity and clergy together? France, for example, has a large and effective *Fraternité Orthodoxe*; in Britain a much smaller movement with the same object, the Orthodox Fellowship of St. John the Baptist, was founded four years ago. How could these local Orthodox organizations be rendered more dynamic? Do I personally support them?

(c) Christian unity. As members of the “Unity and Mission” conference rightly affirmed at Marseilles last year, for Orthodoxy’s unity is an objective fact, it is not something we have to create. As a non-Orthodox, Karl Barth, used to say, church unity is not a “manufactured article”, but something “already accomplished in Christ”. “The one, undivided Church”, observes Professor Trembelas in his Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church, “exists not as an ideal, but as a tangible, living, visible reality”.

Yet, while convinced that Orthodoxy is the true Church of Christ on earth, one and unique, do we also recognize the need to listen to non-Orthodox Christians and learn from them? The Jews of the diaspora learnt in exile from those who had taken them captive; how ready are we Orthodox of the “diaspora” to learn from the non-Orthodox around us? But to listen is not easily achieved. Our prayer, for example, is all too often not a dialogue but a monologue: we speak, we hear the sound of our own voice, but we lack hesychia, inner stillness, and so we do not listen to God’s reply, to the voice of the Holy Spirit within our heart. One of the most difficult things in the art of prayer is to stop talking and to start listening; and it is precisely here that the Jesus Prayer is able to help us. Listening is likewise of the utmost importance for the spiritual father: often the starets help others not so much by what he says as by the

depth of his attentive silence. The same is true of every priest: you will not be a good priest until you have learnt to listen. That applies also to the teacher: you will not be effective in your teaching unless you listen to your pupils and see the difficulties in their minds. So it is equally in our Orthodox commitment to work for Christian Unity: we need to listen. In the field of doctrine we cannot as Orthodox agree on any compromise. But maximalism is not the same as triumphalism.

At all levels of Church unity –parochial, diocesan, inter-Christian- let us not be afraid to take risks. In many parts of the Orthodox world today, there prevails a spirit of timidity, meanness and suspicion, that is directly contrary to the Spirit of Christ. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts our fear” (I John 4:18). Vladimir Lossky says that, when God created living beings endowed with free will, he took a risk; but the risk, so far from being a sign of divine weakness, is in fact the supreme expression of God’s self-fulfilment. And we are to act creatively, must also be willing to take risks.

Mission

Let me now turn, much more briefly, to the theme of mission. If unity is the essential characteristics of the Church, then so is mission. As was said at the Valamo Assembly, “We must remember that the Church is mission”. Mission is not merely a possible activity of the Church, but it is the very expression of the Church’s being and life. In the Creed, when we confess our faith in the Church as “apostolic”, we are to think not only of the unbroken apostolic succession of bishops from one generation to the next, not only of the continuity of apostolic faith and sanctity throughout the centuries; we are to think also of the literal meaning of the greek verb apostellein, “to send”. The apostle is a man sent out: “Go into all the world...” (Matt. 28:19). The Church does not exist for itself; as apostolic, it is by definition sent into the world.

If this mission is to be true to itself, it needs to be marked above all by three qualities: holiness, sacrifice, joy.

Holiness. Our missionary witness should be, not so much through our words and arguments, through our propaganda and apologetics, but above all through our life. It should be an existential witness. The true missionary is the saint. In this connection it is significant how important a part has always been played in Orthodox missionary work by the monk, the man of inward prayer and silence. For Orthodox existing in a missionary situation in America, Australia, and Western Europe –and equally for the Orthodox in Africa- there is perhaps no greater need at the present moment than vigorous and firmly-rooted monasteries, loyal to tradition but free from fanaticism. Must we not be deeply disturbed by the extreme weakness of monasticism in many parts of the Orthodox world today, and deeply encouraged by the monastic renewal on Mount Athos?

Sacrifice . Not for nothing does the Greek term martyria signify at the same time both witness and martyrdom. The words of the risen Christ, ymeis martyres touton (Luke 24:28) mean equally “You are witnesses” and “You are martyrs”. If the Saint is a missionary, then so in a more particular way is the martyr. Christ saved us, not primarily by preaching to us, but by dying for us; and the most effective missionary witness has always been given by those who, through the ages, have shared in Christ’s sacrificial death. Twentieth century Orthodox have good reason to reflect on this, for ours has been pre-eminently an age of martyrs. In the past sixty years incomparably more Christians have died as martyrs for the Crucifixion; and by

far the greater number of those who suffered, although not all, were Orthodox. Times of peace, said Paul Evdokimov, paraphrasing Origen, are favourable to Satan: for they rob Christ of His martyrs and the Church of its glory. If we apply that standard to recent orthodox history, then we may thank God that our century has been a time of great glory for the Church.

Martyrdom is in a sense a universal vocation. Those not required to undergo red martyrdom, the literal martyrdom of blood, can yet undergo what the early Fathers called white martyrdom, the inward martyrdom of the ascetic life, of dying to our own self-will. And when we speak of the ascetic life, let us bear in mind that it is not only monks and nuns who are called to be ascetics, but also married men and women. Significantly, one of the troparia sung as the bride and bridegroom go in procession three times round the table is addressed to the holy martyrs; and the crowns that they newly-married couples wear, as well as being symbols of loyalty and victory, are also martyrs' crowns.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Such is the unfailing rule, in missionary work as in all else: Life through death. As Fr. Justin Popovich has said:

Orthodoxy has always created ascetic renaissances: she knows no other renaissances. Those who practice the ascetic life are the only missionaries of Orthodoxy. Ascetism is Orthodoxy's only missionary school.

What Fr. Justin says is of particular importance for Orthodox in the West. If our Orthodox witness is to make any impact there, then that to which we bear witness needs to be a humble, gentle, kenotic Orthodoxy. It will not greatly interest the West if we appeal to the outward glories, long since past, of the Byzantine theocracy or of imperial Russia. It will not impress them if we present Orthodox truth in a harsh, aggressive condemnatory fashion. Let us appeal rather to the Orthodoxy of St. John Chrysostom, of the New Martyrs under the Turkish rule, of the Fools in Christ, of St. Nicodemus and the Philokalia, of St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Herman of Alaska, and St. Nectarios of Aegina. That they will listen to gladly.

Joy. But, when speaking in this way of martyrdom and ascetism, we must not allow others or ourselves to imagine that there are dour and world-denying things. On the contrary, in first-hand accounts of the sufferings of the martyrs again and again the point is made that they went to their death with joy. Of the New Martyr Nicolas the Grocer, on his way to execution, it is said that “he was like someone going to a marriage, not to his death”; another New Martyr, Jordan of Trebizond, “ran through the streets joyfully, as a thirsty deer that seeks the water-springs”. The Church has good reason to begin so many of its hymns to the martyrs with the word “Rejoice”. The same joy should mark all forms of missionary martyrdom. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann insists:

From its very beginning Christianity has been the proclamation of joy on earth... Without the proclamation of joy Christianity is incomprehensible. It is only as joy that the Church was victorious in the world, and it lost that joy, and ceased to be a credible witness to it. Of all the accusations against Christians the most terrible one was uttered by Nietzsche when he said that the Christians had no joy... “For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy”- thus begins the Gospel and its end is: “And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” (Luke 2:10, 24:52).

We lost the world when we lost the joy: nor will we win back the world unless we recover the joy.

Holiness, sacrifice, joy: these are the three indispensable marks of a true missionary. He or she is to be a witness at one and the same time to Christ suffering and crucified, and to Christ transfigured and risen: in St. Paul words, “dying, and behold we live... sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:9-10).

“Let us love one another...”

In all things the criterion and touchstone of our Orthodox life in Christ is the Eucharist; and so, in closing, what I have to say about unity and mission, let me put before you two phrases from the Divine Liturgy. The first is the deacon’s acclamation and the people’s response immediately before the Creed: Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and individed. There we see summed up the theme of unity. There can be no true confession of faith in the Trinity, no genuine celebration of the Holy Mysteries, except when there is mutual love. Only through unity in mutual love can we be living ikons of the Trinitarian God.

The second phrase comes at the conclusion of the Liturgy, after the communion: Let us go forth in peace. There we see summed up the theme of mission. We are to understand these words not as an ending, but as a beginning; not as a comforting epilogue to our worship, but as a specific call to mission and service in the world. The Eucharist is the starting point of a cosmic transfiguration; it is the source that inspires all our efforts as Christians in the cause of social righteousness, all our endeavours to fight against poverty, injustice, disease, and death. “Go forth in peace” means: “Go out to participate actively in building up the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity. Go out: the Liturgy after the Liturgy is about to begin”.

“Let us love one another”, “Go forth in peace”: may these two eucharistic texts inspire all our study and discussion together.

NOTES

1. Apophthegmata, alphabetical collection, Antony 9.
2. Ibid., Agathon 26-27
3. Jesus Christ in a Changing World, Report of the Seventh General Assembly of SYNDESMOS at Rattvik, July 1968 (Beirut, no date), p.13.
4. **Witness and Service**, Report of the International Orthodox Youth Festival, August 1-6, 1980, and of the X General Assembly of SYNDESMOS, August 6-10, (Joensuu 1981), p.33.
5. “Orthodoxy and the West”, address given at the Inter-Orthodox Conference in Brookline Mass., USA, September 1970: in Eastern Churches Review 3 (1971), p. 299-300.

6. Report of the “Unity and Mission” Conference, Marseille, France, August 25-29, 1982. (Kuopio 1983), p.23.
7. cf. G. Curtis, Paul Courturier and Unity in Christ (London 1964), p.86.
8. Dogmatiki tis Orthodoxou Katholikis Ekklisias, vol.2 (Athens 1959).
9. In the image and Likeness of God (st. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, 1974) p.214.
10. Witness and Service, p.101.
11. Sacrement de l’amour (Paris 1962), p.101.
12. Report of the « Unity and Mission » Conference, p.7.
13. St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, Neon Martyrologion (Athens 1961), p.87,72.
14. For the Life of the World: Sacrements and Orthodoxy (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood), p.24.