

Concluding thanks by Enzo Bianchi

XXII International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

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in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

CONCLUDING THANKS BY ENZO BIANCHI

I would simply like to express my great thankfulness to the Lord. It is not hard for us to recognize that the Lord accompanies us in these conferences, that the Lord preserves us and allows us to renew our mutual confidence, confidence in meeting, in dialogue, confidence in being able to walk together towards a deeper communion, which the Holy Spirit prepares in the hearts of each one of us, in our communities, and in our Churches. Gratitude to the Lord is what we always express in our prayer, because every prayer is eucharist, is thanksgiving for all the gifts that the Lord gives. Of all his gifts the most important is the gift of his mercy, the only gift of which we truly have need. If we have the Lord's mercy upon us, we too become merciful, in the image of his holy and glorious Name, and from his mercy draw the ability to be operators of peace. At the end of this XXII Ecumenical Conference, our thankfulness is connected necessarily to an epiclesis, to a request for peace. We make this request to the Lord because our Churches always have need of his peace, but have need of it particularly at this time. Some papers, some contributions at the conference have certainly indicated a line of meditation so that we might become peacemakers, simply by acknowledging our weakness and recognizing our sin and invoking the Lord's mercy. Peace does not come from force, peace does not come from any superiority, peace does not come from any worldly greatness, peace does not come from any power or from any recognition of this world. The man of peace, let us not forget, according to the Gospel, is weak Adam, the man par excellence, Jesus Christ, who, scourged and crowned with thorns, is presented by Pilate as the true man, the man whom God had always intended, the man who gives his life for others, the man in whom God has given himself for all of us, to the point of giving over his Son. In our lives, as archimandrite Sophronius used to say, peace is a force of sweetness and meekness, a meekness and sweetness that can be had by each of us if we can invoke the Lord. Then the peace that we want to build in our communities and in our Churches is a peace that always has before its eyes communion, because if we Christians are not able to live in communion, are not able to seek communion, then we are not even able to exchange peace with each other. Let us not forget that at the heart of our every eucharistic liturgy, in all the Churches, the Lord who makes himself present in our midst makes peace his gift: "Peace be with you". This is the source of our peace. In our daily life we must employ all our energy and predispose all our life so that the Holy Spirit may act and may inspire thoughts and actions of peace. Our conference has been a meeting, and I believe we can say, a very loyal meeting. At times it touched on difficult and delicate points, which could be the cause of contrasts, but did not become so; we have maintained peace because the Lord reigned over us and in our hearts more than our thoughts and our words. This conference, which like all the others, has had the blessing of the ecumenical patriarchate and of the patriarchate of Moscow, which have always supported and encouraged us, as also of the other Orthodox Churches, — this our conference desires to be always an occasion of peace and friendship, whatever the theme proposed to our consideration.

Allow me then truly to conclude with thanks. These thanks are always made up of names and may sound monotonous, but when we say a person's name, we say it in God and before God, and then our thanks become something that we can follow with conviction, with the heart, as a real and true epiclesis. Here, then, we remember the patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomeos and his delegate, metropolitan Athenagoras of Belgium, the metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos, not forgetting archdeacon John Chrysavghis and archimandrite Athenagoras, whom we thank. The celebration of the Divine Liturgy this morning, which we have not shared, but which has made us feel how the one baptism made us recognize the risen Christ present among us. The patriarch of Moscow Kirill, metropolitan Zosima, who has returned among us, bishop Kliment, the head of the delegation, with father Aleksij and father Arsenij; bishop Filaret of Lviv, delegate of metropolitan Onufrij, who preside the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and bishop Ilarij of Makariv, the monks of the Kiev Caves Lavra; bishop Stefan of Homel of the Belarusian Exarchate, again among us, representing metropolitan Pavel; I thank all the Churches who have sent their representatives or messages of fraternal participation, all of which you will find on the website of our community. The messages of patriarch Neofit of Bulgaria and of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church have given us joy.

The bishops who were at the conference or visited it. The list is long. I name those who are here: archbishop Antonio Mennini, apostolic nuncio in Great Britain, bishop Alberto Silvani of Volterra; then the members and delegates of the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian unity: father Hyacinthe Destivelle, monsignor Andrea Palmieri, and father Milan Žust; father Porfyrios, dean of Balamand, representing the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Antioch Yuhanna, bishop Andrej of Austria, delegate of patriarch Irinej of Serbia, with the faithful monk Vasilij Grolimund; metropolitan Serafim of Germany of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and faithful friend; metropolitan Antonij of Central and Western Europe and metropolitan Dometian of Vidin of the patriarchate of Bulgaria; bishop Gregorios of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus;

metropolitan Ioannis of Thermopylae of the Orthodox Church of Greece; bishop Melchisedek of Pittsburgh and bishop Alexander of Toledo of the Orthodox Church of America, and father John Behr, dean of the St Vladimir Theological Institute in New York. Thanks also to father Makaryan, representing the Armenian Apostolic Church, and bishop Jonathan Goodall, representing the archbishop of Canterbury, canon Hugh Wybrew, and Michel Nseir, delegate of the World Council of Churches. I also thank the members of the scientific committee, some of whom are my brothers and sisters, but especially Michel van Parys, Antonio Rigo, and Hervé Legrand, for their wisdom and discernment. I thank all the monks and nuns of East and West who are here. We monks always feel a strong communion and our extraordinary vocation makes us simply poor Christians, but with the commitment to be vigilant and to pray for the Churches. I thank the interpreters and the technician Mr Panzica and his collaborators. All our friends who faithfully return and who accompany these conferences with prayer.

Goodbye, then, until next year. In the meantime, with the good will of my brothers and sisters, the acts of the XXI Conference, "The Ages of the Spiritual Life", have come out. We will choose the theme for the next conference in a meeting of the scientific committee; we keep the same dates, which next year will be 9–12 September. May the Lord truly be with you who now return to your Churches. And do not forget that our community lives in continuous intercession for each of our Churches of the East and of the West, asking the Lord to hasten the day when we will be able to celebrate one eucharist. Thank-you to all. Our community loves you and accompanies you with its prayer.